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# Ways In Which Participation In Intercollegiate Athletics Contributes To The Learning And Development Of Student-Athletes

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WAYS IN WHICH PARTICIPATION IN INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS  
CONTRIBUTES TO THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

R. Chad Good

145 pages

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The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate the impact of Division I intercollegiate athletic participation on the student learning and development of former student-athletes. More specifically, in what did ways these student-athletes perceive gains and losses as related to their overall life and career skills repertoire. The study is somewhat unique considering there is a dearth of qualitative research available regarding this particular research topic.

The study focused on the specific ways in which former college student-athletes perceived how they had learned, developed and gained from their overall experiences as student-athletes. They were asked to interpret what were the important programs, techniques, strategies that contributed to their student learning and development. As important, they were asked to reflect on the persons most influential in their overall development as student-athletes. The study involved personal interviews with 19 former student-athletes from NCAA Division I institutions across a variety of sports and included both males and females.

Ultimately, the findings of this study were consistent with the theoretical framework upon which the study was based, chiefly, that intercollegiate athletics can serve as a viable out-of-class learning experience and that critical life and career skills can be enhanced by effectively administered intercollegiate athletic programs. In essence, all of the participants perceived that their life and career skills had been positively impacted directly by their overall experiences as college student-athletes.

This study suggests that intercollegiate athletic programs, when designed, implemented, and administered with appropriate personnel, programs, pedagogies, and strategies can essentially align with the overall mission of higher education.

WAYS IN WHICH PARTICIPATION IN INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS  
CONTRIBUTES TO THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

R. CHAD GOOD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

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2015

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WAYS IN WHICH PARTICIPATION IN INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS  
CONTRIBUTES TO THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

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R. C. G.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

In its infancy, intercollegiate athletics modeled "the 'collegiate ideal' which emphasized character and teamwork, and varsity sports flourished as a visible, highly valued component of that ideal" (Thelin, 2004, p. 177). But a dichotomous relationship between intercollegiate athletics and higher education emerged quickly (Thelin, 1994; Zimbalist, 1999; Duderstadt, 2000; Gerdy, 1997, 2006). All the way back to 1895, institutions of higher learning were searching for ways to bring their intercollegiate athletic programs under some form of control. "Questions regarding the appropriateness of the presence of athletics programs within the university have been discussed for as long as intercollegiate athletics have been a part of American higher education" (Duderstadt, 2000, p. 263).

To help illustrate the crux of the problem to be investigated in this study, consider the quotes below from one of the venerable motion pictures about intercollegiate athletics: *Knute Rockne—All American*. In the scene, Knute Rockne, the legendary Notre Dame Fighting Irish football coach, is testifying before a national panel (representatives of the Carnegie Foundation) that has been convened to investigate concerns about the abuses regarding intercollegiate football.

Panelist: Do you mean that you have never interceded for a football player that fell behind in his classes and had to be suspended from your team ?  
Rockne: I mean just that. Any football player who flunks his classes is no good to his coach or the school he attends. Any coach who goes around trying to fix it for

his athletes to become scholastically eligible when they are not is just a plain, everyday fool.

Panelist: How would you grade an average athlete's contribution to the national intelligence?

Rockne: Gentlemen, we are living in the 20<sup>th</sup> century....to limit a college education to books, classrooms, and laboratories is to set a limit to education in modern times....we are losing that most precious heritage of mind and body.... The finest work of man is building the character of man....How would you grade a boy, professor.....50, 75, 90 ....but wouldn't it be a good idea not to measure his contribution to the intelligence of America...until all the results are in—maybe five or ten years after graduation? When his record in character is not hung on the wall like a diploma but inside the man himself? (Bacon, L., Director, 1940)

The above scenario played out almost 100 years ago. Yet, what Knute Rockne addresses in that speech before the panel, the same or similar questions and criticisms about intercollegiate athletics have continued for several generations.

In the mid 1800s, sports on college campuses were informal affairs, similar to their British counterparts, and were organized by and for the students for diversion and recreation (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Universities then began efforts to “institutionalize” organized athletics as they did many other campus activities. Shulman and Bowen (2001) professed that “no other historical development in intercollegiate athletics has been as influential, or as subtle, as the progressive institutionalization of the athletic clubs that the students once ran” (p. 9).

