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DISSERTATION

**ATHLETES AND ACADEMICS:
THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT-ATHLETES AT A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

Submitted by

Kent J. Smith, Jr.

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2000

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December 13, 1999

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER
OUR SUPERVISION BY KENT J. SMITH, JR. ENTITLED "THE EXPERIENCES OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENT ATHLETES AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES" BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Athletes and Academics: The Experiences of African American Student-Athletes at a Predominantly White Institution of Higher Education

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of African American student-athletes at a predominantly white institution of higher education. The major questions to be answered by this study were related to the experiences of those African American student-athletes who graduated, those who left the institution without graduating, and the differences in experiences and background between those graduates and non-graduates.

The study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological research design. In-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of twelve male African American former student-athletes, six graduates and six non-graduates, who attended a moderately sized predominantly white Carnegie I research institution. Data collection involved retrospective interviews to examine the participants' perceptions of what it took for them to be academically successful. The interview instrument included questions related to demographics, defining academic success, obstacles to academic success, reasons for leaving the university, personal support systems and role models.

Three major themes emerged from the study:

- a) Relationships with coaches, teachers, parents and others were paramount for the academic success of African American student-athletes.
- b) The attitude of both the coach and the athlete himself was an important factor in determining academic success.

- c) The ability and determination of the African American student-athletes to deal with negative aspects

of the school climate was key regarding persistence to graduation.

From these themes both general and specific recommendations are suggested for institutions of higher education to increase the graduation rates of African American student-athletes who attend predominantly white universities.

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Spring 2000

DEDICATION

This educational endeavor is dedicated to the memory of two deceased members of my family. They are Daryl Wayne Hughes and Arnold Lawrence Decuir. Daryl Wayne Hughes was my first cousin. In many respects, my life has formed a distinct pattern after that of Daryl's life. Daryl persisted in obtaining an undergraduate and graduate degree and he eventually became an assistant professor in engineering at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I have chosen to dedicate this dissertation to Daryl's memory because he was a person who had extreme patience and he was a person who always made time for anyone who needed it, especially me. Daryl, I will never forget what you did and continue to do for me. I know that you are watching over me daily and that I could not have completed this awesome task without your guidance. THIS IS FOR YOU, DOC!

Arnold Lawrence Decuir was my grandfather. He died shortly after I started matriculating at Colorado State University. If there is anyone I would like to pattern myself after, it would be my grandfather. Arnold Decuir taught me the real meaning of being a man. He taught me how to value and take care of my family. For this, I am eternally grateful. Whether it was money, time, or just simple conversation, you were there for me and I shall never forget you. THANKS, PAW I LOVE YOU!

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myself, you were there to pick up the pieces. You taught me the idea of unconditional love and this has transcended in the relationship with my children.

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To my grandmother, Ann Decuir. You are the beacon of light in our family. Your constant commitment to God and prayer in general has made me a very spiritual person. I could never repay you for all that you have done to support me. Thanks for teaching me the real rules of life. You have truly been an inspiration in my life. May God continue to place his blessings upon you.

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continue to grow as it will have profound effects on those who participate in the process.

Please continue a great thing!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For decades now researchers have sought to understand the reasons why some students leave universities without completing a degree and why others remain and complete their degree. As a result, some research has managed to identify certain characteristics in students' background that may affect whether or not they persist to graduate. Although the discovery of these factors has helped researchers in predicting the success of students, Tierney (1992) argues that such individualistic characteristics have stymied researchers in their search for a general causal model of student participation. In turn, minority student participation in academe has remained problematic.

Up until very recently in American higher education, colleges and universities were designed to educate a clientele overwhelmingly composed of middle and upper class white males. At the same time, the alarmingly poor performance of African American students throughout the years has become an indisputable and unfortunate fact of near tragic proportions. Coupled with this is the further issue of retention regarding African American student-athletes, which results in a unique student population that has yet to be widely studied. Garrett (1997) alluded to the fact that among African American student-athletes, 60 to 70 percent never graduate. Indeed, some researchers argue that African American student-athletes have a unique set of needs and interests that must be understood before the problem of attrition for this population can really be addressed (Ferrante & Etzel, 1991; Kramer, 1986).

Regarding minority participation in academe, Tierney (1992) argued that rather than defining minorities as the ones who have the "problem," we might think of the

institution as having the “problem.” Indeed, the “problem” might be defined not as a group’s lack of “acculturation” but as an institution’s inability to operate in a multicultural world.

Tierney (1992) argued that the successful retention of students offers at least three benefits: the student will be able to reap the rewards that a college degree affords; the college or university will be able to maintain the income that derives from the student’s attendance; and society will be able to utilize the skills of students in becoming more productive. This research examined the experiences of African American student-athletes in a predominantly white institution of higher education in order to learn more about issues related to their retention.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of the difficulties facing institutions of higher education regarding student attrition and retention is emphasized in research which indicates that students leave higher education at varying rates. For example, Tinto (1985) reported that nearly 60 out of 100 first time entrants to the four-year college sector left their first institution of registration without completing a degree program. Tinto also reported that of every 100 first-time entrants to the four-year college sector, nearly 65 will eventually obtain a four-year college degree. In particular, student-athletes face more serious difficulties than non-athletes when it comes to retention at higher education institutions. As Eitzen (1988) and Gurney & Stuart (1987) pointed out, student-athletes enter college with poorer academic records, and overall they are less prepared than their non-athlete peers. This is important when considering the fact that close to one-half of all NCAA division 1 athletes on

scholarship are African American (Simms, 1997). Thus, the retention of student-athletes in higher education is a significant issue. But given the predicted declining applicant pool (Blake, 1987) and the consistency over time of the retention rates of all students in higher education, the motivation to better understand why any student leaves college has increased tremendously.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1992), traditional and publicly accepted indicators of college quality such as admissions, selectivity, prestige and reputational measures, educational resources, library size, educational expenditures per FTE student, and faculty research productivity, tell us little about the impact or effectiveness of the undergraduate education a student receives. Once students' pre-college characteristics are taken into account, such traditional indicators of college quality have only small, and perhaps in any administrative or educational sense, unimportant net effects on learning, cognitive development, moral reasoning and various dimensions of personal maturation and development. For student-athletes, these factors may be less important than for the general student population.

When examining the issue of student retention, it appears that regardless of race, there is already a high attrition rate of students attending four year colleges. For example, Bean (1986) reported that during the twentieth century, retention rates were consistently about 45% over a four-year cycle. Retention issues which affect African American students show that they leave universities at higher rates than white students (Hinton, 1988; Person and LeNoir, 1997). In fact, recent studies show that since the early 1980s, the completion rate for whites has been rising faster than rates for blacks (Conditions of Education, 1999). However, Fleming (1984) noted that African American

students who attended predominantly African American colleges had fewer difficulties gaining a sense of membership within their academic community and experienced less stress than their peers who attended predominantly white colleges. Therefore, the failure to achieve a sense of membership or integration within an academic community provided a basis for understanding why African American students who were not in academic jeopardy left predominantly white college campuses (Allen, 1984; Green & Winter, 1989; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Tinto 1988; Snyder, 1996). In addition, research has also focused on another distinct university population with its own unique issues of retention, the student-athlete. The 1987-88 National Study of Intercollegiate Athletes sponsored by the NCAA argued that student-athletes' are a special population and emphasized that underlying factors such as academic preparation and commitment should be further studied.

Bakker, Whiting, and Brug (1990) suggested that to offer theories that are basic to the student-athletes actual experiences researchers must explore the problems athletes face in their personal accounts of those experiences. Research which has examined the experiences of African American student-athletes suggests that very few studies have utilized the qualitative method of research in which the perceptions and perspectives of this group have been exposed (Pearson & Lenoir, 1997; Benson, 2000). In addition, both Pearson & Lenoir (1997) and Benson (2000) found that student-athletes had unique needs that the university did not meet. More generally, the evidence Pascarella and Terenzini (1992) reviewed clearly established that: (1) students change in a wide variety of ways during the college years, and (2) that those changes are attributable at least in part to the college experience above and beyond the personal and intellectual baggage students bring

with them to college. Since the problems student-athletes face seem to be more intensified at the university than high school level (Bissinger, 1990), this research study examined the perceptions and experiences of African American student-athletes regarding their academic career at the university level. The experiences of graduates and non-graduates were compared to discern specific issues affecting persistence of African American student-athletes at a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution.

Research Questions

Several questions guided this research effort. In the tradition of qualitative research, they were broad in nature.

- (1) What are the perceptions regarding the academic experiences of African American student-athletes who left a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution before completing the baccalaureate degree?
- (2) What are the perceptions regarding the academic experiences of African American student-athletes who graduated from a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution with a baccalaureate degree?
- (3) What are the differences in perceptions regarding the academic experiences of African American student-athletes who left predominantly white Carnegie Research I institutions before completing baccalaureate degrees and those African American student-athletes who persisted to graduate with the baccalaureate degree?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons related to understanding the experiences of African American student-athletes on predominantly white campuses.

First and most prominently, few research efforts have focused on the experiences of African American student-athletes at predominantly white Carnegie Research I institutions. Approximately one out of nine African American male college students is an athlete (Person and LeNoir, 1997). For this reason, studies that focus on successful retention and graduation of this population can have a significant impact on the overall success of black male undergraduates. As a distinct minority population, they must negotiate an academic and athletic culture in which attention to their unique needs and interests may fall short of what it needs to be. To date, there is little systematic recognition that changes need to be made in how the special cultural and educational needs of the African American student-athlete are addressed. This research was designed to afford the student-athletes an opportunity to describe their perceptions of their academic and athletic experiences in the tradition suggested by Baker, Whitting & Brug (1990). They argued that such approaches are required before developing theories basic to affecting the retention of this population.

Second, this research expands on prior research studies (Adler and Adler, 1991; Person and LeNoir, 1997; Benson, 2000) by actually comparing the experiences of graduate and non-graduate student-athletes who attended a predominantly white university. Not only will this expand the knowledge about student-athletes on a white campus, but it will assist in identifying key factors that differentiate persistence and attrition of these students.

Third, student-athletes assume several challenges apart from the curriculum demands of their majors. Many times their educational needs and interests do not fit within the existing academic and athletic culture. These students make up a unique

segment of the university student population (Grant & Darley, 1993) in that they must assume both the numerous challenges that evolve out of being a racial minority on a predominantly white campus as well as negotiating those demands that are unique to the student-athlete culture. This research study will help expand the understanding of this unique student population on a predominantly white campus.

Fourth, the athletic environment has characteristic patterns of interaction as well as norms of behavior. For student-athletes, achieving membership in college involves participating in the athletic community as well as the academic and social community. Departure from campus arises from the failure to become integrated with any aspect of this culture or with the university as a whole (Tinto, 1998). The issue of persistence is important for African American student-athletes who participate in revenue generating sports as prior research has shown that this particular group of students does not perform well academically and has a lower persistence rate when compared with other groups (American Institutes for Research, 1988). This study provided self-report opportunities for African American student-athletes at a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution that could yield valuable insights as to the issues that directly have an impact on these retention rates.

Finally, the findings of this research study may provide the basis for faculty, student-athletes, coaches and university administrators to develop a richer understanding of the different perceptions and experiences of African American student-athletes who are involved in athletic programs. This research study could assist university administrators, faculty, and coaches in helping this special student population to matriculate at the university. Additionally, data that are generated from the study could

benefit the future student-athletes by creating a greater awareness of their probable academic and athletic experiences.

Delimitations

The following delimitations will be made with respect to the research:

First, the study only included post secondary African American male student-athletes at one institution. Post secondary African American student-athletes were used in this study since it was intended to examine students who matriculated at a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution due to the fact that research has shown that this is a special population of students at the university. Therefore, the results may not be generalizeable to the entire African American student-athlete population.

Second, the analysis of the data was limited to the perceptions and experiences of the undergraduate African American student-athletes. No other non-perceptual data were utilized to validate the perceptions of the participants. Student-athletes who participate at the Division Two level or other levels of competition may have a different set of perceptions and experiences.

Third, the study only included male student-athletes who participated in revenue generating sports. Because there were only a few such female student-athletes, they were excluded from the study. Thus, the results may not be applicable to female student-athletes or participants from non-revenue generating sports.

Fourth, no comparisons with similarly situated white student-athletes were made. While the prior research described African American student-athletes as a unique

population, no attempt was made here to compare the perceptions of white and African American student-athletes.

Limitations

This research study will describe and analyze the experiences of African American student-athletes who participated in basketball and football at a predominantly White Carnegie Research I institution at some point during the 1991-1998 school years. It is assumed that the participants in the study responded honestly and completely to the interview questions. It was further assumed that the participants understood and interpreted the questions as intended. Since the experiences of the student-athletes were different and because the sample size was small, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all similar athletes who matriculated at the same institution or other institutions.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in relation to this research:

First, more can be learned about student-athletes' academic experiences by talking directly to recent students. This is based on the tenets of qualitative research in which more information is yielded from conducting an interview with a participant rather than just conducting a survey. The problem with the survey format is that the questions and answers are generated up-front whereas in the qualitative approach, participants generate all responses without pre-conceived biases of the researchers.

Second, it was assumed that more could be learned about attrition and persistence of the African American student-athlete population by examining the experiences described by participants. This was suggested by researchers (Baker, Whitting & Brug, 1990) as the most appropriate means for developing theories of retention for these students.

Definition of Research Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were established:

Academic Experiences- Those experiences which encompass students' perceptions and interactions relating to their studies at the university. This could include classroom experiences, out of class involvement in academics (e.g. library), interactions with peers, mentors and others. For the purposes of this study, academic experiences refers to those involving African American student-athletes.

African American Student-Athlete – People who identify their heritage as African American or Black and participate in a collegiate sport. For the purposes of this study, the African American student-athletes are those males who played collegiate football or basketball.

Carnegie Research University I – Classification given to research institutions of higher education that award 50 or more doctorates per year and receive \$40 million or more per year in federal support.

Perception_- One's awareness and comprehension of an environment or situation. (Strauss, 1987). For purposes of this study, perceptions were determined through responses to interview questions.

Predominantly White University - A university with less than twelve percent of its student population being minority. This encompasses all minorities on campus. This includes those students of African, Asian, Native, and Latino-Hispanic backgrounds.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of African American student-athletes attending a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution. The review of literature indicates that previous researchers have studied some of the many reasons why African American students fail in the academic environment, but there is not much research done on African American student-athletes' experiences in the academic and athletic environment, nor of the many interrelated factors which may have contributed to the academic success of these students.

The review of literature focuses on research and background information related to what factors (i.e., ecological, sociocultural, historical) had an impact upon the educational and personal success of African American students, as well as what the factors of success might be for African American students attending a predominantly white institution. The review of literature includes seven sections:

(1) Retention Background Information, (2) Conceptual Framework, (3) African American Students and Retention. (4) Psychological Models of Racial Identity. (5) Student-Athletes and Identity Development, (6) Student-Athletes and Academic Preparation, and (7) Summary

Background

Students who leave higher education prior to earning an undergraduate degree do so at varying rates. The importance of this issue is consistent in the research. The pattern of leaving does not seem to change dramatically over time, as an earlier study found that retention rates after one year ranged from 65% to 67% (Beal & Noel, 1980). The same study found that after two years the rate of retention had dropped to 56%. [(Tinto, 1988; Porter, 1990)] suggest that persistence rates have remained remarkably stable at roughly 45% as far back as 1885 and that there are notable variations when the ethnicity of the student is introduced. Bean (1986) reported that for the past century, retention rates had remained fairly constant at about 45% over a four-year cycle. The National Center for Educational Statistics (1999) reported that students who entered postsecondary education at age 18 or younger were more than twice as likely as those who entered between the ages of 20 and 29 to have reported completing a bachelor's degree within five years, and five times more likely than students who entered at age 30 or later. As the students' socioeconomic status (SES) and parents' educational attainment levels increased, so did their likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree, or any degree, within five years. Tinto (1985) reported that nearly 60 out of 100 first-time entrants to the four-year college sector left their first institution of registration without completing a degree program. Tinto (1985) also reported that "of every 100 first-time entrants to the four-year college sector, nearly 65 will eventually obtain a four-year college degree" (p.30).

When students' pre-college characteristics are taken into account, traditional indicators of college quality have only small and unimportant net effects on learning, cognitive development, moral reasoning and various dimensions of personal maturation

and development. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1992), traditional and publicly accepted indicators of college “quality” such as admissions, selectivity, prestige and reputational measures, educational resources, library size, educational expenditures per FTE student, and faculty research productivity tell us little about the impact or effectiveness of the undergraduate education a student receives.

Bakker, Whiting, and Brug (1990) suggested that in order to develop theories that are basic to the student-athletes’ actual experiences, researchers must explore the problems athletes face in their personal accounts of those experiences. The evidence Pascarella and Terenzini (1992) reviewed clearly established that: (1) students change in a wide variety of ways during the college years, and (2) that those changes are attributable at least in part to the college experience above and beyond the personal and intellectual baggage students bring with them to college. Since the problems student-athletes face seem to be more intensified at the university level (Bissinger, 1990), it is clear that research is needed to examine issues regarding the retention of student-athletes.

While much of the literature has been filled with enrollment data, demographic data, and information on programs for athletic recruitment and retention for general students (Allen, 1984; Arbeiter, 1987; Bayer, 1972; Engstrom and Sedlacek, 1991; Johnson, 1997), there has been an insufficient examination of the quality of the educational experience for minority student-athletes. Several studies have begun to examine the experiences of African American student-athletes on college campuses and other studies have focused on problems for African American students on university campuses (Adler and Adler, 1991; Benson, 2000; Pearson and LeNoir, 1997). However, little research has specifically sought to examine the academic experiences of graduates

and non-graduates among the African American student-athlete population. Thus, a closer examination of their perceptions, expectations, and experiences should provide insights into the factors that directly impact the retention rates of these athletes.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto (1975, 1985, 1987, 1993, 1998) developed a model for understanding student retention that focuses on the interactive process that occurs between individuals and the environment. This section will introduce the Tinto Model of Student Retention. Following the introduction, the concepts detailing both individual and institutional aspects of Tinto's theory of student retention will be outlined. Tinto's theory is used because it establishes the importance of the student – institutional interaction.

The Tinto Model of Student Retention

Tinto (1975, 1985, 1987, 1993, 1998) developed an explanatory, longitudinal model of student departure which focused on the interactive process that occurs between individuals and the environment created by the students, faculty, and staff within an institution of higher education. The model suggested a move toward a theory of student departure which seeks to explain how and why it is that particular individual and institutional attributes come to be associated with student departure from institutions of higher education. More specifically, it emphasized “the longitudinal process of interactions, which arises among individuals within the institution and can be seen over time to account for the longitudinal process of withdrawal or disassociation which marks individual departure” (Tinto, 1993, p. 18). Further, the model explained how interactions

and the communities which comprise them lead individuals of different characteristics to withdraw from that institution prior to degree completion.

Tinto's model emphasized that the integration of the student into the communities of the college was crucial to persistence at the institution. He described the college environment as being more bipolar in nature than society, comprised of distinct academic and social systems with both formal and informal networks contained within and between systems.

The Tinto model made three distinctions. It distinguished between involuntary and voluntary student withdrawals, while it also discussed the individual attributes that stand out as the primary roots of voluntary departure. It distinguished between those who leave institutions (institutional departure) and those who withdrew from all forms of higher education participation (system departure). Lastly, it linked departure primarily to the institutional interactional outcomes of incongruence and isolation, both of which led to an absence of integration into the social and academic environments of the institution.

Involuntary withdrawal was defined as "an individual's inability or unwillingness to meet minimum standards of academic performance required to maintain enrollment" (Tinto, 1998, p. 68). According to Tinto, this form of withdrawal, initiated by the institution, takes the form of academic dismissal, which refers to a situation in which the demands of the academic system prove too great. The individual either does not have the ability to meet those demands or has yet to develop and apply those skills and study habits needed to do so. Tinto (1985) suggested that involuntary withdrawal may be related to inadequate preparation in high school, which creates adjustment problems for even the brightest students, as well as the fact that some students are simply unwilling,

lacking either the motivation or interest to apply their skills to meet even minimal standards.

In contrast, voluntary withdrawal occurred primarily as “the result of the individual’s intentions and commitments and the nature of personal experiences in the academic and social communities of the college” (Tinto, 1985, p. 88). More simply, voluntary departure appears to be the result more of what goes on after entry into the institution than of what may have occurred beforehand. The Tinto model focused on voluntary withdrawal from an institution. According to the model, the two most important individual characteristics in studying voluntary withdrawal are (a) the intentions or goals of the student, and (b) the commitments or motivations with which students approach higher education. Tinto (1987) described these factors as follows:

Intentions or goals specify both the level and type of education and occupation desired by the individual. Commitments indicate the degree to which individuals are committed both to the attainment of those goals (goal commitment) and to the institution into which they gain entry (institutional commitment). These, together with skills and value orientations, describe the social and intellectual resources and orientations regarding educational continuance which individuals bring with them into the college environment. (p. 115)

Individual commitment of students was an important aspect of Tinto's model. As Tinto (1987) suggested, “individual commitments, whether expressed as motivation, drive, or effort, also prove to be centrally related to departure from institutions of higher education” (p. 117). Individuals were required to be committed both physically (by attending the institution) and psychologically.

Commitment was divided into goals and institutional commitment. A goal commitment referred to the individual’s commitment to the educational and occupational

goals one holds for oneself. It specified the person's willingness to work toward the attainment of those goals. It differed from institutional commitments, which were defined as an individual's commitment to the institution in which s/he is enrolled. It indicated the degree to which one was willing to work toward the attainment of one's goals within a given higher educational institution.

Tinto differentiated between different types of departures. Some students decided to leave a particular institution (institutional departure), while others decided to move to a different institution (institutional transfer), or depart from the higher educational system all together (system departure). For some, this departure was temporary in which case it was considered more a stopout than a system departure.

Tinto argued that the simple act of leaving should not be defined as dropout when that departure represents the attainment by a student of sought-after goals. If, for example, voluntary departure represented a positive decision based on self-exploration and maturation, then what did student departure mean for institutions? Tinto (1985) argued against just counting dropouts. Instead, he suggested that "the proper question to ask regarding departure and retention then is not who leaves and who stays, but what do individuals learn as a result of attending the institution" (p. 41). He added that the questions institutions should first ask themselves are not how many students they should seek to maintain, but how to best meet the educational responsibility they have assumed in admitting these students.

