

THE VALUE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS PARTICIPATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FORMER ACC ATHLETES

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In today's environment of multi-million dollar television deals and increased commercialization of college athletics, the public is becoming increasingly skeptical about the role of athletics in higher education (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, & Hu, 2009; Shulman & Bown, 2001; Thelin, 1994; Wolverton, 2008). These critics of intercollegiate athletics are unconvinced that the quality of education athletes are receiving while they are in college is up to par with the standards required of higher education. Due to the amount of time that student-athletes devote specifically to athletics, it is feared that they are missing out on obtaining a full college experience while being able to participate in curricular and co-curricular activities alike (Simiyu, 2010).

Inherently, student-athletes are different from their non-athlete peers. Student-athletes make up a unique population on college campuses because of their integral roles, their atypical lifestyles, and their special needs (Caro-

dine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Traditionally, participation in intercollegiate athletics has been justified through educational rationale—that this participation opportunity provides opportunities for learning unlike any other experience. With the escalation of commercialization within the athletics arena, however, the question has arisen whether the educational benefits of college are disadvantaged by athletics participation. Empirical research has not produced consistent results as to the effects of athletics participation on the academic experience, but it is theorized that the imbalance between academics and athletics becomes greater when the size and profile of the athletic program increases (Williams, Sarraf, & Umbach, 2006). All college students are faced with choices and make compromises and decisions about what activities to participate in and how to spend their time. Student-athletes are no different from the general population in this regard, however unlike their non-athlete

peers, student-athletes have tremendous athletics commitments in addition to commitments in their social and academic realms (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Previous research has found that the importance and prevalence of each of these realms changes as student-athletes progress through college (Miller & Kerr, 2002), but much of this research has focused on student-athletes that are currently participating and currently making these compromises. This study sought to reveal the perceived benefits of participation in retrospect of this progression.

The vast majority of individuals that have participated in athletics will say that they learned something from the experience, but the question remains, what is it that was really learned? Athletics has been linked with an individual's academic and overall success (Robst & Keil, 2000) and athletes are said to learn valuable life lessons by participating in athletics at any age (Henderson, Olbrecht, & Polachek, 2006). Participating in youth sports is traditionally known to teach values such as teamwork and perseverance, while participating in high school or club athletics can teach adolescents how to balance different time commitments such as school and practice. Each is a skill that is transferable past athletic playing days and into the professional and 'real' world. In support of funding athletic programs, institutions regularly cite the institutional and instructional values that players learn through participation (Henderson et al., 2006), however without quantifiable data, there is an enigma

that exists as to the proper balance between traditional academic education and athletics in higher education (Gayles & Hu, 2009). While much effort is spent monitoring and highlighting the failings of intercollegiate athletics, far less energy is spent uncovering or reporting the many successes (Williams et al., 2006). This study explored the benefits former student-athletes associate with their participation in intercollegiate athletics at the highest level.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Role of Intercollegiate Athletics in the Academy

Current advocates for intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of a collegiate educational experience argue that athletics helps to define the spirit of the American college and allows colleges and universities to address their broader public purpose (Gerdy, 2002; Toma, 1999). Athletics aids in the overall development of young people, contributes to increased academic performance, facilitates upward occupational mobility, and provides potential help to increase a school's enrollment and revenue (Brand, 2006; Miller, 2003). Many opportunities are granted to students that participate in intercollegiate athletics that other students do not have the chance to experience. Through participation, values such as dedication, sacrifice, teamwork, integrity, and leadership are developed. Each of these character-building values can be acquired through participation and are beneficial throughout life

(Duderstadt, 2000; Olivia, 1989). These advocates assert that intercollegiate athletics provides opportunities for student-athletes to develop into individuals possessing desirable character qualities that will succeed in a life after competition has ended.

Those who argue against the presence of intercollegiate athletics within the academy routinely cite that student-athletes receive preferential treatment in the admissions process and are more likely to be academically under-prepared for college than non-athletes (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006). Other critiques of intercollegiate athletics include the arguments that student-athletes do not have the same campus life experiences and opportunities available to non-athletes and that student-athletes have their own subculture that is isolated from the rest of the student population (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006). In addition to creating their own subculture in the campus community, student-athletes often do not engage with their peers inside or outside of the classroom (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001) and are not engaged in effective educational practices at the same level as non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006). The overarching criticism of intercollegiate athletics is that academics and athletics are out of balance, with athletic pursuits completely overshadowing the academic experience of higher education (Suggs, 2003).