The presidents of seven Midwestern schools met in Chicago in January of 1895 to form an organization that would gain some control over the growing controversy that was college athletics. The schools attending this meeting were the University of Illinois, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin, Purdue University, Northwestern University, University of Chicago, and Lake Forest College. They adopted a name, the Western Intercollegiate Conference, which later became the Big Ten Conference

(Thelin, 1994). This occurred during a time when contests were frequently broken up due to quarrels over savage playing methods or questions about players' eligibility, and when most institutions' athletic departments were on bad terms with each other. However, Thelin (1994) stated that establishing conferences as regulatory bodies did not necessarily reduce infractions. It meant that violations were cited and institutions were penalized. Whether it was an effective deterrent is unclear. This is an indication that something was awry very early within the athletics landscape.

In 1905, concerns about intercollegiate athletics arose from the Teddy Roosevelt White House, which was chiefly concerned about the brutality involved in college football. In perhaps what was a very early indication that sports was permeating the American culture, the president deemed it important that the American public should not know about his involvement since a president should be working on more important things (Miller, 2011). His involvement resulted in the establishment of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) in 1906, the immediate forerunner to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Miller, 2011).

In 1912, The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was established. To add to the early concerns about college football, it had also been speculated that the aggressive nature of many sports involving hard contact and playing when hurt may contribute to violence and aggressive behavior off the field (Zimbalist, 1999). True to that original founding ideal, the NCAA (2013) continues to state that it was established to protect student-athletes, and continues to implement that principle with increased emphasis on both athletics and academic excellence.

The 1929 Savage Report known as “Bulletin #23” was produced for the Carnegie Foundation (Savage, 1929). It expressed concern for commercialism in athletics, was particularly damning of the press and media, and deplored All-American team selections because it was considered “pre-professionalism” (Thelin, 1994, p. 25). Some hoped that this exposé on the state of intercollegiate athletics would send shockwaves of dismay through the ranks of college presidents and other officials, but the reactions were mixed at best. Thelin (1994) noted that Savage and others stated that revenues and attendance were down in the 2 years following the release of the Savage Report. Perhaps they decided to ignore that this coincided with the beginning of the Great Depression. It could be that not as many people could afford a ticket to a football game, hence the drop-off revenues and attendance (Thelin, 1994).

Almost 100 years later the complexities surrounding the status and image of intercollegiate athletics have greatly multiplied. In addition to the traditional problems faced in the last century, intercollegiate athletics has been inundated with cultural, legal, and financial issues that present unique challenges for university and college administrators as well as those who directly oversee college athletic programs. All of this tends to provide even more fodder for critics of college sports. Consider the most recent social, financial, and legal issues that have arisen just in 2014.

At the University of Missouri, senior defensive standout Michael Sam revealed that he was gay. This was a major revelation in collegiate athletics; particularly in a high visibility sport such as NCAA Division I football. While his teammates were aware of his sexual orientation prior to the beginning of the season; the timing of his announcement, just months before the National Football League (NFL) draft, sent shockwaves through

the media. Speculation on how NFL organizations and, more importantly, NFL players would receive this news ran rampant. It remains to be seen if the NFL will handle Michael Sam's sexual orientation as positively and respectfully as The University of Missouri and his college football teammates did (Branch, 2014).

On the heels of the Michael Sam bombshell came the news that a Division I men's college basketball player was going to play the upcoming college basketball season after publicly coming out as a gay man. In somewhat different fashion than Sam's case, Derrick Gordon of the University of Massachusetts has put his sexual orientation on display not only for his teammates, but for opponents, fans, and television spectators as well (Schonbrun, 2014). So far Gordon has received overwhelming support from around the globe. To its credit, the University of Massachusetts has refrained from exploiting this situation to their advantage. They do acknowledge that attendance and season ticket sales have increased over last year (Schonbrun, 2014).

In a landmark development on the Northwestern University campus in the spring of 2014, football players cast secret ballots on whether to form the nation's first union for college student-athletes (Greenstein, 2014). This highly symbolic gesture forced the NCAA and its member institutions to scramble for remedies, especially in terms of the legal and financial aspects that unionized college student-athletes would present. The Northwestern players were seeking better and extended medical benefits, guaranteed 4-year scholarships, and other compensation. Many experts fear that systematic unionization of college student-athletes, essentially making them employees, will forever change the relationship between a student-athlete and his or her university or college (Clotfelter, 2011; Gerdy, 2002, 2006; Emmert 2014).