Another distinction that the Tinto model made dealt with the integration of an individual into the communities of an institution of higher education. Tinto conveys the idea that the integrative experiences heighten the likelihood of persistence. Their absence

increases the likelihood of departure by establishing conditions, which tend to isolate the individual from the daily life of the institution. In turn, these conditions serve to reduce goals and weaken commitments, especially to the institution.

Tinto (1993) detailed four forms of individual experiences within an institution, all affecting departure: adjustment to meeting the demands of the new environment, difficulty in meeting performance standards, incongruence with the institution or its members, and isolation. Intentions and commitment were dispositions with which individuals enter institutions of higher education; adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation were experienced after they enter the institution.

Overall, Tinto's model was created to describe the processes and events that lead to students leaving or remaining at institutions of higher education. The model focuses on the voluntary and involuntary withdrawals of students. It is a model in which the focus is placed on the experiences of the student within the confines of the institution.

The Student-Athlete and the Environment

This section focuses on student-athletes and the environment. The university environment is an integral part of the Tinto model. Also, there will be a discussion of the unique experiences that student-athletes have while attending an institution of higher learning and specifically, the reasons why a student-athlete can be considered as being a part of a special population. This research shows that student-athletes have experiences that are unique to them. For example, student-athletes have demands that are placed on their time and performance that non-athletes do not have.

The interaction between a student-athlete and the environment created at institutions of higher education has received a great deal of attention. In June of 1987,

the Presidents Commission of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sponsored a study to gain further insight into this interaction. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) began the 1987 – 88 National Study of Intercollegiate Athletes in November of 1987. The study compared the experiences of student- athletes with the experiences of student non-athletes who participated extensively in extracurricular activities. Questionnaires, high school and college transcripts, and ACT or SAT scores were reviewed for the 4,083 student-athletes and comparison student participants (AIR, 1988). Ratcliff (1991) and Simms (1997) emphasized that student involvement is key. He showed that successful black student-athletes demonstrate a sense of control over their lives; hold high aspirations for themselves; possess academic goals that are supported by peers, friends, and families; understand the nature of racism; and voluntarily participate in community service.

The results from this study pointed to the fact that student-athletes have some unique experiences in the college environment. In particular, the study showed that student-athletes are a special population and that underlying factors such as academic preparation and commitment should be further studied so that the knowledge base for student-athletes could be increased.

Other research describing student-athletes also suggests that as a population, they have unique needs, facing challenges that other students in higher education may not face. Researchers have discussed the unique needs of the athlete population (AIR, 1989a, 1989b; Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Coakley, 1983; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Ferrante & Etzel, 1991; Gordon, 1986; Gould & Finch, 1991; Grant & Darley, 1993; Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, & Terenzini, 1994; Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston, 1992; Simms, 1997;

Benson, 2000). All of these studies point to the fact that student-athletes have special needs in that there are many demands that are placed on them as athletes that are not placed on non-athletes.

Ferrante & Etzel (1991) suggested that student-athletes should be considered as nontraditional students who have their own culture. This was underscored by Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston (1992) who suggested that “it may be more meaningful to consider athletes as nontraditional students with their own culture and problems in relating to the larger system “(p. 726).

Kramer (1986) also discussed the idea of student-athletes as a unique culture. He argued that culture is manifest in behavioral norms, hidden assumptions, and human nature, each occurring at a different level of depth. Behavioral norms were described as behaviors and attitudes that members of a group or organization pressured one another to follow. An example of one athletic system norm is that student-athletes frequently wear distinctive clothes that identify them as athletes.

As a unique group or culture, the student-athlete population has demands that are different from the non-athlete population. Some of these demands include academic performance and time constraints. As Parham (1993) argued, “Student-athletes are challenged to find ways of maximizing their involvement and learning in both academic and athletic domains and doing so in an effective and efficient manner”(p.417).

Today, minority student-athletes who are involved in a revenue generating sport are important contributors to institutions of higher education. This importance stems from helping to increase the diversity of the student population to helping the particular athletic program to generate more funds. An NCAA report added: “Both the scholar and

the student-athlete heighten the image of higher education. Both assist their universities in garnering financial support, and both are capable of becoming supportive alumni” (NCAA, 1982, pp. 5-6).

While the student-athlete heightens the image of higher education, it is not without a cost. Quite often, the needs of the individual student-athlete can very easily be ignored. As Oglivie and Howe (1982) pointed out: “the needs of the individual in this kind of structure are easily ignored. The athlete is more easily manipulated and exploited at this level [collegiate] than at any other. For example, the entire careers of University administrators and coaches and the multi-million dollar big-business of college athletics depends on the athlete’s performance” (p. 188). There is the potential for student-athletes to become lost in the very system that lives off of their success. As Zing (1982) pointed out, it becomes almost a cat and mouse game. He described it this way:

Before matriculating, the student-athletes are prizes in recruiting efforts which spare neither expense nor energy nor hyperbole to win their signatures on letters of intent. Throughout their undergraduate years, they are among the most visible students on campus. They are subjected to the unique pressures which only public performance in competition brings. And upon graduation—for those who do graduate—they are a source of institutional pride and accomplishment. (p. 283)

The existing research clearly makes a case for student-athletes to be considered as a special population or subculture in higher education. Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, (1992) and Kramer (1986) suggested that student-athletes share characteristics that bind them together. Whether it is increased demands on time or an increased demand for performance, the fact remains that there is something different about the demands that are placed on student-athletes compared to traditional students.

Student-Athletes and Commitment

This section examines student-athletes and the ways in which commitment (a key component of Tinto's model) and participation in athletics are intertwined. It shows that a large percentage of student-athletes enter the institution with the idea that it is a stepping stone to a professional contract. This mindset has a direct impact on the student-athlete's academic and institutional commitment.

While little research has examined the area of student-athlete commitment, the existing research suggests that participation in collegiate athletics takes precedence for these students over academic goal commitment and institutional commitment (Gup, 1989; Speranti, 1988). Schumaker and Small (1986) explained how this creates tension in the student-athlete's academic career:

Many student-athletes enter an institution with the idea that it is a stepping-stone to a professional contract. That belief has a tremendous impact on how student-athletes go about obtaining their education. Many institutions expect academic excellence from their student-athletes. The term "scholarships" emphasizes the word "scholar" when given to deserving students. There is not an attempt to find easy majors or easy courses, and the coaches talk like educators because that is the way they perceive themselves. Students who are unprepared for this scholarly treatment don't remain in the system very long. (p.79)

The American Institutes for Research (1988) study found that approximately 23% of football and basketball players and 30% of grant-recipients in other sports reported that at the time they enrolled in college, they expected to become professional athletes. Clearly, many student-athletes believe that they will become professional athletes and this notion may skew the commitment level to academics because of the expectations that they will be making a professional salary. Therefore, the relationship that non-athletes see between academics and careers is missing for student-athletes. Speranti (1989) suggested that the student-athlete's identity is that of athlete, not that of student. He

explained “the academic world is peripheral to their other role as athletes. where most of their identity is focused” (p. 8).

The experience of a student-athlete seems to be an anomaly in higher education. As the literature review shows, athletics play an integral role in establishing an institution’s prevailing climate. Ironically, membership in the athletic system for student-athletes appears to negatively impact the kind of commitment that is needed to persist until graduation.

Overall, the research on student-athletes and commitment shows that many of them enter the collegiate ranks with the mindset of using the experience as a stepping stone towards a professional career. Therefore, developing a strong academic and institutional commitment does not become a top priority. This has a direct impact on the graduation rates of student-athletes.

African American Students and Retention

This section will focus on the enrollment trends of African American students in higher education for the past forty years. It will also focus on the retention of African American students at predominantly white institutions. The research shows that retention is an issue with which many institutions struggle. Clearly, African American students are lagging behind when it comes to graduating from institutions of higher learning. Some of the issues that the research identified which directly have an impact on the retention of African American students include: social and academic integration; family support; faculty intercourse; financial aid; and networking relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Each will be discussed in greater detail within this section of the literature review.

The retention of students in higher education is an issue with which every campus struggles. As Gillespie & Noble (1992) argued, "Student retention is a major and on-going concern at postsecondary institutions with restrictions on financial resources and decreases in the traditional-age college freshmen pool, institutions are striving to find ways to identify and retain potential dropouts"(p.76). The changing demographics of the college applicant pool have forced institutions to reconsider traditional strategies and focus greater attention on student retention. The smaller traditional applicant pool has forced colleges and universities to demonstrate their attractiveness to students by emphasizing such areas as quality of education, location of the institution, and success in placing students in graduate schools.

Enrollment at colleges and universities increased significantly from 1950 to 1980. During this time institutions of higher education had a large pool from which to select students (Cerna, 1980). However, the period of rapid growth experienced in higher education has slowed (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Furthermore, patterns of enrollment have changed (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Thus, there is certainly more emphasis being placed on student retention.

Traditionally, colleges and universities primarily served individuals who were between the ages of 18 and 24, white, male, middle-class, and above average in ability (Cerna, 1980). Enrollment projections for higher education made in 1980 suggested that the traditional 18-to-24 year old group would decrease as a result of the declining birth rate (Cerna, 1980). The number of persons in the indicated age group in the majority population has begun to decrease. For the majority population, a decrease of 5.4 million was expected by 2008. It is estimated that this group will go from 30 million to 24.6

million, while Hispanics and African Americans in this same age group will increase from 5.2 million to 6.6 million (Estrada, 1988). In addition, trends in higher education indicate that the enrollments in colleges and universities have increased for a number of groups including those who are 25 years and older, ethnic minorities, women, lower socioeconomic background, and the number of those attending college on a part-time basis (U.S. Department of Education, 1995; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Estrada (1988) emphasized the impact of such demographic shifts on colleges and universities: "The demographic realities demand that institutions of higher education understand that their long term future is linked to their abilities to attract, recruit, and retain minority students"(p. 172).

Astin (1993) and Tinto (1975, 1985, 1987, 1993, 1998) have been highly influential in shaping research about the college-going patterns of ethnic minority students. In addition, their work gave rise to the development of advocacy offices and minority enclaves on college campuses for students from races and /or ethnicities different from the dominant culture represented by the majority of students on college campuses.

Astin (1993) provided the first in-depth account of minority students' experiences in higher education. He collected longitudinal data over a nine year period. These data revealed trends in national enrollment and graduation rates. He indicated that African Americans in mainstream universities had a low likelihood of all minorities of completing their baccalaureate degrees within four years. In addition, they had a low overall completion rate and also one of the lowest retention rates of all groups.

Richardson and Skinner (1991) outlined a model of institutional adaptation to student diversity which was the result of case studies of ten postsecondary institutions whose records were commendable for graduating underrepresented minority groups, including African Americans. They found that students who were able to get involved with the university environment were able to persist to graduate at a higher rate.

For African Americans, research also confirms dramatic shifts in college racial patterns over the past few decades. In the 1950's over 90% of black students (approximately 100,000) were educated in traditionally black schools (Fleming, 1984). In the 1960's there were 4,000,000 students on United States campuses, 200,000 were black with 130,000 attending historically black institutions (Wilson & Melendez, 1986). Approximately 96% of all black college students were in 105 black institutions (Cartina, 1986). Enrollment data for the 1970's, however, indicates a significant change in the number of black students attending predominantly white institutions, with three-fourths of all black students attending such schools (Astin, 1975). In the 1990's, studies indicate that two thirds of all black graduates received their degrees from predominantly white campuses (Benson, 1996). Other studies raise that figure to four out of every five minority students enrolling in predominantly white institutions, with 45% of the black student population enrolled in two-year colleges and 55% at four-year campuses (Collins, 1987).

While such data suggest the success of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the Black Power Movement of the late 60s and 70s given the emphasis on equal access, recent studies also indicate that the picture of success may not be quite complete. American colleges and universities may no longer face the admission of black

students as their greatest challenge, but instead confront the dual issues. The more significant issue recently confronting academic institutions of whether or not black students will continue to attend these institutions and will remain long enough to graduate (Benson, 1996).

Attrition rates of black college students in predominantly white institutions is substantially higher than that of white students (Astin, 1982). Black students drop out of predominantly white institutions at a rate of 49.5%, as compared to a drop out rate of 41.4% among white men and 30.9% among white women. Cartina (1986) found that black students dropped out at a rate of 73.4%, whereas the overall population dropped out at a rate of 47.7%. Allen (1981) found that from one-third to one-half of black students studying at predominantly white institutions left without degrees, an attrition rate 3 to 5 times higher than that of whites. Among African American students who are enrolled at predominantly white institutions, only 30% graduate, as compared to a 70% graduation rate for black students attending predominantly black institutions (Wilson & Melendez, 1986). Though only one-fourth of all black students in higher education attend predominantly black institutions, they award 69% of all baccalaureate degrees received by black students (Thomas & Ermler, 1988).

Research into the causes of attrition among black students suggests that black students are increasingly selecting options other than college after high school (Arbeiter, 1987). Those who do attend identify the lack of role models and insensitive instructors (Brown, 1986), and poor pre-college academic preparation as some of the reasons for dropping out (Brown, 1986; Loo and Rolinson, 1986; Adams and Smith, 1987). The most frequently reported variables, however, are commonly described as the black

student's feelings of alienation or isolation (Brown, 1986; Loo and Rolinson, 1986; Suen, 1983; Willie, 1981; Astin, 1975; Cortina, 1980; Goodrich, 1980). Closely related are feelings of anger, frustration, and helplessness (Peterson & Rodriguez, 1978), and culture shock (Remer, Tongate & Watson, 1978; Atkinson & Hord, 1983). Fleming (1981) described campus environments expressing both overt and covert racism and black student dropout responses to such rejection and hostility (Willie & McCord, 1972; Gibbs, 1974; Boyd, 1978). A category identified as "intellectual anxiety" in an earlier study (Coleman, 1961) has given way in more recent studies to the term "cognitive conflict" (Anderson, 1988). An increasing number of black students are experiencing "interferences with the normal development of the quest for intellectual competence" (Fleming, 1981 p.171), feeling not like welcomed academicians, but rather like "uninvited guests in a strange land" (Parker & Scott, 1985, p.67).

Retention research, on the other hand, has attempted to identify factors that incline black students to stay in school. In this research, retention generally refers to the numbers and percentages of students who stay in college to graduate with two-year, four-year, graduate, or professional degrees. Institutions often measure retention rates using four, five, and six-year cohort figures which may or may not account for transfer students or students who take seven or more years to complete a degree. Involvement appears to be an operative term in retention studies (Mallinckrodt, 1984; Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987), along with identification with the college (Astin, 1975), integration into the social and academic life (Tinto, 1975), as identified by the use of certain campus facilities (Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1984), family support (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984), faculty intercourse (Pascarella & Terezini, 1992), and networking

relationships with faculty, staff, and peers (Faughn, 1982; Pollard, 1982; Cardinal, 1981). The findings that non-academic variables are influencing factors are born out in the extensive research on retention by Sedlacek and colleagues (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984) who identify eight non-traditional, non-cognitive variables critical to the lives of minority students (Hinton, 1990). These variables include:

- (1) **POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT OR CONFIDENCE:** Strong self-feeling, strength of character, determination, and independence.
- (2) **REALISTIC SELF-APPRAISAL:** Especially academic. Recognizes and accepts any deficiencies and works hard at self-development; Recognizes need to broaden his/her individuality.
- (3) **UNDERSTANDS AND DEALS WITH RACISM:** Realist based upon personal experience with racism; Is committed to fighting to improve existing system; Not submissive to existing wrongs, nor hostile to society, nor a "cop-out"; Able to handle a racist system; Asserts school role to fight racism.
- (4) **PREFERS LONG RANGE GOALS TO SHORT-TERM OR IMMEDIATE NEEDS:** Able to respond to deferred gratification.
- (5) **AVAILABILITY OF STRONG SUPPORT PERSON:** To whom to turn in crises.
- (6) **SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE:** In any area pertinent to his/her background (gang leader, sports, non-educational group, etc.).
- (7) **DEMONSTRATED COMMUNITY SERVICE:** Has involvement in his/her cultural community.
- (8) **KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED IN A FIELD:** Unusual and/or culturally related ways of obtaining information and demonstrating knowledge; Field itself may be nontraditional. (White & Sedlacek, 1986).

The first variable (Positive Self-Concept or Confidence) has generated several theoretical models. Sedlacek has found that the student who has a Positive Self-Concept, who feels confident about his/her ability, is more likely to persist through graduation (Sedlacek &

Adams-Gaston, 1992; Di Cesare, et. Al., 1972). Research concerning the relationship between black student self-esteem is not new (Bayer, 1972; Nisbet, 1982), but new directions for theoretical models have emerged.

Hinton (1990), for example, conducted research on the factors influencing on-time graduation of black students in a predominantly white institution, using Sedlacek's non-cognitive variables as part of the parallel analysis. In her work she identified those studies that validated the importance of these variables as influencing factors in the life of black students. These variables included: realistic self-appraisal, dealing with racism, demonstrated community service, prefers long range goals, availability of strong support person, successful leadership experience, and knowledge acquired in a field.

Hinton was able to show that these variables indeed have an impact on black students who attend predominantly white institutions in that each variable played an important role in the lives of these students.

Overall, the retention literature suggests that African American students who attend predominantly white institutions of higher learning are not graduating at the same rate as their white counterparts. What is clear is that there are many factors that contribute to this difference in graduation rates. Therefore, minority student retention is a matter of growing concern on college campuses across the nation. Students are expected to make choices and persist; however, the literature suggests that for minority students enrolling in predominantly white institutions of higher education, neither persistence nor progress toward identified goals is occurring at satisfactory levels. These data indicate that educational progress, adjustment to college life, and persistence in institutions of higher education for minority students appear to be at least delayed, and for many,

impaired. The key variables which affect the retention of African American students who attend a predominantly white institution include: self-appraisal, dealing with racism, community service, long range goals, support person, leadership experience, knowledge acquired in a specific field, alienation, isolation, and hostility.

In addition to the general research on African American student attrition and retention, several studies have examined retention issues for African American student-athletes. Benson (2000) for example, interviewed eight African American student-athletes who were labeled at risk and played football for a predominantly white university. The study yielded evidence that the marginal academic performance of the student-athletes was a phenomenon that was created by a series of interrelated practices engaged in by all significant members of the academic setting, including peers, coaches, advisors, teachers, and the student-athletes themselves.

Pearson & Lenoir (1997) also conducted a study which focused on thirty one African American student-athletes. In this study, the researchers identified special challenges and benefits that African American student-athletes encounter. The study also pointed to the need for supported and structured programs for these student-athletes.

Research by Johnson (1997); Simms (1997); Suggs (1999) have also suggested that while collegiate athletics can be exciting and challenging, beneath the fame and glory lie the everyday realities which can be frightening, frustrating, and confusing for student-athletes. For the African American student-athlete the everyday realities can be multiplied if the issues are not brought to the forefront so they may be addressed.

These studies on African American student-athletes suggest that this sub-population of African American students have unique problems and needs related to

academic success. This supports Bakker, Whiting, & Brug's (1990) call for further research examining the perspectives of these students.

Psychological Model of Racial Identity

Psychological models of racial identity were developed by Thomas (1970) and Cross (1978). Issues of black self-identity and confidence have been addressed in fields of genetics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, literature, and law. A revision of these models underscores the critical need for African American students to know themselves racially, historically, and socially.

Cross and Thomas refer to their work as models of "psychological Nigrescence." Nigrescence is defined as "the process of becoming black." To negate one's blackness, according to Thomas, is to become a victim of "Negromachy," which he defines as "a form of mental illness that affected African Americans before the onset of the Negro-to-black movement"(p.43). It is further "that which is ruled by confusion of self-worth and shows a dependency upon White society for definition of self. ...the 'White is right' attitude. ... a denial of self ...of reality..." (Cross, 1978; Thomas, 1970). For Cross and Thomas, this pathology is overcome by seeking a racial identity that in turn becomes a conduit for discovering one's unity with mankind. Cross (1978) developed five stages of racial identity. These include:

- (1) Pre-Encounter – The black person's worldview is dominated by Euro-American determinants. S/he thinks, acts, behaves in a manner that degrades blackness.
- (2) Encounter – One has an experience, an encounter, and begins to re-interpret the world as a consequence of that encounter. There is a secondary testing phase during which the individual cautiously and fearfully tries to validate his new perceptions.

- (3) **Immersion-Emersion** – This stage provides most sensational aspects of black identity development, “vortex of psychological metamorphosis...” The person’s level of blackness is high, but the degree of internalization of the new identity is minimal. This period of emergent identity or “just discovered blackness” is manifested in the construction of the correct ideology and/or world view, glorification of African heritage, dichotomous thinking, blacker than thou attitudes, unrealistic expectations concerning the efficacy of black power, the tendency to denigrate White people and White culture while simultaneously deifying black people and black culture. Euphoria, rage, inordinate amounts of artistic and/or political energy, perturbation, effrontery, high risk taking, a destructive mood in constant tensions with dreams of revitalization, and an characterize behavior in this stage.
- (4) **Internalization** - This stage signals the resolution of conflicts between the “old” and “new” worldviews. Tension, and defensiveness are replaced by a calm, secure demeanor. Ideological flexibility, psychological openness, and self-confidence about one’s blackness are evident in interpersonal transactions. Anti-White feelings decline to the point where friendships with white associates can be renegotiated. While still using blacks as a primary reference group, the person moves toward a pluralistic nonracist perspective.
- (5) **Internalization-Commitment** - Here a distinction is made between persons who have simply internalized the new identity but discontinue involvement in the movement (development levels off at stage four) and those who continue to be social activists. This “ideal person” has not only incorporated the new identity, but is struggling to translate personal identity into activities that are meaningful to the group.

In conclusion, it is clear that establishing a racial identity is very important for African American students who attend a predominantly white institution. The Cross (1978) model of Racial Identity has five stages, which highlight the development from an eurocentric view to one fully internalized and committed to black identity. The psychological models are important, therefore, as they explain where a student is in relation to self-identity and confidence. For African American student-athletes this model of racial identity is especially significant because the literature suggests that such students struggle with identity when attending a predominantly white campus.

Student-Athletes and Identity Development

Research on the impact of athletic participation on individuals has been plentiful. A review of that research emphasizes a focus on identity and self image development. This literature shows that participation in athletics has a definite impact on individual growth and academic achievement. However, it is apparent that this impact can be positive or negative.