EDUCATION AND ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION

Engagement. Student engagement on a college campus has been tied to positive overall college education outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The level of engagement that a student has in educationally purposeful activities while in college is vital to learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

In a sample of 66,900 NCAA Division I student-athletes, Williams et al. (2006) found that student-athletes actually engage at a higher level than non-athletes including certain academic and campus activities. Similarly, in the National Survey of Student Achievement, Umbach et al. (2006) reported student-athletes devoted more time to extracurricular activities and reported greater gains in personal, social, and practical development as well as overall achievement. Several additional studies have found student-athletes do not differ in overall levels of campus engagement from their non-athlete peers (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Kuh et al., 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Collectively analyzing the literature, it appears that overall, student-athletes and traditional university students are very similar (Parham, 1993; Umbach et al., 2006). Student-athletes benefit from their college experiences in ways that in many ways replicate those of non-athletes (Gayles, 2009; Richards & Aries, 1999; Stone & Strange, 1989; Umbach et al., 2006), are as engaged and involved

in educationally purposeful activities as non-athletes, have academic achievements that are equivalent (Hood, Craig, & Ferguson, 1992; Umbach et al., 2006), and are just as likely to struggle with issues such as development and maturity (Parham, 1993).

Cognitive Outcomes. Previous research has examined student-athletes and non-athletes as two separate groups in higher education, making comparisons related to the cognitive impact of participation in intercollegiate athletics. Cognitive outcomes are higher order mental processes such as critical thinking, academic achievement, and logic and reason (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Many of the desired outcomes of college are cognitive outcomes such as traditional academic pursuits and performance, problem-solving, and intellectual development (Gayles, 2009; Kuh, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006).

Research has demonstrated participation in intercollegiate athletics to have both positive and negative effects on cognitive outcomes, as well as differing outcomes between male and female athletes. Although participation was found to be positively associated with critical thinking in a study of students from 18 four-year institutions, participation was negatively associated with scores on standardized graduate school admissions tests (Astin, 1993; Pascarella et al., 1999). In the Pascarella et al. (1999) study, female athletes and non-revenue Olympic sport male athletes were found to not be disadvantaged or different from non-athletes in regards to cognitive development or outcomes of meas-

ure (Pascarella, et al., 1999). These student-athletes develop just as much cognitively as non-athletes while revenue male student-athletes differ in cognitive development. Given that the differences in cognitive development exists only in male student-athletes participating in revenue generating sports "suggests that any negative cognitive influence of participation in intercollegiate athletics may be largely a function of the distinct disadvantage that accrue to football and basketball players" (Pascarella et al., 1999).

Affective Outcomes. A growing emphasis in higher education research is on affective impact and outcomes (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont & Stephens, 2003; Enrilich, 2000; Gayles & Hu, 2009). Affective outcomes include such things as values, attitudes, and beliefs (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The practical application of affective outcomes, such as the ability to work with people of different backgrounds, has increased the focus on such college outcomes in addition to cognitive outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Many desired outcomes of college are affective and include working and collaborating productively and efficiently with peers, personal development, psychosocial development, and overall learning and maturity of attitudes and beliefs (Gayles, 2009; Kuh, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006).

Gayles and Hu (2009) found participation in intercollegiate athletics had a positive impact on the development of many of the documented desired student interests, attitudes, and academic skills measured in the Basic Academic

Skills Study (Gayles, 2009; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001). Affective outcomes and benefits of participation have included increased drive, self-confidence, self-discipline, and motivation to complete their academic degree requirements (Astin, 1993; Robst & Keil, 2000; Ryan, 1989). Many of the affective outcomes of participation have a multiplier effect when the growth in self-concept enables them to grow and develop in additional areas (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella, Smart, Ethington & Nettles, 1987). As with other educationally purposeful activities, increased involvement indicates increased outcomes in regards to affective characteristics (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Academic and Athletic Balance. The activities that student-athletes engage in have been shown to have a greater impact on personal self-concept, learning, and communication skills (Gayles & Hu, 2009). These impacts produce significant and positive influences on college for student-athletes regardless of an individual athlete's background characteristics (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Kuh, Hu & Versper, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Both male and female student-athletes perceive their campus environments to be more supportive as well as have more support in regards to their academic and social needs than traditional students (Umbach et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2006). Student-athletes are more involved and engaged in some campus activities and academic areas (Pascarella, et al., 1999; Umbach et al., 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2004; Williams et

al., 2006; Wolniak et al., 2001) although they indicate their education was less relevant to their post-graduate work than non-athletes (Adelman, 1990; Pascarella et al., 1999). In general, student-athletes indicated that their experiences while in college exceed those of non-athletes (Williams et al., 2006).