The end of the summer in 2014 culminated in a court decision that had been brewing since 2009 (Feldman, 2014). The *O'Bannon v. NCAA* case was finally decided. This case decided that the NCAA must allow its member institutions to give some of the money they collect by licensing a student-athlete's name, image, or likeness to companies such as video game manufacturers or to the sporting goods industry. It also stipulates that the NCAA cannot cap the value of an athletic scholarship below the actual cost of attendance, which is typically a few thousand dollars more than current scholarships are worth. The NCAA fought the case on grounds of preserving the amateurism of intercollegiate athletics. The presiding judge exposed the NCAA for changing its definition of amateurism several times in the past to fit its needs. She noted that preserving a contrived idea is not a legitimate reason for violating antitrust laws (Feldman, 2014). The full effects of this court battle may take some time to be resolved; however, there is little question that NCAA Division I institutions may see rapid changes to the financial landscape surrounding their athletic programs.

The whirlwind of events taking shape in 2014 led to a rousing press conference in late July headed by Big 12 Conference commissioner Bob Bowlsby (Stankevitz, 2014). In statements that drew national attention, Bowlsby said, "I expect to be in court most of the rest of my career. I've been in entire meetings where we talk no sports." He also expressed concern for the future of Olympic sports that don't "have the advantage of an adoring public" (p. 6), and he believes may be sacrificed at the expense of compensating football and basketball athletes. Bowlsby finished by saying, "I am not entirely optimistic about the future because it is troubling" (Stankevitz, 2014, p. 7).

Clearly, American society has long been permeated by the powerful cultural forces exuded by both professional and intercollegiate sports (Clotfelter, 2011; Gerdy 2002). Over the last decade, a facet of this power has been revealed in the cascade of conference realignment scenarios that have taken place. Commercial and financial considerations have trumped other aspects, such as tradition and geography. Ironically, as a result of these conference realignments and affiliations, a new term was coined—the Power Five conferences (ACC, Big Ten, Big Twelve, Pac 12, and SEC). This name alone helps define the largesse of commercial aspects pervading the intercollegiate athletic landscape today. As will be discussed later, power and culture play significant roles in both the perceived and actual gaps between academia and intercollegiate athletics.

Finally, it seems clear that even after approximately 150 years of recognized intercollegiate athletics in America, a tenuous relationship remains between college athletics and higher education. There continues to be widespread criticism of both the ideology regarding intercollegiate athletics and the ways in which it is managed, with scrutiny on the NCAA down to the smaller college athletic programs.

This study focuses on identifying particular pieces of the puzzle, among them: institutional and athletic department missions, values and cultures, characteristics of student-athlete learning and development, student-athlete support services, and accountability. It also explores ways in which those pieces may be able to fit together to bridge the divide. Perhaps a study such as this will be able to highlight areas in which both athletic departments and the institutions themselves could concentrate to effectively address this puzzle. Significant research has demonstrated the value of out-of-class experiences on the learning and development of college students (Baxter Magolda, 1992,

1995; Kuh, 1993; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1996; Astin, 1999). Perhaps in this era of the student-centered learning environment, a heightened awareness on accountability and expectations for developing and assessing learning and development outcomes, the opportunity to finally fit these complex puzzle pieces together may emerge, providing a “master plan” for integrating intercollegiate athletics with the modern missions and visions of the American higher education system.

### **Statement of the Problem**

First, the problems related to intercollegiate athletics have long been debated. Now, probably more than in any periods of time before, intercollegiate athletic programs are being scrutinized. Not only does this scrutiny come from the media and the public but from within the walls of academe and government entities as well (Brand, 2001; Spellings, 2006).

Organizations accented with heavy academic influence, such as the Knight Foundation and the Drake Group, have been and continue to be major players in this scrutiny. The Knight Foundation convened the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics in 1989 to evaluate intercollegiate athletics within the realm of higher education and to put forth recommendations for reformation (Hesburgh & Friday, 1991). The NCAA respected this effort and actually implemented many of the reports’ recommendations, which were produced in 1991. The fact that the Knight Foundation task force was reconstituted in 2001 is further proof that some of the major problems concerning intercollegiate athletics continued. It is quite apparent that the criticisms and skepticisms surrounding college athletics for at least the past 100 years has not quieted.