The most pressing and relevant question regarding athletic participation centers on the role of athletics as a positive or negative influence on individual growth and academic achievement. Evidence in the literature supports both positive and negative influences on these areas of achievement. Participation in athletics was found to have an effect on popularity as early as junior high and high school (Coleman, 1961; Eder & Parker, 1987; Thirer & Wright, 1985). Eder and Parker (1987) argued that high status male athletic activities were evident in the membership of an elite peer group in high school, which consisted exclusively of athletes. Conversely, by associating with other athletes, the student's identification as an athlete was enhanced. In general, extracurricular activities offered students more visibility among their peers, and thus influenced elite peer group membership. This in turn placed more importance on the value of the activities, and increased the extent to which the activities became incorporated into the peer culture.

Many athletes have been rewarded throughout their entire lives for their success as athletes. A by-product of this reward system is the development of a sense of self-worth based on the athlete's ability to excel in athletics (Lanning, 1982; Nelson, 1983). However, this may have drawbacks in areas other than sports. As Petitpas and Champagne (1988) explained, "Many athletes develop a sense of entitlement that hinders

motivation to work outside of sport, and may preclude the development of adequate life skills” (p. 456).

This negative development of self-image and identity of the student-athlete is complex and can be influenced by a number of factors. Grant and Darley (1993) suggested that participation in sports create serious demands on students beyond those of non-athletes. They argue that “student-athletes face all the challenges and stresses of non-athletes but may encounter additional life crises directly related to their participation in sport” (p. 441). Pinkerton, Hinz, and Barrow (1987) supported this as well: “Athletic participation at the college level creates major personal and emotional demands on the sports participant” (p. 226). Although many accommodate and successfully navigate this peril, others are at risk and succumb to a variety of stress producing circumstances. potentially precipitating developmental crises and psychological reactions.

The influence of athletics on self-image has also been found to have a positive influence on individuals. Schumaker, Small, and Wood (1986) found that student-athletes had significantly higher self-concept scores than non-athletes. McLaughlin (1986) found that men who participate in intercollegiate athletics have less fear of success than do women athletes, and men and women non-athletes. Pascarella and Smart (1991) reported that “intercollegiate athletic participation has a positive impact on social involvement during college, satisfaction with college, interpersonal and leadership skills, and motivation to complete one’s degree” (p. 127).

While the literature identified positive outcomes related to self-image based on athletic identity development, the literature also suggested that caution be exercised in accepting athletic participation as solely a positive influence. An individual who

developed only the “athletic” aspect of her or his personality was limited in the development of a holistic sense of self. This developmental process was discussed by Pearson and Petitpas (1990) in their description of the developmental needs of incoming student-athletes:

As athletes enter the college years, the primary developmental task shifts to establishing a personal identity...The quest for identity necessitates active exploration of the various alternative possibilities of adult life. Identity establishment also requires that commitments be made to those ideological and occupational alternatives that appear most consistent with personal needs, values, interests, and skills. (p. 8)

Thus, the research points to the fact that a student-athlete who participates in a sport in which s/he has become proficient may find that s/he is affected in both positive and negative ways. These include areas such as individual growth, academic achievement, self-worth, self-image, and self-identity. It is clear that more research is needed to understand the complex factors affecting student-athletes in order to assist these students in the area of identity development.

Student-Athletes and Academic Preparation

Scant research has examined the challenges that student-athletes face and regulations that have been implemented to enhance student-athletes' academic performance. The current findings suggest that student-athletes were found to enter college with poorer academic records, being less well prepared than their non-athlete peers (Eitzen, 1988; Gurney & Stuart, 1987; NCAA, 1982; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982; Gurney & Stuart, 1987; NCAA, 1999). These issues are of great concern to the

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which has instituted a number of regulations aimed at improving the academic levels of incoming student-athletes.

Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1982), in their study of the academic performance of 2,001 student-athletes over a 10-year period, reported that athletes in male revenue sports of football and basketball had a relatively low probability of receiving an education compared to non-athletes and athletes in other sports. They proposed that because of the revenue-producing potential of these sports, the pressure to win was more intense. Speranti (1988) also suggested that both the college athletic system and the intense desire to win, coupled with inadequate academic preparation of incoming student-athletes, resulted in athletes being held back once they arrived on campus. While the relationship of athletic participation and academic preparation is unclear, it appeared as though student-athletes, as a group, arrived at college less prepared academically than student non-athletes.

In April 1982 the NCAA Council, concerned with the criticisms of intercollegiate athletics, established the Select Committee on Athletic Problems and Concerns in Higher Education. The committee was comprised of chief executive officers, faculty athletic representatives, athletic administrators, coaches, and lay people concerned with the state of athletics and its impact on higher education. Issues identified for the committee to address included (NCAA, 1982):

1. Potential athletes being admitted without skills or experience to perform successfully as students at the universities in which they are participating.
2. Those participating in the athletic programs not being required to conform to an academic program that would enable them to

- receive a degree and ensure the benefits that should be obtained through college attendance.
3. Student-athletes not being given sufficient attention to help them overcome the academic problems they may confront from a combination of possible under-preparation for academic success and overcommitment to athletic endeavors.
 4. So many demands being placed on the athlete in the pursuit of athletic endeavors, resulting in insufficient time and energy to meet even the minimum academic requirements. (p. 8)

One of the responses by the committee was to develop what became known as "Proposition 48," which set minimum standards required for individual student-athletes to become and remain eligible. The NCAA announced that beginning in the 1995-96 academic year the minimum standards for freshman student-athletes to be considered eligible were tightened (Bissenger, 1990). Obviously, the reaction of the NCAA to the academic difficulties of student-athletes was to limit who could attend four-year universities in terms of their incoming academic preparation.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association Foundation (1994) has also implemented a program called the "NCAA Life Skills Program." The mission of the program is to "provide a systematic personal development program designed to reach each student-athlete based on his or her individual needs." (p. 1). The program has identified five components into which the materials in development are centered. These include: academic commitment, athletic commitment, personal development commitment, a commitment to service and a career development commitment.

Student-athletes face a number of challenges that non-athletes do not face when seeking integration into the formal academic system. It appears that for some athletes, particularly those who were not in the revenue-producing sports (specifically football and basketball), the effects are not overwhelming (NCAA, 1995). In part, this may be due to

the additional opportunities made available to the student-athlete such as tutors, academic assistance, and study centers. For those who participate in revenue-producing sports, however, the effects for many seem to be overwhelming, as they are not graduating from institutions at the same rate of non-athletes. The reasons for this particular group of students' additional difficulties remain unclear. Some such students do graduate, but many struggle much more significantly than do any of their peers.

The research shows that student-athletes face many challenges when it comes to academic performance. Comparatively, student-athletes were found to enter college with poorer academic records than their non-athlete peers. The research also points to the fact that one of the big challenges is to assist the student-athlete in seeking integration into the formal academic system. For those student-athletes who participate in revenue generating sports, this seems to be a more difficult task. One of the ways that student-athletes are able to overcome this challenge is by having additional help available to them such as having tutors, academic assistance, and study centers. Even with this assistance black student-athletes are, as a group, still at the bottom of all measures of academic success: the problems noted in earlier decades have persisted into the 90s (Benson, 2000). For example, in a discussion of 1993 NCAA Division I graduation rates, Siegel (1994) noted that 57% of white football players graduated in six years, whereas the rate for African American football players was only 36%. 1995 graduation rate data for Division I student-athletes who enrolled in 1988 show that the overall rate was 57%, but the rate for black male student-athletes was only 41% ("Year in Review," 1996). Most recently, Division I data show that the 1998 graduation rate for all student-athletes was 57%, 60% for white male football players, and only 42% for black male football players (NCAA,

1999). It is clear that more research is needed to assess the best ways in which universities could further assist student-athletes in the area of academic preparation.

Summary

The review of literature examined six areas related to African American Student-Athletes and Academic Success. The sections included student-athletes and the environment, student-athletes and commitment, African American students and retention, psychological models of racial identity, student-athletes and identity development, and student-athletes and academic preparation.

Environment plays an important role in the lives of student-athletes. American Institutes for Research (1988) indicated that the interaction student-athletes have with the university environment has a direct impact on whether or not they persist to graduate.

Commitment is another variable which affects the retention of student-athletes. As Schumaker, Small & Wood (1986) suggested, many student-athletes view their collegiate athletic experience as a stepping stone to a professional career. With this mindset, for many student-athletes the focus is on bettering their conditions to enter a professional career and not persisting to graduate.

Retention remains an issue all universities face (Gillespie & Noble, 1992; Snyder, 1996). For African American students who attend predominantly white institutions, retention is an issue (Simms, 1997). Clearly, African American students are attending these institutions. However, they are not graduating at the same rate as their white counterparts (Allen, 1981; Simms, 1997). As the research displayed, factors such as relationships with faculty, staff and peers, self confidence, racism, family support and

integration into academic life play a part in whether or not an African American student at a predominantly white institution will persist to graduate or not (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984). In addition, research on African American student-athletes indicates that they are a unique population with special needs (Benson, 2000; Pearson & Lenoir, 1997).

Racial identity plays a role in the life of an African American student who attends a predominantly white institution. The Cross (1978) model of Racial Identity identified five stages, which highlighted the development of racial identity for African American students from a eurocentric view to one that is fully internalized and committed to black identity. The stages included: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. The research in this area indicated that students move within these stages based on experiences as they occur. This is also true for student-athletes as they move within the stages while participating in a university sport.

Similarly, identity and self-development were identified in the literature as having an impact on the academic success African American student-athletes (Eder and Parker, 1987). In particular, the key question is whether or not participation in athletics has a positive or negative affect on individual growth and academic achievement. The literature identified both positive and negative influences on individual growth and academic achievement (Blann, 1985; Pearson and Petitpas, 1990). Some of the areas of impact were individual growth, academic achievement, self-worth, self-image, and self-identity. The effect of the impact, whether positive or negative, depended solely on the individual student-athlete.

Few research studies examined student-athletes and academic preparation. The studies that have been conducted identified student-athletes as entering college with less academic preparation than that of non-athlete students (Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel, 1982). Also, these studies identified the fact that male athletes in the revenue sports of football and basketball had a low probability of receiving an education in comparison with those student-athletes who participated in non-revenue generating sports.

Clearly, African American student-athletes are not graduating at the same rate as their White counterparts. With the changing pool of students attending today's colleges, an emphasis on discovering the causes and possible cures for the high attrition rates of these students will assist institutions by allowing them to have an increase in their graduation rates. What is missing from the literature is a closer look at the African American student-athlete's perceptions, expectations, and experiences including comparative data from both graduates and non-graduates. By paying closer attention to the experiences of African American student-athletes it may be possible to gain insight into the factors that directly impact the retention rates of these athletes on academic performance.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived key success factors for African American student-athletes who enrolled in a predominantly white Carnegie Research I university setting. Information relevant to the research design and procedures used to conduct this study included (a) population and sample, (b) research design, (c) researcher's perspective (d) instrumentation, (e) data collection procedures, (f) data analysis, (g) validity and reliability.

Population and Sample

The theoretical population for this study included African American student-athletes who enrolled at the undergraduate level, in all predominantly white Carnegie Research I institutions across the United States. The actual population for this study included African American male student-athletes who enrolled at the undergraduate level, in a moderate-sized predominantly white Carnegie Research I university of approximately 22,000 students, during the 1991-98 school years and played either football or basketball.

Selection of the participants in the study was based on the tenets of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). The sample was selected from a list of eligible participants, which was obtained from the registrar's office at the university. This list included 47 student-athletes who had matriculated at the university. In order to be eligible to participate in the study, the African American male student-athlete had to have his

diploma in hand or have left the institution at the undergraduate level prior to completing the degree requirements. Also, each participant matriculated at the institution for a minimum of four full academic semesters. Due to limitations of the given list, such as outdated phone numbers and addresses, twelve out of the 47 student-athletes listed as potential participants were able to participate in the study. The twelve participants included six graduates and six non-graduates. Each participant was given the opportunity to respond to a personal or telephone interview on a voluntary basis and each participant signed a consent form that allowed the researcher to conduct the interview (See Appendix A for a copy of the consent form).

The intent of sample selection in qualitative research is purposive rather than random (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; and Patton, 1990). For this study the participant sample was based on the tenet of "criterion sampling" which was described by Patton (1990) as reviewing cases or people who have predetermined criterion of importance. The researcher determined that the participants would come from two groups of former African American student-athletes who had matriculated at a predominantly white university for a minimum of four academic semesters between the 1991 and 1998 school years. The first group of student-athletes were those who played football and basketball and who had persisted to graduate from the predominantly white university. The second group of student-athletes that were chosen to participate in this study were those African American student-athletes who played football and basketball and had left the university prior to graduation.

Location and Setting for the Research

The university used for this study is located in the Midwest and has a population of approximately 22,000 students. This university is made up of predominantly white students. The total minority (African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Latino/Hispanic) student population at this university is approximately 11 percent, of which 1.4 percent is African American.

Research Design

Qualitative research is a methodology that values the participants' view of reality and seeks to discover these views in an interactive process that allows the participants to create the data for the research through their own voices or words (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Patton (1990) presented a similar perspective on qualitative research when he noted that qualitative analysis is a way to understand natural occurring phenomena in their natural state with direct quotes and descriptive data. Patton (1990) suggested that qualitative designs are particularly oriented toward exploration and discovery.

The qualitative research method is useful for examining the experiences and perceptions of individuals in a holistic rather than subdivided manner. The research is much more intensive than extensive in its objectives (McCracken, 1988). For this investigation, the use of qualitative research permitted the researcher to examine selected issues in greater depth and detail by using descriptions and direct quotations which capture the essence of individual's personal experiences (Patton, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to obtain an understanding of the experiences of African American student-athletes at a predominantly white Carnegie Research I

institution. This purpose fits well into the inductive and exploratory framework that is provided by the qualitative paradigm. Within the qualitative paradigm, a number of specific approaches exist. Most often noted in educational research are the case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Glaser. 1992). This study was conducted from a phenomenological perspective utilizing the tenets of the grounded theory approach as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978, 1992). Patton (1990) suggested:

A phenomenological perspective can mean either or both (1) a focus on what people experience and how they interpret the world (in which case one can use interviews without actually experiencing the phenomenon oneself) or (2) a methodological mandate to actually experience the phenomenon being investigated (in which case participant observation would be necessary) (p. 70).

This study was closely allied with Patton's first meaning of phenomenological perspective. The intent of this research was to learn about the experiences of African American student-athletes at a predominantly white institution of higher education and how they interpreted those experiences. Methods to capture participants' experiences were used without focusing on the essence or nature of shared experiences, which is the goal of research conducted from a phenomenological approach.

The term grounded theory was coined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It refers to theories or hypotheses that emerge from findings grounded in empirical data and shaped by constant comparative analysis without reliance on prior hypotheses, theories, or conclusions. Glaser (1992) wrote, "The grounded theory approach is a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set

of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (p. 16). Findings that emerged from the data of this research led to a summation of the experiences of African American student-athletes at a predominantly white institution of higher education.

Constant comparative analysis is central to the grounding of theory in the data. This process assures that theories emerge from the data rather than precede them. Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote about how the constant comparison of experiences produces categories with identifiable dimensions and conditions. Soon there is an emergence of relationships among properties of the same category as well as connecting features across categories. Glaser (1992) stressed the need to allow categories and their features to be revealed without an overlay of preconceptions on the analyst’s part, which can lead to the forcing, not emerging of research findings.

Researcher’s Perspective

Narrative data are fundamental to qualitative research. These data are most frequently collected from individual accounts of events, feelings, thoughts, and perceptions. The researcher’s responsibility is to gather enough description from the voices and stories of the participants to be able to discern themes, patterns, and relationships in order to develop a meaningful interpretation for others who did not hear the participants themselves. In a sense, the researcher “speaks” for the voices and stories, which form the narrative. Therefore, it is essential for the researcher to share some personal history to offer the reader perspective and insight about the research process.

I am an African American male who was born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I attended predominantly white catholic schools from the second through the twelfth grades. In elementary and middle school, I played basketball and football. Due to financial constraints I chose to start working a part-time job and therefore I did not participate in high school and college athletics.

For my college studies I chose to attend Southern University, which is a predominantly African American land grant institution located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. While in college, I developed an appreciation for sports and a couple of my friends played football and basketball for the university. Therefore, it can be said that I have spent some time around athletics.

I chose to attend large predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution to pursue a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration. Initially, I had feelings of discomfort and isolation as I was in a new environment academically and socially. These feelings led me to have a desire to conduct research on African American students who attend predominantly white universities. Thus, when it was time to choose a topic for the dissertation, I wanted to study this student population. As I began to research this topic, I discovered that I needed to dig deeper as there had been previous studies, which dealt directly with African American students who attended predominantly white institutions. I discovered that little research had examined the African American student-athlete as a special population, specifically having the voices of those athletes to discern a sense of their experiences.

Currently, I am the Assistant Director in an advocacy office at a predominantly white university. In this position, I come in contact with African American student-

athletes daily, and I work closely with the Academic Advisor in the Athletic Department to insure that these students are on track academically. This contact has afforded me an opportunity to further understand some of the feelings that exist among this population.

Instrumentation

The interview schedule was developed based upon key issues derived from the literature review. A pilot study was employed to test and refine the interview questions. The final instrument included twenty-five questions which related to student demographics, defining academic success, factors that influence academic success, factors that were identified as roadblocks or obstacles that impede the academic success of student-athletes, reasons for leaving a university, personal support systems, and the importance of role models.

The questions on the instrument were developed based on prior research, which focused on student retention. Gillespie & Noble, (1992); Adams and Smith, (1987); Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, (1984); Tinto (1975, 1985, 1987, 1993, 1998) all focused on student retention. These studies indicated that student retention was based on a series of events that involve the campus environment as well as the overall academic setting. Key questions on the instrument related to retention included demographics, defining academic success, obstacles to academic success, reasons for leaving the university, personal support systems and role models.

The interview schedule was the same for graduates and non-graduates with the exception of certain questions, which were asked of non-graduates. These questions for the non-graduates dealt directly with leaving the institution prior to graduation (See

Appendix B for a copy of both interview schedules). Each interview took approximately 60 to 120 minutes to complete.

Data Collection Procedures

The research was conducted in three phases. In phase I the researcher conducted a pilot study. The pilot study was conducted with four current student-athletes at the university. The researcher conducted mock interviews with these student-athletes to determine what changes, if any, should be made to the interview questions before being used in the actual study. The only change that came out of the pilot study in regard to the interview questions was that the researcher added a question to find out if the student-athletes had received a scholarship to the university initially or did they “walk on” to the team.

In phase II the selected prospective participants were contacted by phone in order to ask if they wished to participate in the study. Those who agreed were mailed and asked to return a signed consent form, which offered confidentiality. Also, during this phone contact, the researcher discussed the topic in general, the purpose of the study, and the actual interview process involved. The prospective participants were informed that the researcher is African American as well. Each of the prospective interviewees agreed to participate and was scheduled for an interview.

Before phase III of the study commenced, a copy of the interview questions were distributed to each participant approximately one week prior to the interview. This provided each participant an opportunity to consider his responses in some depth prior to the actual interview.

Phase III included the retrospective interviews. Prior to each interview session, the participants were given a personal briefing about the process and they were encouraged to be candid. The consent form which had been previously signed sought permission so that their responses could be tape recorded and transcribed and so their responses could be directly quoted and used as part of the study.

During the interview, the researcher asked each question consecutively for the purpose of consistency among participants. Responses were not prompted unless there was confusion or misunderstanding regarding the question that was being asked. The duration of each interview was approximately one to two hours. At the close of each interview, the participants were informed that copies of the study would be available at the university library and an abstract would be forwarded to them if they so desired.

Data Analysis

This section discusses the coding procedures, analysis process, and process of describing and interpreting the data employed in this study. Due to the circular nature of qualitative data analysis, it is difficult to write about each of these activities separately. Most authors (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Glaser, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidel, Freise, & Leonard, 1995; and Tesch, 1990) agree that coding is analysis and forms the basis of description from which interpretation is made.

This study utilized the grounded theory approach, which was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in which patterns and relationships across cases may be identified through inductive analysis. Findings are grounded in real-world situations as reported by those participating in the research. Through systematic data collection,

management, and analysis each category and theme of this study is easily traced to its origins in the voices of the participants.

Constant comparative analysis is central to the grounding of theory in the data. This process assures that theories emerge from the data rather than precede them. Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote about how the constant comparison of experiences produces categories with identifiable dimensions and conditions. Soon there is an emergence of relationships among properties of the same category as well as connecting features across categories. Glaser (1992) stressed the need to allow categories and their features to be revealed without an overlay of preconceptions on the analyst's part, which can lead to the forcing, not emerging of research findings.

Epoche is the first important ingredient in data analysis in a phenomenological study. Epoche gives the researcher the opportunity to set aside all personal biases and preconceived notions of the phenomenon being studied (Glaser, 1992). In this instance, the researcher employed "Expert Debriefs" in which the four members of the dissertation committee reviewed the interview questions to ensure they were devoid of any wording that would indicate bias or prejudgment on the part of the researcher.

The coding of the transcriptions included several stages. The stages were open coding, refinement of coding, and axial coding. These stages eventually led to the emergence of themes.

Open coding is the initial stage of constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This led to tagging or labeling of all segments of transcripts to represent descriptive responses to questions asked about the experiences of African American student-athletes in higher education (Appendix C provides a complete list of all of the

open codes that were developed). This activity involved immersing the researcher in each transcript and led to seventy-five codes. Frequently one line contained material about something in addition to the first code assigned to it. It was not unusual for some lines to have several codes attached to them.

Refinement of the coding scheme constituted the first in-depth analysis of the data. Codes became heuristic tools of analysis as they provided aid and direction towards constructing a map of the data. While merging several codes into one or modified codes into something different, the researcher constantly compared the codes to ensure that new definitions accurately encompassed the substance of the idea. This condensed the seventy-five open codes into eleven categories. The code names were: reasons for attending the institution, family background, academic success, academic and athletic performance, relationships with coaches, relationships with teachers, relationships with parents, attitudes of teachers in regards to student-athletes, attitudes of student-athletes in regards to teachers, racism, and coping skills. As this process continued, themes began to emerge. Code names were amended, added, and deleted as analysis progressed.

Axial coding, the intense analysis of one category at a time (Glaser, 1967), followed as the next level of coding as categories emerged from the open coding and refinement processes. During the cycle of the coding process, relationships appeared among codes and across categories. In studying the emergent categories, relationships and patterns caused the assigning of each category to a major theme, of which there were three. These included: relationships, attitudes, and school climate.

Throughout the coding process, HyperRESEARCH software was used for evaluation purposes. HyperRESEARCH allowed the researcher to code all data numerous

times, retrieve and manipulate portions of coded source material, test propositions about the data on any one code or combination of codes using Boolean searches, test hypotheses about the overall meaning of the data using artificial intelligence, and print the retrieved data.