Although student-athletes report many advantages over non-athletes, they face unique challenges, demands, and needs (Gayles, 2009; Heyman, 1986; Parham, 1993; Pinkerton, Hinz & Barrow, 1989). Student-athletes have extensive time demands in addition to regular academic demands of full-time students (Carodine et al., 2001; Hood et al., 1992) which may make maximizing and balancing involvement in both academics and extracurriculars a harder task (Lanning, 1982; Parham, 1993; Pinkney, 1991; Remer, Tongate & Watson, 1978; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981).

Research on student-athletes' grades compared to non-athletes' grades is inconsistent. Studies have reported no difference between student-athletes' grades and non-athletes' grades (Hood et al., 1992; Umbach et al., 2006); grade similarities between athletes and non-athletes with similar time commitments (Carodine et al., 2001; Hood et al., 1992); grade divergences between male student-athletes who have lower grades and female student-athletes who have similar grades to their respective non-athlete peers (Umbach et al., 2006); and student-athletes in general having lower grades than non-athletes (Maloney & McCormick, 1993; Robst & Keil, 2000).

While some athletes are short-changed in non-trivial ways in terms of what they put into and get out of college (Umbach et al., 2006), the review of literature found that many studies present a different picture of student-athletes than the portrait of student-athlete exploitation often portrayed by the media (Umbach & Kuh, 2004; Weight & Cooper, 2012). The evidence is not consistent on the intellectual consequences of participation in intercollegiate athletics, but institutions of higher learning must look at more than just grade point averages and graduation rates of their student-athletes (Pascarella et al., 1999; Umbach et al., 2006). It is important to look at the overall student-athlete experience, which includes taking part in educationally purposeful activities and attaining desired outcomes (Umbach et al., 2006). It is without a doubt that intercollegiate athletes have overwhelming time and physical demands, but the research indicates that institutions have realized their obligation to provide a supportive environment as soon as possible for student-athletes to facilitate success athletically, academically, and personally (Carodine et al., 2001; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory, a popular management model, was conceived as a way for organizations to simplify the understanding of an unpredictable external environment while broadening their vision of management (Fassin, 2008; Wolfe & Putler, 2002). Stakeholder the-

ory encourages administrators to devote "attention to the participants in the organization beyond the shareholders and to take into account the interests of the surrounding business community and the socio-economic region" (Fassin, 2008, p. 119). Freeman's stakeholder model has been used by many organizations and embraced as a fundamental representation of an organization's relationships between various groups. The stakeholder model has been refined and developed through scholarly inquiry over the course of many years since its inception in 1984, however its basic tenant remains that at the center of any organization is a series of relationships that are affected by various constituencies and the leaders of those organizations must decide how much time is invested and to which relationships attention is paid (Fassin, 2008; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). The themes of stakeholder theory have been observed in multiple research fields, which propose that the theory has broad appeal can be applied to this study (Laplume, Sonpar, & Litz, 2008).

A stakeholder is simply "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 25). In order for an organization to have long-term success, it is imperative that the organization have the support of its stakeholders. The management and leaders of the organization must actively explore the organization's relationship with various stakeholder groups when making impactful decisions. If stakeholder groups are not being thought of

in the decision-making process, it is possible that the organization will lose the support of the stakeholders it must have for its long-term success (Freeman, 1984). In direct relation to the population of interest in this study, Scott and Lane (2000) examined student-athletes and alumni; they found that both groups identified with the athletic department because of their status as a member stakeholder. Student-athletes and alumni perceive themselves as stakeholders because of three tactics used by the organization. These three tactics include organizational communication, visibility of their affiliation with the organization, and embeddedness within the organizational community, which creates an agreement of self-interest from the members of the stakeholder group (Scott & Lane, 2000; Wolfe & Putler, 2002).