The Drake Group, which was founded in 1999, claims many scholars cited in this study among the contributing members to their organization. It was established as a think tank for establishing integrity in intercollegiate athletics. Of this group, Murray Sperber has probably garnered the most notoriety, as he has published two books about college sports which have made the *Sports Illustrated* list of the Best 100 Books About Sports of All-Time (The Drake Group, 2013). Most recently, the Drake Group proposed replacing the NCAA with a federally chartered body to govern intercollegiate athletics (The Drake Group, 2015).

Second, this study explores the potential value of participation in intercollegiate athletics as a viable and integral out-of-class student learning and development endeavor. This is especially important from a qualitative standpoint because much of the research produced about the effectiveness of participation in intercollegiate athletics has been quantitative in nature.

If I were asked what the ideal intercollegiate athletic department today would look like, it would fit this description. First, the athletic department's mission, vision, and values statements should integrate with its institutional mission, vision, and core values. Second, the coaches and athletic department personnel must recognize, respect, and embrace their unique roles in the lives of their student-athletes. Third, the athletic department should have a sufficient student support services structure in place. Fourth, there is a process in place for systematic formal and informal student-athlete feedback and evaluation. Finally, a formal outcomes assessment program is in place to measure student-athlete learning and development.

Browne et al. (1995) surmised that “intercollegiate athletics is an integral part of American education and a microcosm of American society. Intercollegiate competition brings with it such distinctive problems as inordinate time demands as well as manifestations of larger social problems” (p. 73). Toma and Kezar (1999) argued that intercollegiate athletics plays a very important role in the life of the university, often evolving into a key point of reference to the institution for audiences outside of the academic community. Of course, the debate has carried on for decades, but with tight institutional budgets and public scrutiny ever intensifying, college administrations may be seeking ways to cut their losses. Perhaps athletic programs are easy targets for such cuts. This all solicits the question: How does the continued growth, profile, and emphasis on intercollegiate athletics affect the academic mission of higher education (Martin & Christy, 2010)? How can the important stakeholders—university presidents, faculty, athletic administrators, coaches, student-athletes, and alumni/boosters—strengthen this relationship in the future?

Scholars have researched the out-of-class experiences of undergraduate students (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Kuh, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003; Kuh & Whitt 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Pacarella, Terenzini & Blimling, 1996). Typically, they have found that the out-of-class opportunities provided to students are a valuable educational component. Out-of-class experiences can enrich the lives of undergraduate students and can lead to enhanced learning opportunities. Thus, research suggests that quality out-of-class programs at institutions of higher learning can be effective tools in the total or whole education of the undergraduate student. Hence, a component in the mission of higher education

institutions often emphasizes quality out-of-class opportunities. Typically, it is the quality and reputation of these types of programs that attract students who desire to be involved while in college (Kuh, 1993).

One component of the out-of-class experience portfolio is intercollegiate athletics. Its values have been often overlooked, as critics increasingly examine the negative aspects that can be attributed to athletics. Consider this line from a 1929 Knute Rockne after-dinner speech to Notre Dame alumni:

College directors in particular take a myopic view of the significance of football [and discriminate against] the brawny boy because he is not so strong on math. However, four years of football are calculated to breed in the average man more ingredients of the success of life than almost any academic course he takes. (Cited in Sperber, 1993, p. 305)

Preparing for success in life after college or after student-athletes are finished with their sport should be a major focus for modern day athletic department personnel (Bowen & Levin, 2003). Only 1.3 % of all men's basketball players and 1.6% of football student-athletes go on to careers in professional athletics (NCAA, 2012). Even fewer student-athletes from Olympic sports can expect careers in their respective sports, considering that few of these sports have professional leagues. Since a critical function of higher education is to prepare students for useful and productive careers, it behooves all those involved in the process to prepare college athletes for careers in something other than their respective collegiate sport. It is not only crucial for students to acquire skills and knowledge but also to develop competencies for applying those skills and knowledge in the context of their lives (Komives & Woodard, 2003; Smith & Rodgers, 2005).