Validity and Reliability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that credibility is a key concept in establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry. Trustworthiness refers to the validity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; and Krefting, 1990). To address the issues of validity and reliability, various methods were employed. Specifically, the study employed member checks and expert debriefs. Member checking was used to ensure that what was recorded by the researcher represented the statements that were made by the informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each participant involved in the study had the opportunity to review his interview and to correct any misinterpretations that may have existed. Only one participant chose to correct a statement in the transcribed interview.

Expert debriefs were used prior to the interviews to check the instrumentation and process employed to enhance validity. A panel of experts examined the research proposal, interview questions, the methodology chapter, the analysis chapter, and made suggestions for changes to the researcher. By doing this, the panel of experts helped to evaluate the credibility of the processes that was used and also the conclusions that were drawn by the researcher.

Three criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Marshall and Rossman (1989), and Erlandson et al. (1993) are used to assess the trustworthiness of this type of study. They include (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) dependability.

Erlandson et al. (1993) wrote that the criterion of credibility can be achieved by triangulation, reflexivity, and peer examination. Regarding this study, credibility was met in the following ways. The bulk of the data came from the voices and stories of African American student-athletes heard during the interviewing process. Additional data included fieldnotes, institutional documents, and relevant literature. Reflexivity was accomplished by discussing my work with people familiar with qualitative methods. Finally, an outside reader reviewed my work.

The second criterion for trustworthiness is transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that transferability is the extent to which research findings can be utilized in other situations. It is the responsibility of the researcher to generate thick description (Geertz, 1973) to demonstrate the possibility of applicability of research results to other contexts with shared characteristics. I have provided substantial description of experiences of African American student-athletes in higher education from their voices and from the literature.

Dependability is the third criterion of trustworthiness and concerns the degree of consistency to be found if the study were to be repeated or replicated. Dependability is made evident from an audit trail. Lincoln & Guba (1985) wrote that the purpose of an audit trail is to leave an adequate amount of evidence so that interested parties can reconstruct the process by which the investigators reached their conclusion. An audit trail has been established beginning with the first letters written to people at the university. Other elements of the audit trail include the taped interviews; transcriptions, which ranged from 10 to 35 pages in length, (Appendix D provides one complete transcription of an interview); and fieldnotes.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of African American student-athletes who matriculated at a predominantly white Carnegie Research I university. Three themes related to the experiences of African American student-athletes at a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution were identified. The first focused on the notion that relationships for African American student-athletes play a key role in determining whether or not they persist to graduation. The second major theme was that attitude plays a significant role in determining how student-athletes view their place at a particular institution. Finally, school climate emerged as an important consideration when addressing the issue of retention for African American student-athletes.

This chapter includes a summary of the characteristics of the respondents who participated in individual interviews. The characteristics of the respondents are provided to give the reader a sense of the context in which the respondents developed their values and aspirations, the influences of family or other role models, and the impact of their life experiences on decisions and choices they have made in pursuing their career interest. Context sensitivity in qualitative research offers the researcher a unique perspective on the social and historical contexts of the phenomenon so that greater understanding of the subject under study is achieved (Patton, 1990).

Next, the key themes are developed including issues involving the student-athletes' perceptions of relationships, attitudes, and school climate.

Setting and Demographic Data

This study was conducted at a moderate-sized state university which enrolls approximately 22,000 students, 11.0 percent of whom are minorities. This university is made up of predominantly white students, with the African American student population of 290 being 1.4 percent of the total student population. The university is the state's land-grant institution and has a Carnegie Research I rating.

Each student's perceptions of what it took for him to be academically successful in a predominantly white university setting was gathered through the interview process that lasted sixty to one hundred twenty minutes with each participant. Appendix A shows the list of the interview questions that each participant was given prior to the actual interview. Questions for graduates and non-graduates were the same except for asking non-graduates reasons for leaving the university. The individual responses were audio taped and then later transcribed and coded so that common themes could emerge.

The sample included twelve former male student-athletes who participated in football and basketball and who enrolled during the 1991-1998 school years. Due to limitations of the list of forty-seven potential participants, such as outdated phone numbers and addresses, only twelve former student-athletes participated in this study. Of the forty-seven student-athletes, twenty-three were non-graduates. Of the twelve participants, six had graduated and six had left the university prior to graduation. Each participant had matriculated at the university for at least two years.

Participant Profiles

The twelve African American participants shared their athletic and academic experiences. The participants came from various areas across the country. Table 1 below provides an overview of the participants including age, major, the sport they played, the number of years at the institution, whether they walked-on or received a scholarship, and whether they graduated or left the institution prior to graduation.

As seen in table 1, five participants majored in liberal arts disciplines, three majored in business, two majored in education, one majored in agricultural science, and one majored in sports medicine. In addition, nine out of the twelve participants played football and the other three played basketball. Furthermore, five out of the six non-graduates played football, and four out of the six graduates played football.

The average number of years the graduate participants attended the institution was 4.9, while the average number of years the non-graduates attended the university was 2.4. Five out of the six graduates completed their degrees in five years and the sixth graduate finished in 4.5 years. For the non-graduates, four of the six left the university (within their first three years) of attending and a fifth participant left in 2.5 years. Only one of the non-graduates completed four years before leaving the institution without graduating. Two of the six participants who left the university early ended up completing their degree requirements at other universities.

Of the non-graduates, all six attended the university on athletic scholarships while only three out of the six graduates attended on athletic scholarships. The remaining three were walk-on members of the team and one of those initially attended the university on

an academic scholarship. However, all three of the walk-on participants later received athletic scholarships in their sport.

Table 1. Background Information on Graduates and Non-Graduates

Participant	Age	Major	Sport Played	Years at institution	Walk-on/Scholarship	Graduate?
1	33	Speech Comm.	Football	5	Walk-on	yes
2	24	Liberal Arts	Basketball	5	Scholarship	yes
3	23	Sociology	Football	5	Scholarship	yes
4	28	Education	Basketball	4.5	Walk-on	yes
5	25	Liberal Arts	Football	5	Scholarship	yes
6	24	Animal Science	Football	5	Walk-on	yes
7	24	Business	Basketball	2	Scholarship	no
8	22	Business	Football	4	Scholarship	no
9	26	Education	Football	2.5	Scholarship	no
10	22	Sports Medicine	Football	2	Scholarship	no
11	24	Business	Football	2	Scholarship	no
12	23	Sociology	Football	2	Scholarship	no

Information about each participant's family background and current career is shown in Table 2 below. For both graduates and non-graduates, it depicts their family structure while growing up and their current career.

When asked to describe their family backgrounds, two of the graduates indicated that they came from single parent households in which their mother was the sole

provider. The other four graduates indicated that they had two parents present while growing up. On the other hand, out of the six non-graduates, five stated that they grew up in single parent homes in which the mother was the care provider. Only one non-graduate indicated that he grew up in a two-parent home.

Current careers of the graduate participants are as follows: two are professional athletes, two are in graduate school, one is in the police academy, and one is a high school teacher/coach. Of the non-graduates: one is a construction worker, one is a retail salesman, one has no steady job, and the two who persisted to later graduate from other institutions are teachers/coaches.

Table 2. Family Background and Current Career on Graduates and Non-Graduates

Participant	Family Structure	Graduate?	Current Career
1	single-parent home (mother)	Yes	Academic Advisor (graduate student)
2	single-parent home (mother)	Yes	Pro Basketball Player(Europe)
3	both parents in home	Yes	Police Academy Training
4	both parents in home	Yes	High School Teacher/Coach
5	mother/step-father	Yes	Graduate Student
6	both parents in home	Yes	Pro Football Player (NFL)
7	Single-parent home (mother)	No	Construction Worker
8	two-parent home	No	In-and-out of jobs
9	Single-parent home (mother)	No	High School Teacher/Coach
10	Single-parent home (mother)	No	In-and-out of jobs
11	Single-parent home (mother)	No	Sales
12	Single-parent home (mother)	No	High-School Coach

Participants Personal Profile

The following brief descriptions provide more detail about each participant's family information and current status.

Graduates

Participant One.

Participant one is an African American male, 33 years of age. He is the seventh oldest in a large Catholic family of ten kids. From the age of six, he was raised solely by his mother after his father left the family. He indicated that while he was growing up, his mother heavily stressed the importance of unity, family and education.

This participant earned his degree in speech communications after attending the university for five years. He chose this particular institution because he was "offered a scholarship, liked the community and liked the people who were in charge of certain areas for diversity" when he visited the university.

Presently, he works as an academic advisor for student-athletes at a predominantly white university. He is working on completing the requirements to obtain a master's degree in education.

Participant Two.

Participant two is an African American male, 24 years of age. He is the youngest in a family of four boys. He was raised solely by his mother from the age of seven, when his parents divorced. He described his family as real "close-knit," they have a lot of fun, and help each other out.

This participant earned his degree in liberal arts after attending the university for five years. He was a high school All-American in basketball and said that he chose this particular institution because it was the only school that offered a scholarship to his high school teammate as well as himself.

Presently, he is a professional basketball player overseas. He is a native of Mississippi and he wants to play in the NBA someday soon.

Participant Three.

Participant three is an African American male, 21 years of age. He is a native of California. His parents are still together and he has one brother and one sister with whom he is very close. He describes the kids in his family as being very athletic and strong leaders.

This participant earned his degree in sociology after attending the university for five years. He chose to attend this particular institution because he was offered a scholarship to play football. He also competed in track.

Presently, he is focused on completing police academy training so that he can become a police officer.

Participant Four.

Participant four is an African American male, 28 years of age. He is a native of Houston, Texas. His parents are still together and both of them are college graduates. His father was a high-school basketball, football, and track coach and his mother is a librarian. He has one brother and three sisters, and he indicates that although athletics

were a big focus in his family, a good education was emphasized as being most important.

He earned his degree in education after attending the university for four and a half years. He chose to attend the university because of the strong academic program in his field. He walked-on to the basketball team and eventually received a full basketball scholarship. Presently, he is a high school teacher and athletic coach.

Participant Five.

Participant five is an African American male, 22 years of age. He is a native of California. He and his brother were raised by their mother and step-father and have never met their real father.

This participant earned his degree in liberal arts after attending the university for five years. He chose to attend this particular institution because he felt he fit in with the team, and he could get immediate playing time. He attended the university on a football scholarship and got married while he was still in school.

Presently, he is scheduled to start graduate school in the fall of 1999. This degree will focus on business.

Participant Six.

Participant six is an African American male, 24 years of age. He is a native of San Jose, California. His parents are still together and both have college degrees. His father is a former pro-football player and is currently a high-school

principal, and his mother is a school teacher. He describes his upbringing as being very strict.

This participant earned his degree in animal science after attending the university for five years. He chose this particular school because of its strong agricultural science program, and he attended on an academic scholarship. He walked-on to the football team and also ran track.

Presently, he is a professional football player in the National Football League.

Non-Graduates

Participant Seven.

Participant seven is an African American male, 24 years of age. He is a native of California. He comes from a family of four kids and was raised solely by his mother. He never knew his father.

This participant matriculated at the university for a period of two years. He attended school on a basketball scholarship and majored in business. He has not completed the requirements for a four-year degree as of yet. He indicated that his main reason for leaving the university prematurely was feeling a lack of support from professors and coaches.

Currently, he is working in the construction field.

Participant Eight.

Participant eight is an African American male, 22 years of age. He was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, and later moved to Aurora, Colorado. He has one sister and his parents are still together. They are college graduates and both are school teachers.

Throughout his childhood, his mother strongly emphasized the importance of getting a college education.

This participant matriculated at the university for a period of four years. He chose to attend this institution because he had an overall positive experience on his recruiting trip. He attended school on a football scholarship.

His requirements to complete the four-year degree have yet to be finished. The main reason he left school prior to finishing his degree was that he felt he had too many credits left to complete and not enough motivation to do what he needed to graduate.

Currently, he is a personal trainer and trying to become a professional football player in the Canadian Football League.

Participant Nine.

Participant nine is an African American male, 26 years of age. He was born and raised in New Jersey. He and his brother were raised solely by their mother. The main reason he attended this particular institution was because he was offered a scholarship, and he also indicated that he liked the “country-type atmosphere.”

This participant matriculated at the university for a period of two and a half years. After leaving the university prior to graduation, he enrolled in another school and obtained his degree in education. His main reason for leaving the institution was that he wanted to attend a university with more diversity.

Currently he is teaching and coaching high school in New Jersey.

Participant Ten.

Participant ten is an African American male, 22 years of age. He is a native of Arizona. He and his brothers and sisters were raised solely by their mother. He indicated that his childhood was very impoverished, and he grew up in a high-crime area.

This participant matriculated at the university for a period of two years and majored in sports medicine. He chose to attend this particular institution because he was offered a football scholarship. He left the university prior to graduation and has yet to complete the requirements for the undergraduate degree. The main reason he left school was because he felt the university didn't have his best interests at heart.

Currently, he is working in and out of jobs to help support his family. He would like to enroll in a college in the near future so that he can get his degree.

Participant Eleven.

Participant eleven is an African American male, 24 years of age. He was born and raised in Colorado, and he and his brother and sister were raised by their mother; they never knew their father. He indicated that his childhood was a struggle, because his family didn't have much money or material wealth.

This participant matriculated at the university for a period of two years and majored in business. He attended this particular institution because he was offered a full scholarship to play football and the university was close to home. He has yet to complete his undergraduate requirements. The main reason he left prior to graduation was because he felt the environment "was a cold place, in which he didn't matter to many people." He

also felt the coaches did not care enough about his well being personally and academically.

Currently, participant eleven is working in sales for a large retailer.

Participant Twelve.

Participant twelve is an African American male, 23 years of age. He is from Colorado. He and his younger brother were raised by their mother; he never knew his father. He described his childhood as normal.

This participant matriculated at the university for a period of three years. He chose this particular institution because it was the only place that he was offered a full scholarship. He played football for the university for three years before he transferred to another institution to complete his degree requirements. The main reason he left the university was because he felt there was very little diversity on campus and not enough university support. Currently, he is teaching and coaching at the high school level.

Summary of Demographic Data and Student Profiles

A few key differences between graduates and non-graduates emerge out of the participant profiles and the demographic data. First, the only three walk-on student-athletes who participated in the study graduated. Obviously, they came to the institution for academic reasons first, and they only played athletics as a secondary goal. Interestingly, all six of the non-graduates attended the university via athletic scholarship. Second, the majority (4 of 6) of graduates were in liberal arts fields, while half of the non-graduates were in business. Finally, there was a difference in the area of family

background between graduate and non-graduates. The predominant family structure of non-graduates was a single-parent household (five of the six participants) while the graduates predominantly came from a two-parent household (four of the six participants). The participants' descriptions of their family life suggest a much stronger family relationship among graduates with a greater focus on education, even for those graduates from single-parent homes.

Major Themes

In the following pages, the three major themes concerning African American student-athletes at a predominantly white university in terms of their academic success are discussed. These themes include “Relationships are Key,” “Attitude Determines Altitude in College Academics,” and “Negotiating the Climate.” For each theme, a definition is provided with the major components of the theme. In addition, similarities and differences between graduates and non-graduates are discussed.

Theme I: Relationships are key.

For both graduates and non-graduates in this study, relationships were seen as being paramount to the student-athlete’s academic success. The term ‘relationships’ as used here refers to the fact that the nature of interpersonal relationships with coaches, teachers and parents played an important role in their performance at the university.

The participant responses were clear in portraying this sense that ‘relationships,’ including having black role models and support from coaches and professors on a predominantly white campus, are very important factors when considering academic success. Participant ten, a non-graduate, portrayed his personal difficulty at not having this sort of helpful relationship by saying, “Being an African American on a predominantly white campus I didn’t really have anybody that I could relate to...nobody that I could really go and talk to like a role model that I could just sit down with and share the experiences that I’ve had... and that’s a big factor that plays into it (being academically successful).” Similarly, participant nine, also a non-graduate, expressed a strong need for having black role models by saying, “As a black person on a campus

that's predominantly white, there are some things you just can't relate to with other cultures. so you really need the kind of relationships and support that can be given by people within your own culture." Participant six, a graduate underscored the idea of having role models who can assist minority student-athletes on a predominantly white campus. He said, "Being a minority on a predominantly white campus is kind of like a culture shock and being around a different environment just wasn't comfortable...for one thing, at a school like the one I went to, the coaches and staff didn't really look to help black athletes out and I don't think they even knew how to."

Overall, the student-athletes in this study indicated that relationships with coaches, teachers, and parents played an important role in their performance at the university. Specifically, coaches were viewed as being instrumental to the student-athlete's success. When the relationships with the coaches were positive, the student-athlete found the environment to be supportive and more conducive to balancing the academic/athletic roles. In addition, relationships with teachers also played a vital role in the student-athletes' perception of the campus environment. For example, negative experiences in the relationships with teachers caused the student-athlete to feel unwelcome. The student-athletes in this study indicated that some teachers singled them out or, at the very least, expected less of them just because they were student-athletes. Also, the participants held the perception that campus academic/support services were lacking. This lack of support systems had a negative effect on the student-athletes academically. In fact, this perception that the university failed to assist the student-athletes in developing relationships with any available support systems led three of them to leave the university prior to graduation.

Finally, the theme “Relationships are Key” suggests that the relationship a student-athlete has with his parents plays a critical role in his academic success. In particular, the participants in this study were most successful academically when their background included an established parent-child relationship in which academics was emphasized from childhood.

Sub-Theme I: The lack of positive direction and support provided in the athlete-coach relationship is a detriment to the student-athlete’s academic success.

If prior to entering the university the student-athlete has high expectations about the nature of his relationship with his coach, then he easily can be disappointed when those expectations are not fulfilled. The non-graduates participating in the study strongly indicated that their weak relationships with coaches played a role in their decision to leave school. For example, participant nine, a non-graduate, indicated that a main reason why he left the university is that he felt the coaches didn’t really care. He said, “...When a coach recruits you, he comes to your home and tells you all these things, and tells things to your mom: ‘Oh yes, we have tutors with the basketball team and they’re going to help him out, and we have good relationships with the professors’. Then once I got there – there was none of that...From my experience I think they are more focused on you bringing in big dollars for the university. As long as you do well in your particular sport, that’s all that matters to them.”

Similarly, participant ten, another non-graduate, expressed this same sense of being ‘let down’ by his coach. He reported, “You come in and are taking just general

studies courses and your major is general studies – you know something is wrong because you haven't been advised. You know, coaches who have the best interests of the athlete at heart would see to it at some point you would have an academic career. If you've been at the university for three years and your major is general studies that doesn't seem like the coach has a genuine concern."

This attitude of the non-graduates in terms of their negative perceptions of relationships with coaches underscores their belief that had they felt more support and guidance they might have persisted to graduation. But even though several graduates had supportive relationships with coaches, several others expressed the idea that poor relationships with coaches, especially feeling a lack of support and caring, was something they had to deal with. This perception was so strong, in fact, that several graduates considered dropping out.

Participant one indicated that although he graduated, at one point he did seriously consider leaving the university prior to graduation. He said, "I didn't have any role models to look at, there were no black coaches when I played here, and the only male role models I had were outside of the university setting. So I felt like I didn't have anybody that I could turn to and talk about what my problems were and talk about how I felt."

Likewise, participant two, another graduate, indicated that the number one reason why he almost left the university before he graduated was because of conflict with his coach. This participant indicated that he believed his coach treated him unfairly because the coach was racist. He said, "The coach was my whole problem...In Mississippi, where I'm from, there's racism but the one thing you can appreciate about the south is there's

overt racism...you would know if someone didn't like you, opposed to here they call you racist stuff behind your back."

Overall, it is clear that the student-athletes looked to their coaches to provide them with the moral support and guidance to help them be successful both on the field and in the classroom. If this type of relationship with their coach did not materialize, the student-athletes felt disappointed and frustrated, some to the point that they chose to leave the university.

Sub-theme II: Unsupportive relationships with teachers cause some student-athletes to feel unwelcome.

Participants in this study expressed the feeling that teachers don't care about athletes. For the most part teachers were described as being indifferent to any of the special needs that a student-athlete may have and unsupportive when approached for help. In fact, some faculty were described as being demeaning to the student-athletes. This sense was real for both graduates and non-graduates.

Concerning this sense of a lack of support from teachers, participant two, a graduate, stated that "A lot of them (teachers) just assume that because you are an athlete that it is automatic that you won't be a good student." The athletes indicated that faculty who just come to class and lecture and show no interest in interacting with the students are perceived as uncaring and unsupportive. Participant seven said, "As I think back on it, when I would go to my professors for help, I felt uncomfortable because they put me in the realm of "Oh he is an athlete, a dumb jock" and when I was asking for help I was

going there sincerely and they just thought I was doing it to keep my scholarship... I just got the feeling from them that they didn't want me there, so I didn't go back."

For participant eight, a non-graduate, there was this same sense of feeling unwelcome. He viewed most professors as treating student-athletes as just another number. He said, "There were a couple of professors that I did have to go talk to, but for the most part I didn't really feel comfortable with talking to most of them because they seemed as though I really didn't matter... I was just a number to them." Similarly, participant twelve, a non-graduate, said, "Some professors automatically assume that athletes are not as smart as regular students and therefore they do not get the benefit of the doubt when it comes to grades... This makes it a lot harder for student-athletes."

Only one participant in the study indicated a positive relationship with a professor. This non-graduate said, "There was one professor who had a direct impact on me academically because he took an interest in me. We became personal friends and he would talk with me about the future and what my plans were... Eventually he left the university to work somewhere else."

Overall, both graduates and non-graduates in this study indicated that poor relationships with teachers had an effect on them as student-athletes. These negative relationships with teachers caused the student-athletes to feel unwelcome at the university. The graduating student-athletes seemed to be able to put this in the back of their minds so that it did not block their ability to persist. Sadly, only one participant in the study indicated that he had a positive relationship with a professor.

For the most part, these students indicated a desire to be able to approach their teachers and feel comfortable that they would not be stereotyped or looked down upon

due to their status as African American athletes. Whether real or imagined, most graduates and non-graduates had the feeling that faculty at the university were not welcoming to student-athletes. Further, most felt that faculty have a perception that student-athletes are not as smart as the general population and that the athletes were trying to get over by not doing their school work.

Sub-theme III: A perceived lack of university support systems leave the student-athlete without an effective way to find and develop relationships with peer groups and academic services that would be key in helping him succeed academically.