Study Significance

In the wake of multiple lawsuits, scandals, billion-dollar television deals, and academic scandals associated with intercollegiate athletics, the level of scrutiny and skepticism associated with the role of athletics within higher education is seemingly peaked (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, & Hu, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Thelin, 1994; Wolverton, 2008). What is often missing in the media dialogue and scholarly literature is the voice of the athlete. In the context of an athletic department, student-athletes can be identified as stakeholders with the use of any of the described methods or groupings. This

study examined the value that former student-athletes placed on their participation in intercollegiate athletics while they were in school. In particular, this study focuses on the often untold story of the athletes that comprise the majority of the student-athlete population yet rarely appear in the media (Weight & Cooper, 2012), the “Olympic sport” (non-football and basketball) athletes.

Student-athletes, having been identified as a stakeholder group, should be the focus of athletic departments, and decisions coming from the leaders of the department should have student-athletes at the forefront of their minds. Being able to see what value former student-athletes indicate they received by participating can either encourage athletic directors to continue the status quo or reevaluate their choices. Having reflections from former student-athletes will allow athletic directors to compare the stated mission of their department relative to student-athletes to the actual results. In addition to this critical understanding of student-athlete stakeholder experience, a better understanding of the value of the athletic participation experience can facilitate organizations to foster additional support from other stakeholders groups who value the educational experience of student-athletes. These stakeholders include governmental funding agencies, university personnel who allocate resources to athletics, organizations who aspire to hire leaders with unique leadership capabilities, alumni, etc. As such, stakeholder theory was used as the theoretical lens through which this study was

pursued. Because of the differences between the traditional “revenue-generating” sports of football and men’s basketball, and all other sports (traditionally referred to as “Olympic sports”), we limited the population of interest to those who participated in ACC Olympic sports. Independent variables of sport, gender, and ethnicity were selected in order to provide additional insight into this sample based on basic demographic groupings.

The research questions explored in this study include:

- [RQ 1] What educational components do former ACC Olympic sport athletes identify as competencies developed through participation in intercollegiate athletics?
- [RQ 2] How does participation in intercollegiate athletics affect the collegiate academic success of ACC Olympic Sport athletes?
- [RQ 3] How does participation in intercollegiate athletics prepare student-athletes for life-after-graduation?
- [RQ 4] Do the answers to RQ1-RQ3 differ based on sport, gender, or ethnicity?

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of former Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) Olympic sport student-athletes. Survey methodology was utilized to access a sample of athletes who exhausted

their eligibility between May 2007 and May 2012.

Instrument & Data Collection

The instrument utilized within this study was developed based on a thorough review of literature and multiple phases of testing to enhance instrument validity. A panel of experts was initially consulted to review the survey including two sport administration professors, one athletics staff member, one former student-athlete, and, a specialist in survey methodology from the Odom Institute for Research in Social Science. In order to further enhance survey validity, a pilot study was conducted to verify that the questions were clear and easy to comprehend, and that the survey questions were able to capture the experiences and opinions needed to answer the research questions.

The survey was comprised of four main sections: The first section of questions sought to determine what student-athletes learned from particular athletic department staff members. The second section of questions sought information regarding the effect of participation on student-athletes academic and educational experiences. The third section of the survey consisted of open-ended questions relating to their experience participating as an Olympic sport student-athlete. The fourth and final set of questions included demographic questions. The survey included multiple choice, “check all that apply,” Likert scale, and open-ended response questions. All responses were collected

anonymously in order to encourage honest answers. The respondents were assured that their responses would only be used for the purposes outlined in this study.

In order to contact the desired population of recent-graduate Olympic sport athletes, personalized emails were sent to each ACC Olympic sport head coach asking for assistance in distributing the survey to recently graduated athletes. Every invitation was followed up with a reminder after two weeks. Due to the undeterminable number of potential respondents the survey reached based on whether or not coaches passed the survey on to their athletes, it is impossible to calculate a response rate. The researchers did receive confirmation from at least one coach at each of the ACC schools providing some evidence of distribution by a broad sample of institutions. The survey was submitted by 351 respondents, 120 of which responded "yes" to the question "Did you graduate or exhaust your athletic eligibility between May 2007 and May 2012". Only respondents that answered the above question "yes" were included in the data analysis, indicating that 34.2% of the total respondents were of the desired sample.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was entered into SPSS predictive analytics software 19.0 which enabled descriptive statistical analysis and analysis of variance utilizing the independent variables of sport, gender, and ethnicity. Qualitative data