Additionally, in the era of accountability and assessment of all programs relating to academia, there is a significant need for more formal and universally accepted criteria

for establishing learning and developmental outcomes of student-athletes and the assessment of those outcomes. Methods for measuring out-of-class learning and development should translate well to intercollegiate athletics professionals. If intercollegiate athletic programs were operated on the basis that intentional teaching and learning in the out-of-class laboratory are the expectation, perhaps athletic programs can become integral out-of-class educational delivery systems. Furthermore, research-based athletic programs that consistently deliver valuable out-of-class experiences may serve as templates for other athletic programs to follow. Ultimately, athletic departments may be able to establish a student-athlete “curriculum” whereby pedagogies, developmental programs, and best practices produce desired outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the impact of intercollegiate athletics on the student learning and development of college student-athletes. Thus, for the purposes of this study, intercollegiate athletics are considered to be purposeful out-of-class learning and development experiences. More specifically, the study seeks to explore perceptions of former student-athletes regarding how their experiences as student-athletes affected the processes of student learning and development.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the perceptions of former intercollegiate student-athletes regarding the extent to which participation in athletics affected their learning and development?
2. How do former student-athletes identify and describe the methods, techniques, or strategies that the athletic department employed that affected their student learning and development?

3. According to the student-athletes, who or what was most influential to their learning and development during their collegiate athletic career?
4. What can college athletic departments systematically incorporate to help integrate their educational mission with the institution?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework applied to this study is rooted in the out-of-class or co-curricular student learning and development research. Some of the scholarship published by Kuh et al. (2003, 2005) and Pascarella, Terenzini and Blimling (1996) provided guidance in developing the research questions investigated in this study. Kuh's establishment of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 1998 and later work with Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) have been useful for many academic and student affairs professionals. These initiatives have provided a plethora of data about the educationally related experiences and behaviors of college students, enabling institutions to establish benchmarks, make comparisons to other institutions, and analyze their strengths and weaknesses with regard to the services they provide for their students. Likewise, the findings of Pascarella, Terenzini and Blimling (1996)—that students experienced cognitive gains from out-of-class experiences and learning appears to be holistic—have had a profound impact on student affairs practitioners. This was of chief importance to the student affairs movement because it helped establish their relevance and role in influencing student learning and development. For this study, the notion that intercollegiate athletics could be developed as a more purposeful and powerful vehicle for student-athlete learning and development arose from the aforementioned research.



Another theoretical basis for this study revolves around Baxter Magolda's Epistemology Reflection Model (1992, 1999). Baxter Magolda (1992) conducted a 4-year longitudinal study that focused on how the out-of-class experiences of college students influenced their development. Baxter Magolda (1992) applied these categories of experience to her Epistemology Reflection Model, which describes four ways of knowing. These four ways of knowing are absolute, transitional, independent, and contextual learning. Generally, college-aged students will move through these stages in a progression-like pattern not unlike Chickering's and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of psychosocial development.

The Epistemology Reflection Model portrays personal epistemology as socially constructed and context-bound. People actively *make meaning* of their experience. They interpret what happens to them, evaluate it using their current perspective, and draw conclusions about what the experiences mean to them (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

In the second tier of the study, Baxter Magolda (1995) interviewed college graduates over a 3-year period after they had graduated. The contextual way of knowing, the last stage in this model, more fully develops post-college. Finally, it is the contextual way of knowing that will be central to this research study, since the study participants are post-college and are reflecting on their experiences. I am exploring the perceptions and reflections of post-college student-athletes.

This framework also provided a lens to help present the literature review. For instance, literature that examined college student-athletes and/ or intercollegiate athletics may be considered more relevant to this study if the aforementioned authors and theoretical perspectives were referenced in the publication. In this way the theoretical

framework helped in vetting the literature to be considered for a more comprehensive review.

Lastly, the review of earlier out-of-class learning and development studies, as well as studies involving student-athletes, helped provide some guidance in shaping the qualitative research methods and interview strategies that were utilized in this study.

### **Important Terms**

*Intercollegiate athletics* refers to an institutionally-sponsored program in which sport teams and individuals compete against varsity teams and individuals from other institutions.

*Olympic sports or non-revenue sports* are commonly referred in this study and the definitions are interchangeable. The NCAA and many institutional athletic departments use the term “Olympic sports” more often, while many of the research studies identify with the term “non revenue sports.” These sports almost solely depend on revenues derived from revenue sports at a given institution, because these sports do not produce self-sustaining funding.