The perception of being without any strong support systems both within the classroom setting and on the campus was a factor that had a negative impact on the experiences of the participants. For several of the student-athletes it influenced their decision to leave the university.

Both graduates and non-graduates reported either perceiving a lack of support systems for African American student-athletes or difficulty finding those resources or services that could best help them. In general, there was an expressed disappointment about the lack of diversity on campus. Participants stressed the ability to interact with others racially like them as being extremely important for success. For example, participant one, a graduate, stated that “academic services needs to make itself available to the student-athlete’s needs, whether it be culturally, emotionally, or academically, all those things are a component of that student-athlete’s success.” This perception, shared by both graduates and non-graduates, clearly indicated the belief that those elements were

not present. Similarly, participant four, another graduate, highlighted his feelings about the importance of peer support by saying “I think to be academically successful it takes peer groups. you would have to have people who were around you who knew of your culture and could relate to your culture and could relate to your past experiences and motivate you in the manner that you would need to be motivated. But more deeply, I think you would need people who have that desire to see you truly succeed and not have a desire just to have you out on the field playing for economic gains for the institution.”

Several non-graduates expressed similar ideas about peer support. Participant eight said, “I believe success is found in your social foundation...There are a lot of people out there that are going to be hating you just because you’re an athlete and you stick out of the crowd. Being an African American on campus, people know that you’re an athlete, so you stick out a lot more. Because of that you really need to have a tight relationship with your true friends.”

Overall the participants believed their performance at the university could have been aided had they been provided with access to a forum that served their needs as a racial and cultural minority on a predominantly white campus. They already felt at a disadvantage being a minority on campus and the lack of supportive relationships only served to further those feelings. Of the few perceived supportive systems and interactions identified by the graduates and non-graduates, those were consistently described as being helpful, even critical, to their personal and academic success. For example, participant one explained the one positive instance in which he received support, “They were more than helpful, they wanted me to be successful. They came up with solutions of how I could get from here to point B and be successful.”

In addition, the participants emphasized the importance of and need for interpersonal relationships. The student-athletes in this study overwhelmingly agreed that it is very difficult for African American student-athletes at this university to find support systems that would help them academically. They simply wanted to feel some university support and guidance to help lessen the challenges they faced. Simply put, it seemed that they wanted to know someone cared.

Sub-theme IV: Student-athletes were most successful when their background included an established parent-child relationship in which academics was heavily emphasized from childhood.

Academic success for the African American student-athlete was boosted when there was a strong family emphasis on performing well academically. In instances where this background condition did not exist, the student-athlete had a difficult time trying to formulate an attitude of academic importance. For the most part, the graduate participants were able to describe growing up with strong emphasis and direction for doing well academically. For example, participant four, a graduate, stated, "I basically grew up in a family where we were exposed to athletics at a very young age, but we knew that athletics was not the primary concern or the primary focus...we knew that education was the thing that you would really have to rely on." Participant five, another graduate, also expressed his childhood influence on academics, "Even though I didn't know my father, I always had a father figure around (step-father). So I had a good life and was

usually playing sports or studying. They (my parents) kept me in check. My mom wouldn't let me go out without doing my homework first every day."

For two of the participants, the idea of parental support mixed in with being the first in their family to graduate from college was a big motivator. Participant one, a graduate, had this to say about his upbringing. "My mom was a dictator but very loving, very concerned about what her boys and girls were doing. I think she was extra hard on the boys, simply because we didn't have that male role model around to take the pressure off. So she really put the hammer down as far as getting an education." This same participant shared that a big motivator for him to graduate was that he would be the first in his family to do so. He stated, "Knowing that I'd be the first one in my family to graduate from college, that really kept me at school I think. That's a big step, to be the first in your family to graduate from college. That's huge." Similarly, participant three (a graduate) also expressed the idea of being first in the family as a motivator. He said, "My family pushed me to be very good. My parents pushed me to stay here and finish off, and with me being the first person in our family to go through college, that really made them happy and I wanted to make them happy and know that I can do it."

The non-graduates did not express the same emphasis or academic direction coming from the home. Although they loved and admired their mothers, they indicated some different experiences from the graduates. For example, participant nine stated, "I would say my childhood was somewhat difficult. Looking at my mother trying to support the two of us just by herself...made it difficult and it made us grow up faster and so we didn't have a long childhood period." Likewise, participant ten said, "We never had much money so I was basically kind of using my athletic skills to try to make things better for

myself. Participant seven indicated, "My mom... she did a lot for us, as much as to be expected from her, but because we did not have that male figure in the home, we were not geared the right way from the male perspective."

Even though academics were cited as important by all of the participants in the study, there was a clear difference between the graduates and non-graduates in reference to their academic foundation. In instances where the student-athletes grew up with strong and consistent references to the importance of academics, mostly graduates, they entered school with a clear value for education. In contrast, those participants who did not have that foundation, most commonly the non-graduates, entered school without that support and an unclear outlook on their academic goals.

Summary

The theme "Relationships are Key" referred to the fact that both positive and negative relationships impacted the academic performance of the student-athletes. In particular, there was a strong indication that the nature of interpersonal relationships with coaches, teachers, the university and parents played an important role in academic performance.

The relationship between a student-athlete and a coach was seen as being paramount. Very clearly, the participants in this study indicated that they looked to their coaches to provide them with moral support and guidance to help them to be successful on and off the field. In many cases, the relationships with coaches were a major disappointment and this caused the student-athlete to feel disappointed and frustrated.

Some student-athletes even left the university if the relationship with the coach became negative or did not live-up to their expectations.

Relationships with teachers were also seen as having a direct impact on the student-athletes. In particular, there was an overwhelming feeling among the participants that most faculty at the university are not welcoming, and they have a perception that student-athletes are not as smart as the general student population. This feeling, whether real or imagined, caused the student-athletes to feel uncomfortable in the classroom.

According to many of the participants in this study, university support systems for student-athletes were virtually non-existent. Overall, this had a negative impact on the experiences of the student-athletes. The participants believed that their performance at the university could have been aided had they been provided with access to a forum that served their needs as a racial and cultural minority on a predominantly white campus.

Finally, a student-athlete's academic foundation at home was seen as being very important for academic success. In instances where a student-athlete grew up with strong and consistent references to the importance of academics, he entered school with a clear value for education. A major finding in this study was that five out of the six graduates indicated that they had a strong push from home to graduate. For the non-graduates, the push from home to graduate was not heavily emphasized. Thus, they entered school with less academic support and an unclear outlook on their academic goals.

Theme II: Attitude Determines Altitude in College Academics

The attitude of the coach as well as the student-athlete was important for academic success. The sense of Attitude Determines Altitude in College Academics' refers to the notion that what coaches expect from student-athletes determines how high the student-athlete will go academically. Additionally, for student-athletes, the term "Attitude Determines Altitude in College Academics" represents the idea that their personal attitude toward academics and the idea of becoming a professional athlete plays a vital role in how high they will go and perform academically. There were three components of this theme.

First, the graduates and non-graduates in this study indicated that the overwhelming attitude of most coaches is to "Just Stay Eligible." This attitude from the coaches that academics is not an important issue beyond remaining eligible to participate in athletics had a direct impact on the student-athletes academic performance.

Second, for ten out of the twelve participants in this study, the idea of becoming a professional athlete was very real. In fact, for many of the participants there was little doubt that this would happen. This attitude of "I'm Going Pro" was significant because it caused the student-athletes to focus more on athletics instead of academics.

Finally, the idea of "Academics Count" refers to the belief of both the graduates and non-graduates that making good grades and obtaining a degree are key components that translate into academic success. This sense of 'Academics Count' described the importance of academics in the lives of the student-athletes even if they failed in their attempt to graduate from the university.

Sub-theme I: Just Stay Eligible

“Just Stay Eligible” refers to a consensus among the participants, both graduates and non-graduates, that there was a predominant attitude coming from coaches that academics, or ensuring that athletes’ graduate, is not an important issue beyond remaining eligible to participate in athletics. The participants in this study indicated that there are many demands placed on them as student-athletes that are not placed on the regular matriculating students at the university. In most cases, the major demands deal with athletic performance and not academic performance. In almost a unanimous voice, the participants insisted that the athletic program’s main goal for its student-athletes is for them to remain academically eligible. For the graduates, although they were able to overcome any attitudes that may have deterred them from receiving their degree, many of them expressed the perception that the athletic department did not hold them to a normal standard of academic performance. As one participant said it, “the expectations for athletic performance are very high as the goal is to win ball games and not necessarily to graduate all student-athletes.” In regards to athletic performance, participant one, also a graduate, stated that “if you don’t make improvements in the areas physically where the staff wants, then they’re going to put somebody else there that has, and some kids don’t understand the rules out there. It’s hard work and there are a lot of responsibilities to answer to, and they have a lot of expectations that people want you to follow through on.”

In a similar fashion, non-graduates reported having the same perceptions. For example, participant eight reported, “The coaches tell you that you really don’t need to go out there and make that “A,” they’ll be happy with a “C.” And that’s all they care about,

you know, they really want you to stay eligible, you know, major in eligibility, and that's all that really matters to them, that's their job." Similarly participant ten stated, "...Everybody was just worried about what I was doing on the field instead of in the classroom...once the season is over it's like a totally different atmosphere towards me, and I'm not the center of attention anymore. It's just like 'forget about him,' like when I'm dealing with my academic experiences, it seems like nobody cares in the off-season."

The responses of both graduates and non-graduates indicated that although they were provided with the tools to help them with academics, such as advisors and tutors, there was no real push for them to give any more attention to their academic career than to simply maintain their grades enough so that they remain eligible to play sports. (Giving them adequate time for film viewing and weight room training). Therefore, some of the non-graduates were impacted in the sense that by the time they realized their athletic career would not carry beyond college, it was probably too late to improve academically to receive the degree.

Overall, the athletes expressed being singled out by well-meaning teachers, parents, coaches and the media as worthy of lots of attention as athletes. In turn both graduates and non-graduates performed and tried to do their best to please those who promoted them. In other words, the athletes become dependent on the approval of other people to validate their athletic achievement and strengthen their motivation. But the participants in this study clearly indicated that while this sense was powerful in terms of their sport, it was not so regarding academics. For both graduates and non-graduates, the driving force academically was to "Just Stay Eligible," not to excel as was so prominently stressed regarding athletic performance.

Sub-theme II: I'm Going Pro

"I'm Going Pro" refers to the idea of the participants that they would become professional athletes after their college careers ended. Of the twelve participants in the study, ten admitted that when they entered the university, they believed that they would continue on to become a professional athlete. All six of the non-graduates indicated that they believed they would become pro athletes. For example, participant seven explained, "When I came out of high school I just knew I was going to be in the pros. there was no doubt." And participant eight said, "I truly believed that I was going to make it to the NFL. And once I got here people on campus really looked up to me and other African American athletes on the football team because we really did stand out. I felt like we got a lot of special privileges and stuff because people recognized our faces, so I sort of got that taste for being a superstar and I really, truly believed that I could go pro." Similarly participant nine indicated the same belief, "At some point as you develop, you think 'well yes, I could play on another level,' that was my aspiration when I came here, that I could play at the professional level and I wanted to play at the professional level."

For the six graduates, four admitted that upon entering the university they had aspirations of eventually becoming a professional athlete. A fifth indicated that he developed those aspirations once he entered school. As participant one explained, "Yes, without a doubt (I thought I had a chance to become a professional athlete). And you have to believe that about yourself or you can't compete. Eventually you'll lose your desire or lust for the sport. I also believe that you will be discouraged by what goes on in collegiate athletics." Participant three also stated, "Yes I did (think I'd be a pro athlete), I

thought I had a very good chance, coming out of high school and being very successful...I thought I could, I thought I had a very good chance of going professional.”

Interestingly, though five of the six graduates held aspirations of becoming a professional athlete, they also indicated that a significant event impacted this outlook and altered this pervasive dream. For example, two of the graduates described having a “wake-up call” of sorts that made them realize the importance of academics. As graduate three explained, “I thought I was going to play professional sports from day one when I got up here. It wasn’t until the end of my freshman year when I tore my ACL that I had a huge reality check showing me that school is more important and athletics is not so important.” Similarly, participant one had a career threatening event that impacted his perception of turning pro. He explained, “I got extremely sick with my disease and I missed the rest of the football season and I missed the following year...After that full year I realized that it wasn’t all about football, there were other things that were more important in my life and getting my degree was one of them.”

Participant two also described an event as well which refocused him on academics. As he put it, “Everything was fine as a freshman, fine as a sophomore, then I got into the doghouse with the coach...and he decided that I just won’t play because he didn’t like me. I got caught up in that type of situation after my sophomore year and at that point I was thinking about transferring. But then I thought my education was more important to me at the time since I had already established two years here, so I continued to stay on.”

Overall, the responses from the participants indicated that they overwhelmingly thought that they would one day become professional athletes after completing their

college careers. For the graduates in this study, there was evidence that a major event served as a “wake-up” call which was key in changing their focus. For these students, they took this event to reprioritize some energy from athletics to academics aiding them in persisting to get their degree. None of the non-graduates reported the same occurrence of a “wake-up call.” Thus, it can be said that the idea of “I’m Going Pro” has a direct impact on student-athletes’ academic success, as those who held on to this dream didn’t focus as strongly on academics and graduating. (See table 2 for current careers of all participants. Only two became professional athletes, one in the National Football League, and the other in a European Basketball League).

Sub-theme III: Academics Count

“Academics Count” refers to the predominant belief of the participants in the study, whether they had completed their degree or not, that making good grades and obtaining a degree are key components that translate into academic success. Although being a successful athlete was a primary concern for all the participants, for many of them academics was very meaningful as well. Despite being at the university due to their athletic prowess, several of the participants appreciated and respected the need for strong academic support. This was even true for those participants who admittedly fell short of being what they consider academically successful.

This sense of “Academics Count” was shared by both graduates and non-graduates. As mentioned previously, both graduates and non-graduates overwhelmingly placed the most importance on graduating and making good grades. Clearly, academic

success was important to these student-athletes. They saw success as obtaining a degree even if they had not graduated themselves and made good grades.

When considering academic success, several participants expressed the idea that making good grades and passing classes were important issues. Among the graduates, participant two conveyed the mindset of graduating by saying, “I would define academic success as going there with a goal in mind and getting that degree.” Similarly, participant one stated, “In exchange for your athletic services, like a barter system, you can play sports, they can pay for your education, so the rules are, you play for me and at the end of your time of playing for me, after five years, I will give you a piece of paper which says you can go out into the world and command a higher salary because that’s what you will receive.”

For participant four, making good grades was important. He defined academic success as, “being able to maintain honor roll status – 3.0 average or above.” In the same fashion, participant seven explained, “being good in the classroom and making passing grades so that you can move to the next step.” Participant eight provided another perspective by saying that academic success is “being able to maintain your way through college and excel as you go through your classes and basically just to pass all your classes... As long as I am passing all of my classes, you know, I figure I’m excelling.”

Although the attitude of “Academics Count” was shared by both graduates and non-graduates, just knowing that grades are important and acting to make good grades or graduate were clearly two different things. The graduates either had a positive attitude about academics upon entering the university or developed an attitude to persist while they were in school. For example, participant one explained that from the beginning he

considered academics to be of paramount importance. He said, "Getting my degree was the purpose for me going to college...the bottom line is graduate, get a degree, get that piece of paper. Whether you get a 2.0 or a 4.0, get a degree." Additionally, he indicated, "You have to take responsibility yourself... Young people have to take responsibility, to remember that the student part is first, and my role here was to get a degree." Likewise participant two stated, "It's up to the individual to make sure you've got all the studies put together in tact, because the teachers, the professors, they don't care and because of this attitude, not all student-athletes will make good grades academically."

The non-graduates did not indicate having the same insight into the necessity to persist in spite of being on their own. The intrinsic knowledge that one must persist in spite of the obstacles played a key role for those participants who graduated. The graduates demonstrated a determination to not give up even though life as a student-athlete was hard and true academic help was difficult to find.

Overall, the idea of "Academics Count" was important to both the graduates and the non-graduates in this study. In retrospect, all of the participants would have changed something about their academic careers at the university. The difference that was identified in this study was that the graduates either entered the university already having a strong academic ethic, or while in school they developed an attitude to persist. This attitude allowed the student-athletes to be more successful and finish their degrees. For the non-graduates, the attitude to persist academically was either never realized or once it was recognized, it was seen as being too late to do something about it.

Summary

The theme “Attitude Determines Altitude in Academics” referred to the fact that the attitudes of coaches and the student-athletes’ themselves had a direct impact on how well they performed academically. If the student-athlete had a positive attitude in regards to academics, then he performed well and was most likely to persist to graduate. If the coach had low academic expectations of the student-athletes, then they had a tendency not to perform as well.

These ideas were substantiated in three ways. First, the participants in this study alluded to the fact that the overwhelming attitude of coaches in reference to academics is for the student-athletes to “Just Stay Eligible.” Whether real or imagined, this perceived notion that the coaches only cared about the student-athletes being able to perform athletically caused them to devalue academics.

Second, the student-athletes’ belief of “I’m Going Pro” had a direct impact on them academically as well. Ten out of the twelve participants in this study indicated that when they entered the university they thought that someday they would become professional athletes. This notion of “I’m Going Pro” caused the student-athletes to focus more on athletics rather than academics. Even though five of the six graduates in this study indicated that they held aspirations of becoming professional athletes, there were significant events which caused them to refocus their attention on academics. For the non-graduates in this study, the refocusing on academics due to a significant event never happened.

Finally, the sub-theme “Academics Count” referred to the predominant belief of the participants in the study that making good grades and graduating is what translates

into academic success. Both the graduates and non-graduates stressed the importance of academics to student-athletes. Clearly, academics was important to all of the participants even if they did not do well in school while they were students. The major difference between the graduates and non-graduates was that the graduates either had a positive attitude about academics upon entering the university or they developed an attitude to persist academically while they were in school. This attitude was a force that caused the student-athletes to persist to graduate.

Theme III: Fight or Flight

For many of the participants in this study a key issue that emerged in regard to academic success was school climate. Many of the participants in the study found it very difficult to do well academically due to a lack of diversity, teachers having low expectations of student-athletes, and not learning how to negotiate the climate. "Fight or Flight" refers to the fact that the participants either fought against these difficulties or they left the institution all together.

The graduates and non-graduates in this study described large classes with large numbers of students in them with little or no diversity. This seemed to cause feelings of discomfort and intimidation for the student-athletes. It made them feel as though they were "Just a Number" on the campus and thus they were forced to either deal with it or leave.

Many of the participants in this study alluded to the fact that some professors at the university saw them as being 'different,' and they had low expectations of African American student-athletes. This made it very difficult for the student-athletes to develop strong relationships with the professors so the student-athletes either had to find other outlets or they struggled.

Finally, for some the participants in this study they either learned how to negotiate the climate or they left the university. "Negotiating the Climate" refers to the attitude of some of the participants that they had to learn how to work within the confines of the environment so that they could get what they wanted. They learned to cope. It was clear that the student-athletes wanted to do well academically. But, whether doing well meant

graduating or making good grades didn't matter because the student-athletes still had to learn how to work through the environment.

Sub-theme I: Just a Number.

Many of the participants in the study described large classes with little or no diversity in them. "Just a number" refers to the overall feeling of both graduates and non-graduates that they were isolated, and they experienced difficulty in trying to fit in and feel comfortable in some of their classes. The feeling of being "Just a Number" also refers to the prevailing attitude of the participants that there was a lack of diversity which caused the student-athletes to have feelings of discomfort and intimidation.

The participants reported having negative perceptions and experiences of trying to fit into a classroom setting on a predominantly white campus. For example, participant three said, "To go into a class is pretty discouraging if you are the only African American in that class and the rest of the students are white."

Participant two, a graduate, expressed his idea of being "Just a Number" by saying, "You're just a number. Most of my classes had 200-300 people and I was probably the only black in the classroom." This clearly caused a feeling of isolation for this student-athlete.

Similarly participant six explained, "Being in ag science, there's not a lot of minorities period. So, as soon as I got in there I wasn't comfortable meeting people and getting their number to study with them." This attitude of not feeling comfortable with meeting new people who were obviously different hurt this particular student-athlete because initially his grades were very low. Thus, for many of the student-athletes it was

an issue of not just being different but also being difficult to fit in and feel comfortable associating with the majority students.

Participant eight highlighted this sense of isolation. Coming from a predominantly minority high school, the university was a tremendous shock. He described his feeling of just being a number by saying, "When I went to class for the first time, I was just in shock...I was like, where are all of the black students...I had been spoiled because I had been around the other black athletes before the first day of class and I just thought that this school had many more blacks than what it had...I felt very homesick and I felt as though I just didn't belong here because in high school there were lots of blacks in the school you know."

Overall, both graduates and non-graduates indicated that at times they felt as though they were "Just a Number." Most of these student-athletes described large classes that had little or no diversity in them. This caused feelings of discomfort and intimidation. The big difference between graduates and non-graduates was that the graduates found a way to overcome this lack of diversity and this feeling of being just a number by focusing more on their goal of graduating. For them, there were significant events which forced a refocusing on their educational goals. The non-graduates never focused on academics the same way and they chose to leave the institution. However, two of the non-graduates left the university so that they could attend other universities that were more diverse.

Sub-theme II: Look at Me, I'm Different.

"Look at Me, I'm Different" refers to the participant responses which indicated that professors held perceptions that African American student-athletes were different from most students on campus. The students believed that faculty viewed them as inadequate academically.

Participant seven, a non-graduate explained, "Whether they mean to or not, they're (professors) going to look at you differently. And when they look at you differently, it puts you in an awkward position so you don't want to go asking for help because it makes you feel uncomfortable. That's how I felt when I did it." Participant ten suggested that professors view student-athletes in this way. He said, "Professors think that because you are an athlete that you are trying to get over by not doing your school-work." and "Most teachers believe that student-athletes are not as smart as other students." Similarly, participant two stated, "Some professors automatically assume that athletes are not as smart as regular students and therefore, they do not get the benefit of the doubt when it comes to grades. That makes it a lot harder for student-athletes." Participant one admitted that he had a fear of asking teachers for help, "I was afraid because I felt like they were going to look at me in a negative light."

Participant six cited an example of how he had a professor look at or treat him differently. Participant six reported, "one teacher accused me of cheating on a writing assignment by putting on my paper that I should do my own work, when in fact, I had already done so."