was analyzed through coding and the development of themes. Emergent codes were developed independently by two coders, then discussed and refined for final independent analysis. Scott's Pi was calculated for questions related to "lessons learned from participation" and "challenges overcome since college" with Scott's Pi values of 0.932 (94.4% agreement) and .885 (90.4% agreement). Each of the calculations were found to be greater than the generally accepted level of agreement of .800 (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). The qualitative findings were triangulated with the literature and quantitative findings in order to enhance study reliability and validity. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data within an exploratory study design is encouraged as it provides multiple data sources to draw upon (Creswell, 2003).

RESULTS

The vast majority of survey respondents were white (79%) with 4% and 3% of respondents indicating they were Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American respectively. The remaining 14% of survey respondents identified themselves as "other" which included Asian and mixed race. Among the survey respondents, 62% indicated they were female, 26% indicated they were male while the remaining 12% did not respond to the question. Approximately half (45%) of the survey respondents indicated they participated in one of three sports including lacrosse (21%), golf (14%) or softball (10%). In addition

Table 1
Demographic Information

	%	n
Gender		
Female	61.7%	74
Male	25.8%	31
Missing Demographic Data	12.5%	15
Age		
Less than 25	46.7%	56
26-30	32.5%	39
Ethnicity		
White	79.2%	95
Hispanic or Latino	4.2%	5
Black or African American	2.5%	3
Other	14.2%	17
Sport Participated In		
Lacrosse	20.8%	25
Golf	14.2%	17
Softball	10.0%	12
Track & Field / XC	7.5%	9
Other	7.5%	9
Rowing	6.7%	8
Wrestling	5.8%	7
Volleyball	5.8%	7
Soccer	4.2%	5
Multiple sports	2.5%	3

N=120

to the sports of lacrosse, golf and softball, survey respondents participated in an additional nine varsity sports including baseball, soccer, wrestling, field hockey, volleyball, track & field / cross country, rowing, diving and multiple sports. A complete list of demographic data is available in Table 1.

Educational Competencies Developed Through Participation

The first research question aimed to discover what educational components former student-athletes identify as competencies developed through their intercollegiate athletic participation. Survey respondents were asked to indicate, on a scale of (1) "not at all" to (5) "very well," how their athletic participation influ-

enced nine separate educational components. Descriptive statistics were tabulated to examine the various educational components. As demonstrated in Table 2, all educational components, with the exception of study skills (M= 3.92), had an average participation influence between "fairly well" and "very well." Athletic participation was indicated as having the highest influence on work ethic with an average of 4.82 (SD= 0.52), followed closely by "the overall

University experience" (M= 4.75, SD= 0.56) and "ability to take responsibility for ones' self" (M= 4.73, SD= 0.571). Interestingly, study skills (M= 3.92) had the largest standard deviation (SD= 0.93) indicating the largest amount of variance between respondents.

A one-way between subjects analysis of variance revealed significant differences between genders and between sports, but did not reveal significant differences between ethnicities. The de-

Table 2
Educational Components Developed through ICA Participation

	Mean	SD	F	Mean Difference	p
Work Ethic	4.82	0.522			
Overall University experience	4.75	0.562			
Ability to take responsibility for yourself	4.73	0.571	6.363		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.310	0.013
Time Management Skills	4.69	0.552	3.177		
"Lacrosse" v. "Wrestling"				0.983	0.001
"Softball" v. "Wrestling"				1.060	0.002
"Other" v. "Wrestling"				1.143	0.002
"Field Hockey" v. "Wrestling"				1.143	0.025
Leadership skills	4.68	0.587	11.073		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.400	0.001
Ability to work with others as a team	4.68	0.658	6.898		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.360	0.010
Ability to make decisions	4.41	0.813			
Ability to take responsibility for others	4.27	0.89	3.185		
"Lacrosse" v. "Track & Field/Cross Country"				1.111	0.033
Study skills	3.92	0.927	5.574		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.460	0.020

$p < .05$

Note: Scale from (21) "Not at all" to (5) "Very well"

Tested for significant differences based on independent variables of ethnicity, gender and sport