*Out-of-class experiences* are those experiences that college students collect outside of the purely academic realm that contribute to several aspects of student learning and personal development, such as involvement in student clubs and organizations, institutional governance, residential living, volunteerism, and on-campus employment (Kuh, 1993).

*Power Five Conferences* refers to the NCAA Division I member institutions from the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Southeastern Conference (SEC), Pacific 12 (Pac-12), Big Ten Conference, and Big Twelve Conference, which form a very powerful

economic and political bloc among the NCAA constituency.

*Revenue sports* are almost exclusively NCAA Division I football and men's basketball, because these programs produce revenue which helps support the other sponsored intercollegiate sports at a given institution.

*Student-athlete* is a college student who participates in an institution's varsity sports program. Students receiving scholarships for athletic participation and non scholarship students are both classified as student-athletes.

*Student-at-large* refers to any student or a population of students who are not members of a varsity athletic team.

### **Scope of the Study**

This research project hinges on the notion that there is considerable debate ongoing about the educational worthiness of intercollegiate athletics in the United States. The expectation is that the former student-athletes who are interviewed will espouse honest and genuine feedback regarding their experiences as student-athletes and that this feedback will provide for a deeper or richer meaning about their experiences as student-athletes. However, a delimitation of this study is that many of the participants in the study have matured considerably since their time spent in college, which may or may not have an effect on their perceptions regarding the impact of their past experiences.

The sample included 19 interview participants. Participant diversity in terms of institutional competition level and sport(s) played was considered. Some of the research participants had, at the least, careers or side careers in scholastic, intercollegiate, and/or professional athletics. It should also be noted that I have a pointed interest in this type of research, and potential bias is certainly a by-product of this type of research, which must

be carefully considered. The interview itself as a qualitative process has some important considerations, including: (a) providing information filtered through the lens of the participant, (b) the researcher's presence which may bias responses and, (c) and that human subjects are not equally perceptive or articulate (Creswell, 2003). Triangulation of the data was difficult to achieve for this study. I did not have the opportunity to use multiple investigators and multiple sources of data other than the review of current institutional general and athletic websites. Thus, the utilization of member checking and peer examination were the only methods I employed to address trustworthiness and authenticity.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study centers on the concept that intercollegiate athletics as an out-of-class experience warrants exploration. The study provides in-depth insight on the perceived values of intercollegiate athletics as an out-of-class teaching and learning experience. The study also seeks to shed some light on the attributable gains in student-athlete student development and learning, according to former student-athletes.

Furthermore, the study may help provide some building blocks for structuring athletic department programs with the basis for formal assessments and evaluation efforts in the holistic development of student-athletes. In the future, college administrative leaders, athletic directors, and coaches could consider studies like this to reflect on their institutional missions and the role of intercollegiate athletics within that mission. As Schuh (2009) notes, the future of assessment will involve the increased use of institutional databases and the increased use of comparative data and data exchanges among institutions. Perhaps this will help provide an avenue for scholarship in building

outcomes and assessment structures for intercollegiate athletic programs.

### **Summary**

The overall impetus of this research study is to provide a contribution to the qualitative research body of knowledge regarding intercollegiate student-athlete learning and development. Chapter I presented a statement of the problem, a purpose for the study, research questions, the theoretical framework, the significance of the study, and the definitions related to the study. Chapter II will provide an overview of the scholarly and professional literature related to intercollegiate athletics and the college student-athlete.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

The majority of research about student-athletes centers on academic or in-class learning outcomes. Far less research appears to exist on out-of-class learning experiences related to participation in intercollegiate athletics. Much of the previous research on student-athletes has been quantitative in nature.

There is a dearth of qualitative research on the student development and learning outcomes of student-athletes and the experiences of student-athletes. Instead, existing research is mainly survey-based quantitative data. Umbach et al. (2006) conclude that it is surprising there is so little evidence at the national level about student-athlete behaviors as compared to other students on college campus. Future research in this area may produce some important data that could be utilized by institutions of higher learning, intercollegiate athletic governing bodies, and others who have interests and concerns about the future of college athletics. Furthermore, there is a substantial opportunity to establish a culture of learning outcomes assessment in intercollegiate athletic departments. Very little systematic assessment is being done from NCAA Division I on down to NJCAA community college programs (Hagedorn & Horton, 2009). The development of assessment models for athletic departments possesses great potential for further study.