Overall, both graduates and non-graduates felt as though they were treated differently because they were African American student-athletes. It was clear that the

“Look at Me, I’m Different” attitude of the participants had an impact on the student-athletes academically. It caused the student-athletes to feel isolated in the classroom and feel hesitant or even fearful of asking for help. Without an outlet or source to receive much needed academic help, the clear result was that many suffered academically.

Sub-theme III: Negotiating the Climate.

“Negotiating the Climate” refers to the participants’ sense that they had to learn how to find their way through the academic environment. This was clearly important for the graduates in the study. Three of the graduate participants in this study alluded to this idea of negotiating the climate. For the non-graduates, there was no mention of a student-athlete having to negotiate his way through the academic climate.

For participants one, four, and five, “Negotiating the Climate” was one of the ways that they were able to persist to graduate. In particular, these participants talked about the importance of finding ways to be academically successful. While the ways to negotiate did not come easily, eventually, through persistence, a no lose attitude and working through the politics of success, they were able to negotiate and find the answers that would help them to achieve academic success.

Participant four identified his idea of “Negotiating the Climate” focusing on tenacity and persistence. He emphasized this by saying, “The student-athlete must meet with professors and coaches on a regular basis if they want to graduate...It took me a couple of years before I realized this but once I found out the secret to success, I was relentless. The unfortunate part of this is that I would have graduated a lot sooner if I had

found this out...The student-athlete cannot afford to wait for the professor or the coach to come to him to see what he needs because it just will not happen.”

Participant one focused on his “no lose” attitude related to negotiating the climate. He put it this way, “There’s going to be racism, there’s going to be injustice, and there’s going to be things that you don’t understand, but instead of taking that and saying ‘this is a personal attack on me,’ look at the long-term effects of ‘How is this going to make me a better person.’ ...Don’t spend your time trying to fight all the little battles because you’ll never win...Be knowledgeable of what it takes for you to get your degree.”

Finally, for participant five, the key was learning the politics and striving on. He pointed this out by saying, “A student-athlete has to realize that everything in college is political...The coach’s job is on the line and the professor only has a certain number of ‘A’s’ to give...It is not about who’s the best, it’s about who can give the best performance on any given day. If you can perform on the field for the coach, then he will in turn help you...This holds true for the professor as well...If you can perform on the test, then you will be rewarded with a good grade. The major difference between the coach and the professor is that for the professor you can negotiate what good performance means.”

Overall, there was a general feeling among participants one, four, and five that student-athletes must learn how to “Negotiate the Climate” if they want to be academically successful. This negotiating skill was learned only through the direct experiences as a student. A key was the persistence to learn the culture and cope as was necessary to succeed.

Summary

The theme “Fight or Flight” refers to the idea that African American student-athletes on this predominantly white campus are constantly faced with challenges. The first challenge was that the student-athlete attended large classes where there was little or no diversity. Thus the feeling of being “Just a Number” overwhelmed them as they felt no connection to the university that lent to their sense of belonging. A second challenge for the African American student-athletes was that many of the professors at the university saw them as being different. This faculty attitude caused many of the students to feel isolated and discouraged about continuing at the university. A final challenge for African American student-athletes was to learn how to “Negotiate through the Climate.” This meant that the student-athletes had to have a sense of how the academic and athletic system worked at this school. Persistence, a hard working attitude, and learning to wade through the politics of the academics were key. If the student-athletes developed this sense of the climate, then they were able to persist. The non-graduates never figured out how to “Negotiate the Climate” during their tenure at the university.

Other Significant Issues

Three key issues emerged in direct response to interview questions that are beyond the three themes that characterized the data. These include major events that had a direct impact on the student-athletes academically, suggestions for incoming freshmen, and reasons for leaving the university. Each of these key issues will be discussed and developed separately.

Major Events

The participants in this study were asked if there were any major events in their lives that had a direct impact on them either academically or athletically. For most of the graduates and non-graduates, there were key events that had a direct impact on their academic and athletic careers. These events included: having a genetic disease, getting married, athletic injuries, fighting, a lack of playing time, death in the family and having an argument with the coach. A significant differentiator was the nature of the major events that had an impact on the participants while they were in school.

For five of the six graduates in this study, the major events that had a direct impact on them were all significant and life changing. Either they threatened their athletic career (genetic disease or significant injury) or they were more personal in nature (getting married). In either case, the events had a positive impact on them academically. One participant said that his genetic disease forced him to have a new outlook on the importance of athletics and academics. When his disease got really bad, he had to have surgery and thus he missed the remainder of the football season and the subsequent football season as well. Although this was tough, this participant said that it made him place more value on his education. He alluded to this by saying “After that full year I realized that it wasn’t all about football, there were other things that were more important in my life and getting my degree was one of them.”

As with the genetic disease, injuries altered several student-athletes’ lives. For participants three and six, both graduates, athletic injuries had a major impact on them while they were in school, and it caused them to focus more on academics. Participant three stated, “ I think the major event in my life that made me realize that school was

more important than athletics was when I tore my ACL, and I saw that I had the chance of never playing again. I struggled dealing with this injury for a while and then it just came to me that I was here to learn and that school was more important and that school would carry me a lot further than sports.” This participant also said “Every since the injury, I pulled up a lot of grades where I just figured, hey, I could get by in this class just to play, eligibility wise, and then it was- I love going to class and I will do well in all of my classes, so I think that knowledge is more important than athletics.”

For participant six, another graduate, an athletic injury was also a major event that had an impact on him academically and athletically. Even though this participant injured his rotator cuff, he still played the entire season with the injury and earned all conference honors. It wasn't until after the season that he had surgery to fix the problem. This was the time that this student-athlete started to evaluate what was important to him. He underscored this by saying “When I was in Rehab and did all that and that's when I couldn't play football, so it just made me look at why I was there. I'm like all I have is school and that's when I realized how much time each day that I have to study and do what I'm here for and it made me realize how much time I would waste.”

For participants two and five, a more personal event, getting married, played an integral role in assisting them to persist to graduation. Both of these participants identified some roadblocks that could have prevented them from graduating. These included things like getting into arguments with the coaches, having minimal playing time, not having strong academic assistance, and not having a strong focus on doing well in school. Yet, for both of these participants, getting married seemed to change their focus from athletics to more of academics and tempered their attitude. Both participants

credited their spouses as being the reason why they persisted to graduate from the university. As participant two said “She played a big part in me staying and graduating.” He also pointed out “I might not have been as successful as I am now. She gave me more stability. I just settled down. We found that we shared a lot of things in common, and she made me focus academically, and she helped me to realize that while I was here, it was free, and I might as well get the education and the bonus is that I got to play ball, but I had to get that degree.” Similarly, participant five said that “Marriage changed everything for me. Not that I was a party animal or anything before, but it changed my whole perspective on life. I mean, before sports was a huge part of my life and probably the first or second thing in my life now, it’s not really that big. I mean, I wouldn’t have died if I didn’t have sports in my life. It wouldn’t be that big of a deal now because I have a family.”

For the three non-graduates who identified major events that had an impact on them academically, the reasons were all brought on by themselves and problem-related. These included fighting, having a lack of playing time, death in the family, and getting into an argument with the coach. The significant point of these major events was that these events eventually led the student-athlete to leave the university prior to graduation.

Participant eight, a non-graduate, identified “fighting” as the major event that had an impact on him as a student-athlete. He did not elaborate too much other than saying that he had several fights and because of this, “They threatened to take my scholarship and things like that.” Also, participant eight pointed to the fact that he got a lot of playing time as a freshman and after that year, his playing time greatly diminished. For

this participant, this seemed to be a big disappointment which made him think about leaving the university.

Another non-graduate identified the major event that had an impact on his academic and athletic career was when he got into an argument with the coach. Due to this incident, this student-athlete was terminated from the football team. According to the student-athlete, the coach crossed the line and eventually they ended up in a shouting match that was never reconciled. He put it like this “I had a verbal argument with the head coach and then I got kicked off of the team. This caused me to reevaluate my priorities because before this, all I thought about was football. Once football was over, I realized that I had to do something and that is when I enrolled at another school to complete the degree.”

Finally, another non-graduate in this study identified “death” as the major event that had an impact on his academic and athletic career. Specifically, he explained, “My grandmother passed away during my sophomore year of school. This had a huge affect on my mother. This impacted me because as the oldest child, I felt that I needed to be with my mother. This is when I left school to move back home.”

Eight of the participants in this study identified major events that had an impact on them while they were in school. These were all significant life changing events, which either threatened their athletic careers or they were personal in nature. For the graduates in this study, these major events caused the student-athlete to focus more on academics and less on athletics. For the non-graduates, these major events were more self-inflicted, and they caused the student-athlete to eventually leave the university prior to graduation. Five of the graduates and only three of the non-graduates identified major

events that had an impact on them while they were in school. This finding was significant in that the major events caused the student-athlete to take a course of action. The action that was taken by the student-athletes was to either focus more on academics and graduating or to just leave the university.

Everything That Glitters Isn't Gold

“Everything That Glitters Isn't Gold” refers to the acknowledgement on the part of the participants that the perceived glamour and excitement of college athletics is not a reality. Based on that concept, the participants in the study were asked to give some advice to incoming freshman student-athletes. This question afforded each participant an opportunity to let new student-athletes know about those things that they wish they had known about when they entered the institution.

The participants in this study pointed out many things for an incoming freshman to think about prior to entering the university. The predominant point made indicated that incoming freshmen student-athletes need to be mentally prepared for the reality of life as a student-athlete. They need to be prepared for the demands placed on them both academically and athletically and prepared with the knowledge that for the most part, coaches and athletic departments do not care about them beyond remaining eligible to play in their sport. It is up to the individual to be disciplined, hardworking and focused in order to succeed academically. Many of the participants, both graduates and non-graduates, emphasized the importance of doing well academically and keeping that as their first priority.

The theme of being mentally prepared for the reality of life as a student-athlete was mentioned by both graduates and non-graduates. Participant one said "Ninety percent of what coaches tell you is gold and ten percent is fool's gold. so learn what's gold and what's not to stay on top." Participant two, a graduate, said that the incoming freshman "Needs to be focused coming in from day one. Take advantage of the support groups that we do have here like Black Student Services, and do your work everyday because it's like basketball, if I practice everyday, I'm going to get better." Likewise, participant twelve said, "The experience is what you make of it. If you come here thinking that life will be a bowl of cherries because you play sports, then you had better think again. In fact, things are sometimes harder for you because you play sports." Participant ten stated, "Your school work is going to come first, they (the coaches) are always only going to push you to do well on the football field, so you need to really push yourself to do well in the classroom."

Another theme that supports the fact that the participants in the study entered school unprepared for the reality of what was to come was the idea that incoming freshmen need to enter school already having the tools to succeed and they need to be prepared to succeed academically on their own. This indicates that being successful was much more difficult than any of them had anticipated. For example, participant ten said "Everything that glitters isn't gold, I mean you get this scholarship and you get to play and all of that, but as far as making it in the classroom it's like a whole different ball game...I would suggest to them to come in really disciplined on the work that they can do, if not it's going to be real hard on them because you don't have that kind of support."

Similarly, participant eight said, “You have to have good time management skills and understand who’s out there to help you and who isn’t.”

Another issue comes from the hindsight on the part of the participants that they should have set out a better plan for themselves. The advice communicated is the idea that it is important to enter school with a clear plan in mind of what you seek and what you want to accomplish. Participant four, a graduate, gave the following advice for incoming freshmen, “I think the freshman should look at the school environment in particular to see what the school has academically for you. Your real focus should not be on athletics even though they’re paying. Your real focus should be on getting something academically from the institution.” Participant six, a non-graduate said “I think they need to know that it’s a competitive business and it is a business. and they need to have a plan coming in on what they want to do while they are here.”

Overall, there was a feeling among both the graduate and non-graduate participants in this study that incoming freshmen at this university should be mentally prepared for the reality of life as a student-athlete. This life is not always what it seems to be. There are hidden messages and everything that a student-athlete is told is not always true. It is up to the student-athlete to figure out what is good and what is bad. The graduates and non-graduates also pointed out that there are a lot of demands that are placed on student-athletes both to stay eligible academically and to perform on the field. These demands can lead a student-athlete to focus more on athletics rather than academics and intensify the possibility of never graduating. It is the sole responsibility of the student-athlete to realize that “Everything That Glitters Isn’t Gold.”

Reasons For Non-Grads Leaving

The participants who left the university prior to graduation did so for a variety of reasons. These reasons included a lack of support from professors, lost motivation, arguments with the coaches, deciding to attend a more diverse university, feeling the university did not have the best interests of the student-athlete in mind, and a lack of a university support system. There seemed to be two key themes as to why these student-athletes left the institution prior to graduation, personal reasons and university shortcomings. The personal reasons included lost motivation, arguments with coaches and wanting to attend a more diverse university. The university's shortcomings included a lack of support from professors, coaches not caring, the university not looking out for the student-athletes' best interests, a lack of support both personally and academically, and a lack of a university support system.

Concerning personal reasons, motivational issues and desire to be with a more diverse population were the most prevalent. In terms of motivation, participant eight said that he spent most of his time focussing on athletics rather than academics and once his playing time was up, the realization that he was not close to graduation set in causing him to leave the university. He highlighted this by saying "I lost motivation in getting the degree because after I played my four years, I still had a bunch of credits to take, and I just didn't have interest in that. I just really wanted to go home and get back to my family and friends where I felt comfortable."

Another personal reason that was given by the participants as to why they left the university prior to graduation was the lack of diversity at the school. Participant twelve identified a lack of diversity as the reason why he left the institution prior to graduation.

He said “I just felt as though the university did not support me as much as it should have. I mean that there is no diversity on campus and if you are a person of color, then you will not see many other people like yourself here, including the faculty. This is a shame. Its like being dropped off in a strange land and not being told where you are and not being given directions to get to where you need to go and once you find your way there. then you speak another language from everyone else and they have no clue as to what you are talking about at all.” Similarly, participant nine identified that he left the university because he was disgruntled with the coaches and the fact that there was a lack of diversity at the university. He said “ I became disgruntled with the coaches and their philosophy, and I wanted to attend a university where it was more diverse, so that I could relate better with people who could understand where I was coming from, or my cultural background.”

University shortcomings were another series of factors impacting why participants left the university prior to graduation. For this category, the shortcomings included a lack of support from professors, coaches not caring, the university not looking out for the student-athletes’ best interests, and the lack of a university support system.

For participant seven, his reason for leaving the university prior to graduation was due to a lack of support from professors. He said “I would go to my professors for help, I felt uncomfortable because they put me in the realm of “oh he’s an athlete. a dumb jock” mode and when I was asking for help I was going there sincerely, and they just thought I was doing it just to keep my scholarship or whatever, but I was trying to pass. I just got the feeling from them that they didn’t want me there so I didn’t go back.”

Participant ten didn't feel as though the university had his best interests at heart. He said "I really couldn't take it anymore because it seems like I would have a bad game or something, people would just talk down on me and all that kind of stuff and then once I was good they would be all pumped up about me, but you know... Often I felt that they didn't really have my success, my personal success at heart."

Participant eleven felt as though there was a lack of support both personally and academically by the university and the coaches. He said "The environment played the largest role in my leaving. Even-though I grew up in Colorado, I still found the university to be a cold place in which I did not matter to many people. I also felt as though the coaches did not care enough about my well being personally and academically."

Overall, the student-athletes who left the university prior to graduation left for a variety of reasons. These included: lost motivation, wanting to attend a more diverse university, the lack of support from professors, coaches not caring, the university not looking out for the student-athletes' best interest, a lack of support both personally and academically, and the lack of a university support system. Two out of the six participants who left the university prior to graduation cited a lack of diversity as the reason why they chose to leave. One participant identified the fact that he lost the motivation to continue because he was so far from having enough credits to graduate. Another left the university prior to graduation because he felt as though the professors did not want him there and that the coaches did not care about him. Participant ten felt as though the university did not have his best interest at heart. A final participant left the university because he found the university to be a cold place in which he did not matter to a lot of people.

It was clear that many of the student-athletes who left the university prior to graduation did so due to a lack of diversity and a lack of perceived support from the university. Whether this support meant having more minority students and representatives or just individuals being there for them, these student-athletes needed something that they felt as though they were not given. The result was that they left before graduating.

Summary

The following section details the responses to the three research questions based on the themes and other key issues derived from the interviews.

Research Question I: What are the perceptions regarding the academic experiences of African American student-athletes who left a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution before completing the baccalaureate degree?

The six non-graduates who participated in the study provided an in-depth and detailed look at their academic and athletic experiences as African American student-athletes on a predominantly white campus. Overall they expressed the difficulty of building relationships, developing an attitude that would allow them to be academically successful, and the frustration and confusion of trying to navigate through an academic system they felt fell short of providing appropriate assistance and support for them.

In theme one it was explained that there was a strong indication by the non-graduates that the nature of interpersonal relationships with coaches, teachers, and parents played an important role in their performance at the university. Three of the six non-graduates in this study had negative relationships with their coaches, and poor relationships with coaches had a direct impact on the students' leaving the university prior to graduation. Similarly, as explained in sub-theme two, several of the non-graduate participants indicated that they were singled out by teachers and that the teachers expected less of them because of the fact that they were athletes. Because of this the students were less likely to seek out help from those teachers when it was really needed. The non-graduate student-athletes also perceived that university support systems were virtually non-existent, leaving them without a link to key relationships that might be beneficial. Overall, this had a negative impact on the experiences of the student-athletes by leaving them feeling isolated and without a real sense of help and encouragement. Finally, the non-graduate student-athletes identified that they did not have a push to do well academically from home. Thus, compared to the graduates, they entered school with an unclear outlook on their academic goals.

Overall, participants communicated the importance of attitude of both themselves and those around them as being key to their success. For example, the non-graduates identified that there was a predominant attitude coming from coaches that academics, or ensuring that athletes graduate, is not an important issue beyond remaining eligible to participate in athletics. The student-athletes also indicated that there are many demands that are placed on them that are not placed on the regular matriculating students at the university. In most cases, the major demands deal with athletic performance and not

academic performance. These student-athletes said that the athletic program's main goal for its student-athletes is for them to remain academically eligible.

All six of the non-graduates indicated that they believed they would become pro athletes when they entered the university. This idea of going pro caused the student-athletes to focus more on athletics than academics often to the point of ignoring the importance of performing well academically. However, it was clear, that in retrospect, academic success became important to these students. They saw academic success as obtaining a degree and making good grades even though they had not graduated themselves. For these non-graduates, the attitude to persist academically was either never realized, or once it was recognized, it was seen as being too late to do something about it.

Research Question II: What are the perceptions regarding the academic experiences of African American student-athletes who graduated from a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution with a baccalaureate degree?

The six graduates who participated in the study provided detailed information on their experiences as African American student-athletes on a predominantly white campus and gave extensive insight into factors that helped them to persist to complete their degree. All of the graduates reported the difficulty of balancing their academic and athletic careers and the difficulty of dealing with the adjustments necessary for being successful. While some had a difficult time in the classroom and adjusting to a different racial climate than they were used to, many also entered school coming from a

background that emphasized the important of academics. Additionally they had a strong intrinsic desire to persist towards their degree in spite of the difficulties they came across. Though none of the graduates reported having an easy time while in school, and many of them even faced events or circumstances that made their experiences challenging, they indicated that if they had to do it all again, they would.

For these students, coming from a strong home was important. Two thirds of the graduates came from two parent homes, and all the homes emphasized the importance of education. There were also events in these students lives that played in a role in shaping their outlook while they were in school. While life was not easy for these student-athletes, five of them had significant incidents which caused them to focus more on their education instead of athletics. The reality that the graduates were able to use challenges and events as a means of reframing their identity to refocus on academics helped them to persist to graduation. Another challenge for the student-athletes was to learn how to negotiate through the academic climate. This meant that the student-athlete had to have a sense of how the academic and athletic system worked at the school. These major events had a direct impact on these student-athletes and this along with their ability to cope with the climate were the driving forces that helped them to persist to graduate.

Research Question III: What are the differences in perceptions regarding the academic experiences of African American student-athletes who left a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution before completing a baccalaureate degree and those African American

student-athletes who persisted to graduate with the baccalaureate degree?

Both the graduate and non-graduate participants included in the study shared similar experiences to each other while attending the university. However, there were key experiences on the part of the graduates that they perceived as critical factors in their persistence to remain at the university and graduate. The three themes developed from the interviews, “Relationships are Key,” “Attitude Determines Altitude in College Academics,” and “Negotiating the Climate” bring out detailed issues within each area that played a factor in the experiences of both graduates and non-graduates. Many of these relationships were similar for both graduates and non-graduates such as those with coaches and professors. Likewise there were many similarities in their perceptions of the academic climate. The differences between the graduates and non-graduates emerged most significantly in areas of family background, major events while in school, and how they dealt with and reacted to each of these issues.

For both graduates and non-graduates, relationships were seen as being paramount to the student-athlete’s academic success. In particular, the nature of interpersonal relationships with coaches, teachers and parents played an important role in their performance at the university. Coaches were viewed as being instrumental to the student-athletes’ success.

Also, both graduates and non-graduates expressed similarities in their perceptions of the academic climate. The participants expressed feelings that teachers don’t care about athletes. For the most part teachers were described as being indifferent to any of the special needs that a student-athlete may have, and they were unsupportive when

approached for help, sometimes to the point of being demeaning to the student-athlete. Whether real or imagined, both graduates and non-graduates had an overwhelming feeling that most teachers have a negative perception of student-athletes in general and they are not very willing to assist student-athletes academically.

The differences between graduates and non-graduates emerged in the areas of family background and their reaction to major events that happened to them while they were in school. For the graduate students in this study, family background was important for them because for the most part, they came from families which stressed academics. For these student-athletes there were also major events which caused them to focus more on academics. For the non-graduates, the major events that were identified were the things that caused them to leave the institution prior to graduation.

The graduates in the study identified academic success with having the ability to negotiate the climate. This refers to the sense of the graduates that in order to be successful academically a student-athlete must learn how to find their way through the academic environment. While the ways to negotiate the climate did not come easily, eventually, the graduates were able to negotiate and find the answers that would help them to achieve academic success. For the non-graduates, there was no mention of a student-athlete having to negotiate his way through the academic climate.

The predominant belief of the participants in the study, whether they had completed their degree or not, was that making good grades and obtaining a degree are key components that translate into academic success. Although being a successful athlete was a primary concern for all of the participants, for many of them academics was very meaningful as well.