Mean difference denotes mean from first subcategory listed minus second subcategory.

pendent variables of ability to take responsibility for yourself ($F(1, 103) = 6.36$, $p = 0.013$), leadership skills ($F(1, 103) = 11.07$, $p = 0.001$), ability to work with others as a team ($F(1, 103) = 6.90$, $p = 0.010$) and study skills ($F(1, 103) = 5.57$, $p = 0.020$) all produced significant differences between females and males, with females having the higher means in each category. Female respondents believe their ability to take responsibility for themselves and work with others as a team were influenced significantly more because of their athletic participation than their male counterparts with means of 4.48 and 4.42, respectively, compared to female means of 4.79 and 4.78. Male respondents believed that their leadership skills were influenced significantly less because of their athletic participation than their female counterparts with means of 4.39 compared to females with means of 4.79. Although there were significant differences between females and males, the mean difference in each of the cases was less than 0.5.

Significant differences between sports exist on the dependent variables of time management skills ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.55$) and ability to take responsibility for others ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.89$). Wrestling respondents differed significantly from lacrosse, softball, other, and field hockey respondents on their perceived development of time management skills as wrestlers had a mean of 3.86, with the other four sports having a mean roughly a full point ahead. The results of this one-way analysis of variance indicate that wrestlers believe they develop significantly less time management skills

due to their participation than the other four sports.

Collegiate Academic Success of Student-Athletes

The second research question sought to answer the question of how intercollegiate athletic participation affected the collegiate academic success of student-athletes. Survey respondents ($n = 116$) indicated that athletic participation contributed between (4) "fairly well" and (5) "very well" to both their educational ($m = 4.25$) and personal development ($m = 4.82$). In addition, 79% ($n = 111$) indicated they achieved a good balance between the attention given to athletics and the attention given to everything else that they could have been doing. Although respondents indicated they felt they achieved a good balance, 43.6% of respondents indicated that they believed that their grade point average (GPA) would have been higher had they not participated in athletics, while 18.2% believed that their GPA would have been lower. No significant difference was found among the dependent variables of gender, race or sport in the responses to the effect of participation on the respondent's GPA.

From a list, respondents were asked to select all variables that both facilitated or hindered finding balance. The most common response for both facilitating balance ($n = 88$) and hindering balance ($n = 37$) was self. With 38.7% of respondents, family was the second most common response for facilitating balance followed closely by friends (36.9%) and

Table 3
Factors that Influenced Student-Athlete Balance

	Balance Facilitators		Balance Hindrances	
	%	n	%	n
Self	79.3%	88	33.3%	37
Family	38.7%	43	2.7%	3
Friends	36.9%	41	23.4%	26
Coach	35.1%	39	18.0%	20
Religion	5.4%	6	0.0%	0
Other	3.6%	4	10.8%	12

Table 4
Reasons for Student/Athletes Being Prepared for Life after Graduation

	Mean	SD	F	Mean Difference	p
Skills and/or values learned through participation	4.41	0.908	6.362		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.5	0.011
Overall education	4.13	0.752			
Personal contacts developed through participation	3.76	1.252	7.443		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.73	0.008

Note: Scale from (1) "Not at all" to (5) "Very well"

$p < .05$

Tested for significant differences based on independent variables of ethnicity, gender and sport.

Mean difference denotes mean from first subcategory listed minus second subcategory.

coach (35.1%). After self, friends (23.4%) and coach (18.0%) were the most common hindrances. "Other" factors that facilitated balance included "requirements like study hall" and "time—Junior/Senior years I balanced much better;" with "other" balance hindrances including "teammates," "travel to and from practice," "exhaustion," and

"temptations of social life" among others.

Effect of Participation on Post-graduate Opportunities

Respondents were asked how highly their classroom vs. athletics education helped prepare them for life after grad-

uation. This question was based on a three-point scale ranging from (1) "no value" to (3) "large amount of value". Education learned from being a student-athlete was rated to hold a large amount of value with a mean of 2.92 (SD=.28). Education learned from courses toward a degree was valued less with a mean of 2.41 (SD=.532).

Respondents indicated the skills and/or values learned through participation have helped or will help them in getting a job or starting a desired career between (4) "fairly well" and (5) "very well" with an average mean of 4.41 (SD= 0.91). A one-way between subjects analysis of variance produced a significant difference between males and females $F(1, 103) = 6.362$ with male respondents believing the skills and/or values learned through their participation helped them get a job significantly less than their female counterparts with a mean of 4.03 compared to the female

mean ($M=4.53$). With a slightly lower mean ($M= 4.13$), respondents indicated that their overall education prepared them for life after graduation between (4) "fairly well" and (5) "very well" ($SD= 0.75$).

Lessons Learned Through Participation

Respondents were asked whether attributes that were developed through participation have helped them overcome challenges post-graduation (See Table 5). Narrative responses included a plethora of examples with the majority related to perseverance (36.5%), balance/time management (23.1%), working with a team (17.3%), and dealing with failure and/or accepting criticism (13.5%). These narratives were interlaced with context, most of which included everyday occurrences (17.3%), work (15.4%), searching for a job (13.5%), and a variety of others.

Table 5
Attributes Related to Participation That Have Helped to Overcome Challenges Post-Graduation

	%	n
Perseverance	36.5%	19
Balance / Time management	23.1%	12
Working with a team / Problem solving	17.3%	9
Dealing with failure and accepting criticism	13.5%	7
Confidence	7.7%	4
Goal Setting / Prioritization	7.7%	4
Other	7.7%	4
Leadership	3.8%	2
Accountability / Responsibility	1.9%	1

N=52

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study provides a valuable addition to the literature on the educational value of intercollegiate athletics by delving into the values and lessons that former Olympic sport student-athletes believe they gained by participating in college athletics. The findings in this study will be interpreted through stakeholder theory as a framework through which practitioners and scholars can generalize the importance of the findings herein. Stakeholder theory explains that at the core of any organization, there are a series of relationships that are affected by various constituencies; the leader of such an organization must decide how much and to which relationships attention is paid (Fassin, 2008; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). While barraged with headlines of scandal and student-athlete exploitation, this study provides evidence of positive stakeholder experiences within a subset of athletes, providing support toward a conclusion that student-athletes are valued stakeholders within the institution of intercollegiate athletics.

Similar to the findings of Henderson, Olbrecht, & Polachek (2006), the results of this study confirm that student-athletes gain institutional and instructional values directly through their participation in intercollegiate athletics. By surveying former student-athletes, it can be determined that the values and lessons gained through participation are values and lessons that are carried into life after athletics and into the post-graduation world. The implication of this data

is that there is a balance that student-athletes are able to reach in which they receive both an academic education through their course work as well as an education through their athletic participation. The combination of these two facets produces a holistic educational experience.

This study sought to explore the benefits of participation in retrospect of the evolution of the student-athlete rather than perceived benefits of current student-athletes. Miller and Kerr's (2002) research into the athletic, academic, and social realms and the evolving importance and prevalence placed on each realm can be supported by the results of this study. The results of this study confirm that student-athletes are continuously evolving throughout their educational experience and in doing so place a different emphasis on each of the realms throughout the process. As seen with the survey respondents, when reflecting upon their experience as a student-athlete, many would reallocate the use of their time and the emphasis they placed on one or more of the realms Miller and Kerr (2006) researched. The results from this study provide insight into a post-evolution period to confirm what the research on current students' beliefs has produced is similar to beliefs held by former student-athletes.

In support of Gayles and Hu's (2009) research that found many of the activities that student-athletes engage in have a positive impact and allow an individual to grow and develop, the results of this study confirmed that former student-athletes associate many educa-

tional competencies with their participation in intercollegiate athletics. Specifically, respondents felt that athletic participation influenced their work ethic, time management skills, leadership skills, and ability to make decisions between “fairly well” and “very well.” The athletes also attributed athletics for helping facilitate development of many skills pertinent to working in a team environment such as the ability to take responsibility for themselves, the ability to work with others as a team, and the ability to take responsibility for others.

The focus of this study was on the affective impacts of athletic participation due to the growing emphasis in higher education on the affective impact of college. The overwhelmingly positive results of the study point to athletics as the contributor of developing affective educational outcomes in former student-athletes. In response to the influence that athletics played in the development of affective outcomes, with the exception of study skills, the results provided a response of greater than “fairly well,” with all means greater than four, and six of the eight means greater than four and a half on a five-point scale. These findings provided additional information to confirm that affective outcomes of student-athletes are developed because of their participation in athletics.