Academic success for these student-athletes was boosted when there was a strong family emphasis on performing well academically. For the non-graduates in this study, this background condition did not exist and thus the student-athlete alone had a difficult time trying to formulate an attitude of academic importance. For the most part, the graduate participants were able to describe growing up with strong emphasis and direction for doing well academically. For example, participant four stated, "I basically grew up in a family where we were exposed to athletics at a very young age, but we knew that athletics was not the primary concern or the primary focus...we knew that education was the thing that you would really have to rely on."

Five out of the six graduates and only three of the non-graduates in this study identified major events that had an impact on them while they were in school. For the graduates, the major events that had a direct impact on them were all significant life changing events. Either they threatened their athletic career (genetic disease or significant injury) or they were more personal in nature (getting married). In either case, the events had a positive impact on them academically. For example, participant one said that his genetic disease forced him to have a new outlook on the importance of athletics and academics. When his disease got really bad, he had to have surgery and thus he missed the remainder of the football season and the subsequent football season as well. Although this was tough, this participant said that it made him place more value on his education.

For the three non-graduates who identified major events that had an impact on them academically, the reasons were all personal in nature and problem-related. These included fighting, having a lack of playing time, death in the family, and getting into an

argument with the coach. The significant point of these major events was that these events eventually led the student-athlete to leave the university prior to graduation.

Overall, the graduates and non-graduates in this study had similar experiences while attending the university. For these student-athletes, relationships with the coaches were important and poor relationships with professors had a direct impact on them academically. The overall academic climate was not very welcoming to these participants. The clear difference between graduates and non-graduates was seen in the area of family background and their reaction to major events that happened to them while they were in school. For the graduates, their family background included a strong emphasis on academics while the non-graduate family background focused more on survival. Most participants in this study had major events that had an impact on them academically. For the graduates, these major events caused them to focus more on academics rather than athletics. The non-graduate major events were more personal in nature in that they caused the student-athlete to leave the university prior to graduation.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter five presents an overall summary of the study, a discussion of the findings in relationship to current literature, and conclusions. In addition, based on the findings, a set of recommendations will be given for further research along with a set of recommendations for predominantly white institutions regarding means for assisting in the retention of African American student-athletes.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of African American student-athletes attending a predominantly white university. The study asked three major questions. First, the study sought to determine what the academic experiences were for African American student-athletes who left a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution before completing the baccalaureate degree. Second, the study sought to determine what the academic experiences were for African American student-athletes who graduated from a predominantly white Carnegie Research I institution with a baccalaureate degree. Finally, the study sought to determine the differences in academic experiences between those student-athletes who persisted to graduation and those who left the institution prior to graduation.

Twelve African American student-athletes were selected to participate in the study. Six were graduates and six left the university prior to graduation. Selection was

based on purposeful and criterion sampling. All participants were student-athletes at this predominantly white Carnegie Research I university for a minimum of two years.

The study used a phenomenological research design. The data for the study were generated by interviewing the participants regarding their past academic experiences in a predominantly white institution of higher education. The interview focused on questions related to demographics, defining academic success, factors that influence academic success, factors that are roadblocks or obstacles that impede academic success, reasons for leaving a university, personal support systems, and the importance of role models.

The findings of the study were organized around the three research questions as well as an analysis of emerging themes. The former student-athletes who did not graduate had an average age of 23.5 years. Half of these participants majored in Business when they matriculated and all of them received full athletic scholarships. The graduates who were interviewed for this study had an average age of 25.3 years. These participants had various majors when they matriculated and four received full athletic scholarships while the two others were walk-ons.

Findings

From the coded data of the interviews three major themes emerged. The first theme was that relationships for African American student-athletes play a key role in determining whether or not they persist to graduation from a particular institution. The second major theme that emerged was that attitude plays a significant role in determining how student-athletes view their place at a particular institution. The final major theme

was that school climate is an important consideration when addressing the issue of retention for African American student-athletes.

Discussion of Themes

Theme 1. Relationships are Key

The first theme, referred to as “Relationships are Key,” centers around the idea that for both graduates and non-graduates, relationships were seen as being important to the student-athlete’s academic success. Previous research demonstrated that African American students perceive their universities as hostile places in which their relationships with white professors and white students often are demoralizing. These students by and large reveal that they felt depressed, lonely and alienated (Simms, 1997). This depicts a similar scenario to this study as participants emphasized the significance of negative relationships with coaches, teachers and the university as a whole that left them feeling isolated and without support. “Relationships are key” included four sub-themes that emerged from the data related to the student-athletes’ relationships with coaches, teachers, university support systems and parents. The first sub-theme provided evidence that the lack of positive direction and support provided in the athlete-coach relationship is a detriment to the student-athlete’s academic success. The second sub-theme discussed how unsupportive relationships with teachers caused some student-athletes to feel unwelcome. The third sub-theme showed that a perceived lack of university support systems left the student-athletes without an effective way to find and develop relationships with peer groups and academic services that could help them succeed academically. Finally, the fourth sub-theme showed that student-athletes were most

successful when their background included an established parent-child relationship in which academics was heavily emphasized from childhood.

Coaches

Other than the participants' inner strength and self-reliance the coach played a major role in helping the African American student-athletes persist at a predominantly white institution. This finding supports prior research on coaches. Research shows that coaches are viewed as "significant others" by athletes (Snyder & Speitzer, 1986). For many of the student-athletes in this study there was a concern that there was a lack of African American coaches on the campus. This finding supports the recent study by the NCAA which showed that less than 18% of division one coaches are African American (NCAA, 1999). Second, these "significant others" are instrumental to an athlete's development of self-esteem (Greenspan, 1983); and third, the quality of the coach-player relationship affects individual and team performance, interest, and enjoyment (Dubois, 1981). Several of the participants in this study stated that their coach was their role model or that they had problems with their coaches, which either contributed to them doing well academically or leaving the university.

The non-graduates participating in this study strongly indicated that their poor relationship with coaches, played some role in their decision to leave school. These participants expressed the attitude that had they felt more support and guidance from the coaches, they might have persisted to graduation. Also, there were hints that had more of the coaches been African American, their feelings might have been different. This supports the research by McPherson (1983) and Suggs (1999) which emphasized that

there is enough empirical evidence to conclude that coaches are direct social agents, and they can deeply affect social and emotional development of their athletes.

The graduates who participated in this study expressed the idea that poor relationships with coaches or feeling a lack of support and caring from coaches was something they had to deal with as well. This perception was so strong that it was a key consideration for those graduates who at one point considered dropping out prior to graduation. Again, the importance of the athlete-coach relationship, prominent in the research, is supported by the finding that coaches are viewed as “significant others” by athletes (Snyder & Spreitzer 1986) and these “significant others” are instrumental to an athlete’s development of self-esteem.

Teachers

When the participants talked about teachers, a characteristic that emerged was that some teachers don’t care about athletes and that some teachers have negative attitudes towards student-athletes before they even get to know them. Teachers who just come to class and lecture and show no interest in interacting with students were perceived as uncaring and unsupportive by the participants.

Four of the graduate participants and all six of the non-graduate participants stated that they had experienced differential treatment by teachers. These findings support Alderman (1974) and Simms (1997) who asserted that individual teachers often view African American student-athletes as being academically inferior. The school climate in many schools is such that blacks and particularly black athletes are viewed as high need low achievers. Indeed, one participant indicated that he had been mistreated and that he

received condescending attitudes from teachers at the university. This participant said that when these things happened, it made him feel stupid and not up to par with other students. Other interviewees agreed that faculty treated them as poor students without any sense of their academic abilities.

Overall, there was a general consensus by the participants that they had experienced differential treatment in the classroom due to the fact that they were African American and also student-athletes. There was very little difference between the responses of graduates and non-graduates as four graduates and six non-graduates made similar comments in regards to this topic.

University Support

Three of the graduate student-athletes in this study and four of the non-graduates indicated that the university was not as supportive as it should have been. Individual responses revealed that some student-athletes had negative experiences or had perceived a negative environment or lack of support from the university. In terms of providing a racially diverse environment, which was viewed as particularly important terms of having peer groups to interact with, as well as effective support services for African American student-athletes, these participants perceived a significant lack of resources. This finding highlights the importance of university support systems as they pertain to African American student-athletes, an area that has not been well studied. It also is interesting that this finding emerged despite the tutoring and academic help that the student-athletes identified. They indicated that much of this help was just directed at staying eligible, and

it may be that the expressed concerns relate directly to a lack of services pushing and supporting them for higher academic expectations.

The clear difference between the graduates and non-graduates who had the same perceptions about university support was the way that they chose to handle the situation. For some, a significant event or “encounter” happened in their lives which caused the student-athletes to either “drop out” or persist to graduate. Clearly, the graduates turned negative events into positive solutions for the academic experience while the non-graduates tended to just pull away. For example, one of the graduates had to deal with the effects of having a genetic disease, which ultimately caused him to reevaluate what was important to him regarding athletics and academics. The outcome was to develop a strong determination to graduate and succeed academically. This was unlike the non-graduates who had a significant encounter but used the event as a reason to “drop out” instead of persisting to succeed. The key finding here is that, overall, the graduates “reframed” their experience based on key events which led to their success. This was much like the reframing of a learning disability by vocationally successful learning disabled adults identified by Reiff, Geiber & Ginsberg (1997). This finding is also similar to Cross’ (1970) concept of “Encounter,” in which one has an experience, an encounter, and begins to re-interpret the world as a consequence of that encounter.

Parents

It is well established that a sense of competence has a powerful impact on achievement-related behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Phillips (1994) suggested that parents who give children a positive sense of competence are more likely to adopt an

intrinsic orientation toward achievement. This study supports Phillips findings in relationship to parents. Parental support was seen by seven participants as being an important link with academic performance. In particular, five student-athletes who had graduated from the university said that their parents had an influence on their academic achievements. In addition, two of the non-graduates who transferred to other schools also indicated the same influence from their parents.

Other research has shown that even among the most academically competent, children are vulnerable to the negative effects of low perceived competence due to their parents having lower expectations of success and less persistence (Phillips, 1984). Harter & Guzman (1990) found that individual differences in perceived competence would predict individual differences in affective reaction to school performances, which in turn would impact a student's motivational orientation to academics. Thus, parents are key factors in influencing the student-athletes' academic progress, and this held true for the majority of the graduates interviewed.

Indeed, four of the graduates said that their parent/s provided an environment in which academics was stressed. On the other hand, the non-graduates did not express the same emphasis or academic direction coming from the home. Regardless of the environment the student-athlete grew up in (e.g. single-parent or two parent home), it was obvious that parents played a key role in the academic lives of the student-athletes supporting prior research on the role of parents in academic success.

Theme 2. Attitude Determines Altitude in College Academics

The second theme, “Attitude Determines Altitude in College Academics,” focused on the idea that the attitude of both coaches and the student-athletes themselves had a direct impact on how well they performed academically. This finding supports Roueche (1987) which found that attitude may well be more important than ability in developing sports success. It also underscores the work of Sparenti (1988) who found that to work effectively in the academic environment, athletes must learn to transfer their existing skills for planning and goal setting into the classroom and seek the link between the academic and the athletic world. Theme two included three sub-themes relate to the fact that the attitudes of student-athletes and coaches were important when one considered academic success. The first sub-theme, referred to as “Just stay eligible,” highlighted the agreement among both graduates and non-graduates that there was a predominant attitude coming from coaches that academics, or ensuring that athletes graduate, is not an important issue beyond the need to remain eligible to participate in athletics. The second sub-theme, “I’m going pro,” referred to the idea of the participants that they would become professional athletes after their college careers ended. Finally, the third sub-theme, “Academics Count,” related to the predominant belief of all the participants in the study that making good grades and obtaining a degree are key components that make up their perceptions of academic success.

Just Stay Eligible

The perceived attitude of coaches and the athletic department in regard to academics plays a key role in the student-athlete’s academic performance.

Greenspan (1983) found that “the cutthroat competition” to keep athletes eligible for participation in the absence of performance standards adds to lowered morale in academics because grades simply mean eligibility for athletes. The focus changes to earning eligibility rather than learning the material. Evidence in support of this finding is clear in the student-athletes’ perception that coaches only cared that the athletes remain eligible to participate in their sport, and that academic success beyond eligibility was not important. Thus, without a key motivation toward academics, interest and emphasis on performing well in the classroom fell to the wayside. This supports a previous finding by Johnson (1997) who found that student-athletes generally maintain eligibility for the sake of the continuance of playing sports and not for persisting to graduate. It was clear that the student-athletes are keenly aware of the need to maintain certain grade point averages in order to keep within eligibility standards to participate in their sport. Maintaining eligibility was regarded by some as a necessity for exposure and for making the appropriate connections to be drafted into a professional sport. But without the proper motivation or the development of the necessary skills to succeed academically within this environment, many student-athletes were set for failure before even entering the university. This supports Speranti’s (1988) finding that both the college athletic system and the intense desire to win, coupled with inadequate academic preparation of incoming student-athletes often results in them being held back once they arrived on campus. Again, this is underscored by the non-graduates in this study who did not succeed academically due to the greater emphasis they placed on to performing well athletically.

I'm Going Pro

It was a consistent belief of the participants who left the university prior to graduation that they would succeed due to their athletic ability and determination, not necessarily through academics. In particular, the attitude of the participants in relation to their athletic versus academic goals upon entering school was a significant factor for these student-athletes and their motivation to complete their degree. This clearly supports the findings of previous research studies. For example, the American Institutes for Research (1988) study found that approximately 23% of football and basketball players and 30% of grant-recipients in other sports reported that they enrolled in college to use it as a stepping stone to become professional athletes. Also, Sellers (1997) supported this theme in conveying that as many as 70 percent of African American male student-athletes unrealistically focus their career goals on professional athletics.

All six of the non-graduates strongly believed they had a realistic chance of becoming professional athletes. After making a comparison with the graduates, it was found that four out of the six graduates also believed they had a chance of becoming a professional athlete. However, several issues differentiated the graduates from the non-graduates. The graduates who entered school with that attitude about professional sports admitted facing a significant personal event in their life that changed their focus from athletics to academics. On the other hand, the non-graduates reported none of these same types of attitude-altering experiences. Rather, they were so tied-up with their desire to be a successful athlete that they ignored their role as a student for so long and to such a degree that there was little hope to make up what they had missed academically. Without an avenue of athletic success beyond college, the participants reported being frustrated

with their situations both athletically and academically and having little power to change it. This underscores Speranti's (1988) finding that the student-athletes' identity is that of an athlete, not that of a student, and the academic world is peripheral to their role as athletes where most of their identity is focused.

Academics Count

The sense of "Academics Count" was shared by both graduates and non-graduates. Although being a successful athlete was a primary concern for all the participants while they were in school, later on many of them developed an appreciation for academics, and it became very meaningful for them. In retrospect, the majority of participants expressed a strong belief in the importance of academics and the value of obtaining a degree. However, it was clear that some of them, particularly the non-graduates, did not hold the same value in academics while they were attending school. This finding supports a previous study by Roueche (1983) who found that attitude may well be more important than ability in developing success in sports. This idea parallels what was found in this study regarding success in academics, given that for so many of the student-athletes, the issue was not whether or not they had the ability to perform well academically but rather whether or not they had the desire to succeed.

Theme 3. Fight or Flight

The third theme, referred to as "Fight or Flight," focused on the idea that African American student-athletes on a predominantly white campus are faced with many challenges in the school climate, and they either fight through these difficulties or leave

the institution. The task to “master the university and its mythology” as noted by Smith (1980) includes the necessity to learn the language, behavioral codes, expectations and other social nuances, in other words, the “climate” of the university. The faster that students learn how to navigate through these issues, the smoother will be their adjustment to the new environment. “Fight or Flight” included three sub-themes that emerged from the data related to school climate. The first sub-theme, called “Just a number,” referred to the overall sense of both the graduates and non-graduates that they didn’t matter in their classes. Also, they lamented the lack of diversity they experienced. The second sub-theme, referred to as “Look at me, I’m different,” focused on the participants’ belief that professors had perceptions of the African American student-athlete as being different from other students on campus. Most felt that faculty viewed them as being inadequate academically. The third sub-theme, “Negotiating the climate,” referred to the participants’ sense that to be successful they had to learn how to cope and find their way through the academic environment.

Just a Number

For both the graduates and non-graduates in this study, experiencing both large classes and little or no diversity left them feeling isolated, and it contributed to the notion that they didn’t matter or were not valued in the classroom setting. These perceptions worked against the student-athletes’ academic success as they were intimidated in asking for help from the teachers or other students.

These findings support research by Scott (1994) which emphasized that there was a perception of isolation and alienation (feeling like they were the only Black there, or being the only Black in classes), a perception of being rejected (and having that feeling

reinforced all the time from students and teachers), and the lack of a sense of “fitting” or belonging/acceptance as key factors related to departing an institution. Clearly, the African American student-athletes in this study expressed the same perceptions of isolation and alienation in the classroom, and for the non-graduates, it impacted their academic careers.

Look at me I'm Different

The participants in this study clearly indicated that they had experienced a range of attitudes and behaviors that created an uncomfortable environment for them. This is a significant finding of the study. These responses substantiate Sparenti's (1988) findings that student-athletes experience more student-related problems than non-athletes. Whether real or perceived, the participants reported their frustrations created by biased or discriminatory treatment, a lack of attention and support by teachers, disparaging remarks made about their intellectual abilities or condescending attitudes of faculty toward student-athletes.

Rather than overt discrimination, most of the negative comments about school climate from the interviews related to subtle comments made by teachers and students, lack of attention and support of athletes, being made to feel inferior, or preferential treatment of non-athletes by teachers. Only one participant reported “discrimination” by a teacher. However, some participants suggested that while they may not have been victims of discrimination, they were aware that some student-athletes have experienced discrimination by teachers and students. Experience with discrimination is nothing new to African American students and the ability to cope successfully has previously been

identified as a variable key to the success of minority students. (Ratcliff, 1991; Collins, 1997).

The different treatment of student-athletes in an academic environment in various studies is a continuing problem despite the increasing signs of academic improvement by athletes (NCAA News, 1995). Attitudes and behaviors, which have reportedly discouraged some student-athletes have included: (a) less and less attention given by faculty and administrators to student-athletes (Miracle & Rees, 1994); (b) discriminatory behavior directed toward student-athletes (Sparenti, 1988); (c) attitudes that attribute the success of student-athletes to luck or being a minority (Graham & Folkes, 1990); (d) subtle messages from teachers that they consider student-athletes less intelligent than other students, and therefore expect less from them (Miracle & Rees, 1994); and (e) perceptions that student-athletes take unfair advantage by using their athleticism to get their way in the classroom (Graham, 1990). According to Biddle (1984), the disparaging attitudes and behaviors experienced by some student-athletes affect their academic performance and sometimes their will to remain in school. Thus, school climate could play a key role in whether or not a student-athlete persists to graduate from school. The participants in this study clearly expressed these kinds of perceptions of negative or disparaging attitudes from teachers and other students. It made them feel uncomfortable, and discouraged them from seeking help from faculty who they felt had a negative attitude toward them in the first place.

Negotiating the Climate

According to Graham and Folkes (1990), athletes who enroll in college are more vulnerable than non-athletes when it comes to successfully negotiating their way through

the competitive academic and athletic culture and responding to the pressures of doing both. Brookover (1979) explained that the more teachers and administrators believe in their students ability to achieve, regardless of race, family background, or athletic ability, the more this belief is translated in observable behavior and results will show in classroom achievement. Brookover also found that in addition to the lack of affective orientation in the classroom, attitudes and behaviors exhibited by some teachers and peers discourage student-athletes' intellectual performance and their dedication to pursuing a college degree.

Similarly, this study found that climate is an important factor in determining the athlete's effectiveness in school. Climate is formed by the attitudes, beliefs, and values shared by the people in a school (Brookover, 1979). The data in this study indicated that the perception a student-athlete has of the people in the school climate impacts their motivation to succeed academically and athletically. Most participants discussed their experiences related to attitudes as subtle or ambiguous behaviors of teachers rather than suggesting overt discrimination or biased treatment that they or other student-athletes had experienced. The study by Fleming (1981) indicated that an increasing number of African American students do not feel like welcomed academicians, but rather like uninvited guests in a strange land (Parker & Scott, 1985). This supports the findings in this study which indicate it is that same perception that affects the student-athletes' ability to successfully negotiate the school climate. In the cases where the student-athletes were able to learn how to negotiate the climate, they persisted to graduate. Conversely, when the student-athletes failed to learn how to negotiate the climate, academic success was minimized.

The student-athletes in the research felt that faculty had lower expectations for them than they did for non-student-athletes. This finding was based on reports that teachers tend not to call on them in class, especially if the questions are difficult. Indeed, according to one non-graduate, faculty do not call on student-athletes in order to avoid the appearance that they are “picking on the athlete”. These findings support Harter & Guzman’s (1990) research that found that faculty generally tend to have low educational expectations for student-athletes in regards to classroom performance.

A further finding that supports work by Greenspan (1983) is that the majority of graduates who experienced disparaging or differential treatment developed coping skills that helped them place these frustrations aside while they remained focused on their academic goals. Most of Greenspan’s participants credited their persistence with their own strength, intellectual abilities, hard work, and tenacity. However, Greenpan also found that student-athletes transfer out of certain schools because of the way they were treated by faculty and other students. This was also true of the research reported here as non-graduates ended up leaving the university reportedly because of frustration and the inability to cope with the environment.

Overall, there was a general feeling among several participants that student-athletes must learn how to “Negotiate the climate” if they want to be academically successful. This negotiating skill was learned only through personal experiences at the university. A key was the persistence to learn the culture and break through as was necessary to do well without letting the effects of a negative school environment overcome their ability to persist. The idea of the potential detrimental effects of the school climate is mirrored by Brookover (1979) who argued in his study of school

effectiveness that a school's social system affects achievement, academic self-concepts, and self-reliance.

Conclusions

The findings suggest several key conclusions regarding African American student-athletes and their successful retention to graduation. First, African American student-athletes who attend a predominantly white institution of higher education have a series of unique experiences and feelings which have a direct impact on them academically and athletically. This supports previous research by Benson (2000) and Pearson & Lenoir, (1997). These results also support the theoretical framework of Tinto (1975, 1985, 1987, 1993, 1998), which focuses on the interactive process that occurs between individuals and the environment. Clearly, the student-athletes in this study who left the university prior to graduation did so for a number of reasons including negative aspects of their upbringing as well as things that happened to them after entering the university. None of the student-athletes who left the university prior to graduation did so due to involuntary withdrawal which is what Tinto defined as an individual's inability or unwillingness to meet minimum standards of academic performance. Two of the non-graduate participants in the study were what Tinto describes as institutional transfers. This simply meant that the student-athletes left the university to attend another school of their choice. On the other hand, four of the non-graduates were considered to be a system departure in which the student-athletes left the higher educational system all together. For these non-graduates, it was obvious that they were not able to fit in with the university in some way. This supports Tinto's argument that the integration of an individual into the communities of an institution of higher education increases the likelihood of persistence. It also underscores the importance of learning to negotiate the climate, deemed so significant by the graduates in this research. According to Tinto,

unless students integrate well, the likelihood of departure is enhanced as students are isolated from the daily life of the institution. Such conditions serve to reduce goals and weaken commitments to the institution. For the non-graduates in this study, commitment was obviously not very strong.