Examining the outcomes of the study through the lens of stakeholder theory allows for further implications of the results. Freeman’s (1984) theory points out that it is possible for organizations to lose the support of their stakeholders

if they are not thought of when making impactful decisions, which in turn hurts the long-term success of the organization. Former student-athletes, who remain a stakeholder group even after they have completed their eligibility or graduated, present a method of monitoring the fulfillment of the stated mission of the organization. By looking at the findings of the study as the feedback of one stakeholder group, athletic departments can in turn see that decisions they make do have an effect on the educational experience of student-athletes; and that impact should be taken into consideration for all decisions that will inherently affect the student-athlete experience. The findings from this limited sample provide evidence that this stakeholder group supports the organization, which will only help the success of the organization. **MARKETING STUFF HERE?**

Parham’s (1993) research and assessment of the student-athlete provided that student-athletes are faced with unique challenges and demands and due to those demands have a harder time balancing academic and extracurricular activities. Within this study, over three quarters (78%) of survey respondents felt that they achieved a good balance between athletics and all other activities in which they could take part. Although respondents believed their grades would have been higher had they not participated in athletics, they indicated the lessons and values learned from intercollegiate athletic participation have been more beneficial than what was learned in the classroom. This

is a positive trade-off that former student-athletes believe has helped them after their post-collegiate athletic career. The research done by Parham (1993) neither is confirmed nor refuted because it did not seek information as to the ease in which former student-athletes were able to find balance.

One of the main criticisms of intercollegiate athletics is that academics and athletics are out of balance, and particularly that athletic pursuits completely overshadow the academic experience of higher education (Suggs, 2003). This study found that athletic participation prepared student-athletes for life after their university experience and taught student-athletes lessons and values that are desirable educational competencies uniquely transferable outside the walls of higher education. Rather than athletics and academics being out of balance, the athletic pursuits of student-athletes intensify the educational and academic experience.

The results of this study provide evidence that the mission of the NCAA, "to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes" (Office of the, 2010, ¶5) is being lived out in the lives of Olympic sport student-athletes in this sample and as such, college athletics are an important element of their higher education experience. Having been identified as a stakeholder group, student-athletes should be the focus of athletic department decisions. The results of this study will allow athletic directors to compare the stated mission of their departments to the results of the

student-athlete experience. The better understanding of the complete student-athlete experience may also provide decision makers with the autonomy to garner additional support from other various stakeholder groups who value the educational experience of student-athletes. Further study of these findings on an institutional level could facilitate tremendous marketing, athlete recruitment, alumni relations, fundraising, and community outreach opportunities—further developing relationships with the complete web of athletics department stakeholders.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study provides insightful information into the experiences and beliefs of former student-athletes, additional research is needed on a definitively representative sample. Relying solely on third parties to reach former student-athletes made determining a survey response rate impossible severely limiting the generalizability of the findings. In addition, this study presents an opportunity for non-response bias. It is possible that only those former student-athletes that had a strong experience, being positive or negative, were the individuals who responded. It is also possible, and highly likely, that coaching staffs that are not in touch with former athletes and therefore possibly less invested in their athletes futures did not forward the survey along biasing the sample of alumni based on coaches who may be more supportive or

educational than those who are not in contact, did not forward the survey, or do not maintain an alumni database.

Future research into the value of athletic participation from the perspective of the former athlete can take many different avenues. One of these would be to look at all former student-athletes rather than simply recent graduates. Results of that study would have the potential to determine if the value of athletic participation changes over the course of time or still provides the same value. Another avenue that should be explored is to incorporate a larger sample through institutional alumni offices, or different conferences. Results from those studies could be compared across conferences and/or divisions. Also critical to explore are the experiences of "revenue sport" alumni and the potential differences in experiences and educational outcomes between the Olympic sport and "revenue sport" alumni.

In the age of constant scrutiny of intercollegiate athletics, it is important for athletic departments to ensure they are providing a valuable experience to their student-athletes, as well as their other stakeholders. Athletic departments routinely administer exit interviews of senior student-athletes; in addition, they should also consider surveying their former student-athletes on the value of their experience. By surveying student-athletes that have spent time away from the world of participating in intercollegiate competition on a daily basis, athletic departments are more likely to receive holistic reviews of the experiences of being a student-athlete rather than

just the highs and lows that might become known in an exit interview.

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