Second, relationships impact the academic performance of student-athletes. In particular, there was a strong indication that the nature of interpersonal relationships with coaches, teachers, the university, and parents played an important role in academic and athletic performance for the student-athletes in this study. The relationship between a student-athlete and a coach was seen as being paramount for academic success. These findings support Brown's (1986) research which asserted that African American college students identify the lack of role models and the presence of insensitive instructors as reasons for dropping out of school.

Similarly, teachers were seen as also having a direct impact on student-athletes at the university. The student-athletes felt a sense of racism from faculty and from their white peers. There was an overwhelming feeling among the participants that most teachers at the university were not welcoming and they had a perception that African American student-athletes were not as smart as the general population. Similar to Smith's (1980) study, most of the students interviewed in this study spoke of a perceived hostility from white faculty and a perception that whites students believed that African Americans had no legitimate place on campus because all or most were special admissions or the beneficiaries of quotas. This feeling, whether real or imagined, caused the student-athletes to feel uncomfortable in the classroom.

Third, the participants reported that connecting with university support systems for student-athletes was virtually non-existent. Even though the university had some mechanisms in place which should have provided support for the student-athletes, for whatever reason, the participants in this study had problems in connecting directly with them. In fact, while the athletes did report using tutors and other academic support persons, they didn't consider these as significant university support mechanisms. The perception of the university was that it was uncaring about the personal needs of the student-athlete. In fact, according to many of the participants, the key issue in athletics is only about winning and losing. Overall, this had a negative impact on the experiences of the student-athletes. The participants believed that their performance at the university could have been aided had they been provided with access to services that served their needs as an ethnic and cultural minority on a predominantly white campus. What isn't clear is whether or not they would take advantage of any available services given their professed obsession with becoming professional athletes.

Fourth, the special circumstance of coping as a minority student is further complicated by the added demands placed on student-athletes. The combination of these two challenging roles doubled the emotional stress for the students. This idea of student-athlete stress reiterates the findings of Pinkerton, Hinz and Barrow (1987) who indicated that athletic participation at the college level creates major personal and emotional demands on participants.

Fifth, a student-athlete's foundation at home is very important for his academic success. In instances where the student-athletes grew up with strong and consistent references to the importance of academics, they entered school with a clear value for

education. A major finding in this study was that five out of the six graduates indicated that they had a strong push from home to graduate. For the non-graduates, the push from home to graduate was not heavily emphasized as they entered school with an unclear outlook on their academic goals. Two of the non-graduates who indicated some support from home did go on to another university and graduated.

Sixth, the attitude of the coach in combination with the attitude of the student-athletes' themselves had a direct impact on how well they performed both academically and athletically. If the student-athlete had a positive attitude in regards to academics, then he performed well and was most likely to persist to graduate. Also, if the coach had low expectations or problems with the student-athlete, then the student-athlete had a tendency not to perform well. This supports Hinton's (1990) identification of key influencing factors in the lives of African American students which included having the availability of a strong support person as one of those key variables.

Seventh, there was a predominant belief of the participants in the study that making good grades and graduating is what translates into academic success. Both the graduates and non-graduates stressed the importance of academics, whether they performed well or not. Yet, most of the participants indicated that just passing their classes translated into academic success. There seems to be differences among the student-athletes as to what really is meant by academic success. Given the students' willingness to just accept passing as academic success, the coach's push for the student-athletes to just remain eligible could be seen by some as positive as it was a push to make passing grades. Clearly, the personal motivation of the student-athletes was also a factor in academic success. For example, one major difference between the graduates and non-

graduates was that the graduates either had a positive attitude or commitment about academics upon entering the university, or they developed an attitude or commitment to persist academically while they were in school. This attitude or commitment contributed to academic success.

The student-athletes in this study unanimously identified that on this predominantly white campus, they were faced with challenges. The first challenge was that the student-athlete attended classes where there was little or no diversity. Thus they developed feelings of discomfort and isolation. A second challenge for the African American student-athletes was that many of the professors at the university saw them as being different. This attitude of being different caused many of the student-athletes to feel isolated and discouraged in continuing at the university for the reason that their needs were ignored. This mirrors the argument of Oglivie and Howe (1982) that the needs of the individual student-athlete are easily ignored and the student-athlete is more easily manipulated and exploited at the collegiate level than at any other. A final challenge for the student-athletes was to learn how to negotiate through the climate. This meant that the student-athlete had to have a sense of how the academic and athletic system worked at this school. Persistence, a hard working attitude and learning to wade through the politics of the academics were key. If the student-athlete developed this sense of the climate, then he was able to persist to graduate from the university. The non-graduates were never able to figure out how to negotiate the climate during their tenure as student-athletes.

Finally, race was a key issue for these student-athletes. Many of the responses of the participants in this study had something to do with race. Clearly, the student-athletes

recognized that they were different from most students who attend the university. Not only were they different because they were college athletes but also they were different because of the fact that they were black. It was a double-edged sword that was a key factor in the decision of some of the participants in this study to leave the university prior to graduation. Just as Fleming (1981) described campus environments as expressing both overt and covert racism that contributed to African American students dropping out of school in response to the rejection and hostility, the race issue played a significant role for all the students- whether graduates or non-graduates- who were student-athletes at this predominantly white institution.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this study, the following recommendations for further research are proposed:

1. A replication of this study (an in-depth phenomenological interview process) focusing on female African American student-athletes at a predominantly white institution as this study only focused on male student-athletes. The findings of a study of this nature would afford an opportunity to see what the differences are between female and male student-athletes, as it has been documented that there is a difference in graduation rates for these groups (AIR, 1988; Simms, 1997).
2. The experiences of African American student-athletes at Historically Black Colleges or Universities for comparative purposes since this study focused only on student-athletes at a predominantly white institution. Such a study might identify the role that environment plays in the lives of student-athletes on both types of campuses and the kinds of support needed for success. Since this study identified the fact that environment played a role in the lives of student-athletes on a predominantly white campus it would provide more insight as to the impact of differing environments.
3. An implementation of a similar study for comparative purposes focusing on coaches' and professors' experiences with African American student-athletes in predominantly white institutions. While this study has found that the relationship a student-athlete has with the coach to some degree plays a role in the student-athlete's decision to persist to graduate or to leave the university prior to graduation, a study which

focuses on coaches' and professors experiences' with these students could help to identify ways in which these relationships could be enhanced. It also would help clarify and verify the perceptions about coaches and professors reported by the students.

- 4. A replication of this study focusing on white student-athletes at a predominantly white institution since this study focused only on African American student-athletes. This study would yield valuable information as to the many differences between minority and majority student-athletes and determine if race is as important a variable in student completion rates as reported here.**
- 5. A comparative study which identifies the experiences of student-athletes in revenue and non-revenue producing sports at a predominantly white institution since this study only focused on revenue generating sports. Research suggests that the pressures for student-athletes in a revenue generating sport is different from that of a non-revenue generating sport (NCAA, 1982). This study would yield valuable information about the differences between a revenue and non-revenue producing sport as it relates to student-athletes.**
- 6. A study which focuses on African American student-athletes at a Division II school as their experiences may be different from that of a student-athlete who attends a Division I school. Research shows that the athletic programs in Division II schools may not put the same types of pressure on the student-athletes (Parham, 1993).**

7. A study which focuses on the relevance of student-athletes' home background in regards to achieving academic success as this study has indicated that the home environment plays an integral part in assisting student-athletes to be successful academically. Such a study would provide greater detail as to the importance of home environment when the academic success of student-athletes is taken into consideration, and may provide ideas for supporting students from differing backgrounds.
8. This study found that student-athletes had a perception that the university provided poor or inadequate support systems. A comparative study of support systems currently in place on campuses with high graduation rates for African American student-athletes versus schools with low graduation for African American student-athletes would yield important insight on this issue. It also might suggest why services that are available are not utilized or considered important by some students.

Suggestions for Consideration for Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are directed to predominantly white institutions. Efforts in the directions suggested by these recommendations may be helpful in the recruitment and retention of African American student-athletes in white institutions.

1. Mentoring programs are needed so that student-athletes can be paired with professors, coaches, and other students who already have experience at the institution. This is based on the fact that this study indicated that having a solid relationship with coaches, professors and other students greatly enhances the experience of a student-athlete at the given institution. This would also afford a greater opportunity for the student-athlete to persist to graduate.
2. Stronger orientation programs are needed to assist student-athletes in getting acclimated to the environment within the university. This orientation should focus on academics, study skills, rules and regulations, dating, becoming a professional athlete, and playing college athletics in general. While it is an NCAA requirement for athletic departments to have orientation programs for student-athletes, a more comprehensive program is needed in order to assist the student-athlete in focusing on academics. This suggestion is based on the fact that this study indicated that many of the student-athletes are entering college without knowing some of the very things that will be expected of them in the near future or at the very least, these student-athletes lack some of the skills that will be needed in the university environment.

3. African American student-athletes must be guided and supported in taking classes that will assist them in graduating in the future. Staying eligible is simply not enough. As indicated by this study, many of the student-athletes are guided towards taking classes that will only keep them eligible and in some cases, these classes have nothing to do with departmental requirements. Research says that the cutthroat competition to keep student-athletes eligible for participation in athletics is real (Greenspan, 1983). Therefore, careful advising to assist students in taking classes at the university that will help them to persist to graduate is a must.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent to participate in
a Research Project

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATORS: Rick Ginsberg, Ph.D.

CO-INVESTIGATOR: Kent J. Smith, Jr.

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER

FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS: Kent J. Smith, Jr. – (970) 491-8039

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH: This study will employ a qualitative methodology, specifically the use of interviews to obtain an understanding of the experiences of African American student-athletes at predominantly white Carnegie Research I institutions which relate to their academic success.

PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED: If you agree to participate in the interview you will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences as a student-athlete. Each interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Each interview will be conducted face to face where possible, otherwise, the interview will be conducted via telephone. Each participant will also choose the location of the interview. Where possible, the researcher will assist in conducting the interview on the campus of Colorado State University. Notes will be taken and the interview will be audio taped. The notes and tapes will be destroyed at the end of the research project. All gathered materials will be held by case numbers and no names will be associated with the material.

RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES: There are no known risks. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

BENEFITS: There are no known benefits associated directly for you as a participant in the study, but the information gained from you should be helpful both to individual African American student-athletes and Administrators at institutions of higher education.

Page 1 of 2 Subject Initials _____ Date _____

CONFIDENTIALITY: Individual, institutional, and state identity associated with your interview will not be used in any reports generated by the study. Quotes from the interviews will be used to support general themes, but these quotes from the data will not be identified as to persons, institutions or states. Interview materials and tape recordings will be stored in a safe area and destroyed upon completion of the study.

LIABILITY: The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

Questions about the subject's rights may be directed to Celia S. Walker (970) 491-1563.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

Participant Name (printed)

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator or Co-investigator Signature

Date

Page 2 of 2 Subject Initials _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

**APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR GRADUATES

Age:

Major:

BACKGROUND

- (1) How long did you attend the university?
- (2) Why did you choose to attend this particular institution? What other choices of schools did you have?
- (3) What are you doing now that you have graduated?
- (4) Tell me about your family background.
- (5) How long have you played organized sports?
- (6) What sport did you play at the university?
- (7) Were you a walk on or did you receive a scholarship?

Academic Success

- (8) How would you define academic success?
- (9) Do you consider yourself as being academically successful?
- (10) Why are some student-athletes more successful than others?
- (11) What allows an African American student-athlete to be successful on a predominantly white campus?
- (12) Do you think that these things differ for white student-athletes at a predominantly white campus?
- (13) Have you ever done poorly in a class at this university?
- (14) Why do you think that happened?

Performance

- (15) Did you think you had a chance to become a professional athlete when you first enrolled at this institution?
- (16) What kind of demands are placed on student-athletes at this university in the following areas:
 - Academics
 - Individual athletic performance
 - Team performance
 - a. In season
 - b. Out of season
- (17) What would an incoming freshman need to know about the athletic program at this university?
- (18) Did you ever think about leaving the university prior to graduating?
If so, why? What made you stay?
- (19) Have you ever gone to faculty, a counselor, etc. for academic help?
- (20) Did you receive the help you needed?
- (21) Who are your role models and why?
- (22) Have there been any individuals that have had an impact on your academic career?
- (23) Sometimes, there are major events that impact students. Have there been any major events that have had a major impact on you as a student-athlete?
- (24) If you had it to do again, would you become a college student-athlete?
- (25) Is there any information that you would like to add about being an African American student-athlete?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NON-GRADUATES

Age:

Major:

BACKGROUND

- (1) How long have did you attend the university?
- (2) Why did you choose to attend this particular institution? What other choices of schools did you have?
- (3) What are you doing now?
- (4) Tell me about your family background
- (5) How long have you been playing organized sports?
- (6) What sport did you play at the university?
- (7) Were you a walk on or did you receive a scholarship?

Academic Success

- (8) How would you define academic success?
- (9) Do you consider yourself as being academically successful?
- (10) Why are some student-athletes more successful than others in academics?
- (11) What allows an African American student-athlete to be successful on a predominantly white campus?
- (12) Do you think that these things differ for white student-athletes at a predominantly white campus?
- (13) Have you ever done poorly in a class at this university?
- (14) Why do you think that happened?

Performance

- (15) Did you think you had a chance to become a professional athlete when you first enrolled at this institution?**
- (16) What kind of demands are placed on student-athletes at this university in the following areas:**
 - academics**
 - individual athletic performance**
 - team athletic performance**
 - a. In season**
 - b. Out of season**
- (17) What would an incoming freshman need to know about the athletic program at this university?**
- (18) What factors caused you to leave the university prior to graduation?**
- (19) Have you ever gone to (faculty, a counselor, etc.) for academic help?**
- (20) Did you receive the help you needed?**
- (21) Who are your role models and why?**
- (22) Have there been any individuals that have had an impact on your academic career?**
- (23) Sometimes, there are major events that impact students. Have there been any major events that have had a major impact on you as a student-athlete?**
- (24) If you had it to do again, would you become a college student-athlete?**
- (25) Is there any information that you would like to add about being an African American student-athlete?**

APPENDIX C

01	Ability
02	Academic Performance
03	Anxiety
04	African American Families
05	African American Feelings
06	African American Philosophies
07	Aspirations
08	Attitude
09	Awards
10	African Americans vs. Others
11	Campus Familiarity
12	Characteristics
13	Choice of Majors
14	Cliques
15	College-Going Decisions, Feelings
16	College-Going Preparations
17	Comfortability
18	Community
19	Competition
20	Coping Strategies
21	Course Load
22	Culture
23	Dating, Marriage
24	Degree Attainment
25	Discipline
26	Discrimination
27	Educational Emphasis
28	Ethnic Identity
29	Ethnic Encounters, Positive
30	Ethnic Encounters, Negative
31	Expectations, Family
32	Expectations, Self
33	Factors for Success
34	Family Stability
35	Family Support
36	Financial Aid
37	Goals, Immediate
38	Goals, Future
39	High School Life
40	Homelife
41	Interpersonal Relationships, Teacher
42	Interpersonal Relationships, Peers
43	Impressions of CSU
44	Living Arrangement
45	Modeling, Parent

46	Occupations, Parents
47	Precollege Preparation
48	Parental Education
49	Parental Channeling
50	Parental Background
51	Persistence
52	Pressure
53	Professors, Relationships
54	Religion
55	Sacrifice
56	Study Skills
57	Respect
58	Resources
59	Scholarships
60	Social Interaction, Social Life
61	Student Services
62	Self-Motivation
63	Separation
64	Siblings, Background and Education
65	Stereotyping
66	Support
67	Success
68	Teachings, Beliefs
69	Teacher Encouragement
70	Teaching Style
71	Traditions
72	Transfer
73	Values
74	Views on Education
75	Workout Schedule

APPENDIX D

INT: Athletics and academics, the experiences of African American athletes at a predominately White Carnegie Research One institution. And how old are you?

RSP-M: I'm 24 years old.

INT: What was your major when you attended this institution?

RSP-M: My major that I declared was Business.

INT: What made you decide on business?

RSP-M: Basically because I had friends who went to college, you know, and they were talking about business, so that was really the one I wanted to pick because I knew some people who were going into it and they would tell me a lot of things about that particular major.

INT: How long did you attend the university?

RSP-M: Two years.

INT: What are you doing now?

RSP-M: Right now I'm just going in and out of jobs. Construction, things of that nature.

INT: OK. Tell me a little bit about your family background. Start maybe with your parents, brothers and sisters, that kind of thing. Where you're from.

RSP-M: Basically, I'm from California. Grew up in a single parent home, never really knew my dad. Just stayed with my mother so she was the head of the household. Had two brothers and one sister so that was basically my family structure.

INT: How would you describe your childhood and growing up?

RSP-M: My mom, she did a lot for us. As much as to be expected from her. But we didn't have that male figure in the home that kind of gears you the right way from the male perspective, so that's one thing that I think we missed out on in the family back home.

INT: How long have you played organized sports?

RSP-M: Since the PeeWee League - it started out early and my mother put me on the little teams and there's been a _____ ever since so that's when I started.

INT: What sport did you play at the university?

RSP-M: Basketball.

INT: Were you a walk-on or did you receive a full scholarship?

RSP-M: Well, my first year I received a scholarship and they told me it was basically

based on if I kept my grades up and that type of thing. But it was a scholarship and I had it my first year. The second year I kind of ran into other things, you know.

INT: How would you define academic success?

RSP-M: I think it's just being good in the classroom, making the passing grade so you can move onto the next step.

INT: Do you consider yourself as having been academically successful?

RSP-M: Maybe not because I had some problems with grades in different classes so I was basically put on probation.

INT: Why do you think you weren't successful academically?

RSP-M: Cause it was hard for me to manage my time between basketball practice and studying. You know, it was really kind of hard for me to juggle between the two because I had great demands on both sides.

INT: Why do you think some student athletes are more successful in academics than others?

RSP-M: Well, my personal feeling is that some people are smarter than others and may have had a little more discipline in their study habits than other student athletes because if you come from like where I'm from a small town, and you good in sports, everybody just praises you and the focus is really not on academics. Maybe they just had better study habits.

INT: Specifically, what do you think allows for an African American student athlete to be successful on a predominantly White campus?

RSP-M: It can be support from the coaches, everybody that's affiliated with the team, and maybe from your professors knowing that you are playing sports and so much is expected of you - maybe if they could take all that into consideration, you know, it probably would help out a little.

INT: Do you think that those things are different for White student athletes on a predominantly White campus?

RSP-M: I think so because on a White campus, every time you go somewhere, no matter whether they try to or not, you know, they're going to look at you differently. And when they look at you differently, it kind of puts you in an awkward

position so you don't want to go all the time asking for help because it makes you feel uncomfortable. That's how I felt when I did it.

INT: Have you ever done poorly in a class at this university?

RSP-M: Yes, I've done poorly in some accounting classes I was taking because the professor - I went to him and asked for help but I didn't get a good response like I thought I would get. And I was really trying in the class but it just didn't happen correctly and it caused me not to do as well as I wanted to in that class.

INT: Any other classes maybe you did poorly in?

RSP-M: Basically the accounting classes and the math classes I had because was never my major subject that I was really good in so those were the two main areas where I did really poor.

INT: OK. When you first came to the university, did you think you had a chance to become a Professional Athlete?

RSP-M: Oh, yes. When I came out of high school I just knew I was going to be in the Pros. there was no doubt because when I was playing in California I was averaging like 32 points a game and I was really on top of my game at that level and I just figured I'd do college and go straight to the NBA after that.

INT: Let's talk a little bit about demands that are placed on student athletes as you see it, as you have experienced it here at the university. What kind of demands were placed on you academically?

RSP-M: Basically the demands I had was just trying to keep up with the work and we'd be on 5-7 day road trips and trying to keep up. We had like a little tutors but it still wouldn't be the actual professor that was in the class. When I would come back from the trip, the professor would want me to have all the work done like I was in class and I wasn't there for it because I was missing lectures and all of that - so it was a big demand on me to try to balance playing basketball and keeping up in the class. So that was one of the major demands that I was trying to balance out.

INT: OK. So you talked a little bit about academics in-season. Is there a difference in being in season and out of season as far as the demands placed on your time?

RSP-M: Basically you still have demands out of season because you have to do the

weight training programs in off season. so we were required in order to keep our scholarship we had to do so many hours in the weight room. We were doing an average of like 20 hours a week in the weight room and that could have been time that I was studying or whatever, you know, trying to keep up with my classes, so it was still demanding - not as much because of practice time but you still have demands.

INT: What would an incoming freshman need to know about the athletic program at this institution?

RSP-M: From my experience I think they are more focused on you bringing in big dollars for the university. As long as you do well in your particular sport, that's all that matters to them. It seems like to me that they're not really concerned about your academics because I told them I was having problems and they told me I'd be OK but you see where I am now, so those are different things I ran into.

INT: So you would advise an incoming freshman to do what?

RSP-M: Focus on the major that they want, don't think it's just all athletics. don't think they're going to the NBA-NFL; just try to pick a major and focus in on that and do everything they can do to pass.

INT: What factors caused you to leave the university prior to graduation?

RSP-M: Basically, as I think back on it, when I would go to my professors for help, I felt uncomfortable because they put me in the realm of "oh he's an athlete, a dumb jock" mode and when I was asking for help I was going there sincerely and they just thought I was doing it just to keep my scholarship or whatever, but I was trying to pass. I just got the feeling from them that they didn't want me there so I didn't go back. That's what I ran into.

INT: Anything else that you can think of maybe that caused you to leave?

RSP-M: Coaches not caring. Because when a coach recruits you, he comes to your home and tells you all these things, and tells things to your mom "oh yes, we have tutors with the basketball team and they're going to help him out and we have good relationships with the professors". Then once I got here - none of that, nothing like he was saying in my livingroom at home was true at all. Another thing was, I felt like because I was Black they weren't even worried about me