This chapter provides an overview of research and scholarly work relevant to this study. First, critical perspectives from relevant authors are presented. Then, the theoretical framework for this is presented with perspective to student development theories and research published on out-of-class learning experiences of college students. Finally, research literature pertaining more specifically to student-athlete characteristics and intercollegiate athletic culture, values, and leadership is presented and discussed.

### **Critical Perspective**

For several decades, critics of intercollegiate athletics have railed against the focus and the purpose of college athletic programs (Sperber, 1990, 2000; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Bowen & Levin, 2003). They argue that athletics programs are only businesses, often big businesses; therefore, they could not possibly be part of a mission of a non-profit organization such as an institution of higher learning. Sperber (1990) debunked the myth that college sports are part of the educational mission of American colleges and universities stating,

The main purpose of college sports is commercial entertainment...the athletic department operates as separate business and has almost no connection to the educational departments and functions of the school....The reason elite athletes are in universities has nothing to do with the educational missions of their schools....Athletes are the only group of students recruited for entertainment—not academic—purposes, and are the only students who go through school on grants based not on educational aptitude, but on their talent and potential as commercial entertainers. (p. 1)

Sperber's 1990 book *College Inc.* served as a precursor to the Knight Foundation Report released in 1991. In it he made several broad generalizations about college athletic programs and the function and purpose of the student-athletes. He also argued that the origins of the sports of football and basketball on college campuses are an anomaly of

American history,

That intercollegiate football and basketball began before the professional versions of those games and excluded viable minor leagues in those sports—has created a situation that is unknown and unthinkable in other countries: To become a major league player in a number of sports, an athlete must pass through an institution of higher learning...compounding the problem, American schools now take on the training of young athletes...particularly baseball and hockey, for which there are excellent minor professional leagues, as well as Olympic sport athletes for which there is a strong club system. (p. 7)

As such, the contention is that big-time collegiate sports is nothing more than an extensive minor league professional sports platform for the major professional sports leagues in America. It is free enterprise for the professional leagues but a vastly expensive undertaking for institutions of higher education.

Another area of concern for critics of intercollegiate athletics is the perception of the decline of the amateur spirit in college sports. In fact, the NCAA was created in 1905 in part because of concerns over the deteriorating status of amateurism (Thelin, 1994). It appears there may have never been a period of time, unless brief, when the romanticizations about the “olden days” when college athletes participated merely for the love of sports; and spectators enjoyed the pure theatre on the playing fields. Sack and Staurowsky (1998) claimed that the athletic scholarship or grant-in-aid represents an employment contract. Thus, they assert, college athletes are hired and sometimes fired. This concept can create many problems for athletic departments. These authors directly blame the NCAA for creating a set of rules that make student-athletes university employees. Sack and Staurowsky (1998) further argued that the method for awarding athletic scholarships is flawed “because these grants are unrelated to a recipients’ financial need, money is sometimes being spent to subsidize athletes who could afford to



pay their own way” (p. 91). Athletic scholarships have turned out as failed academic policy. Students, who are recruited and “paid” to attend college primarily because of their athletic abilities, may not have the motivation or the aptitude to perform college academic work. The second problem is that the athletic scholarship allows their coach an inordinate level of control over the lives of the athletes (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).

In reality, when their book is taken in full context, Sack and Staurowsky (1998) are not concerned with intercollegiate athletics as a viable enterprise of higher education institutions. As former scholarship student-athletes themselves, they are deeply concerned with the concept of collegiate amateurism and the mismanagement of this concept from the NCAA down to individual athletic departments.

Another criticism of intercollegiate athletics involves the student-athletes themselves. Critics might call student-athletes pampered, marginal students, behaviorally challenged, and even criminal. Pinar (2003) approached the collegiate athletic scene with the following solution:

For the sake of women, gay men and exploited racial minorities, big-time college sports should be sharply restricted, if not ended altogether. The model of athletics supported by colleges and universities should shift...to an intramural model in which students may elect to enjoy ‘sport’ under careful supervision that emphasizes...movement and exercise. (p. 89)

The criticisms described here are a glimpse of the array of factors that help shape a negative view of intercollegiate athletics shared by some academics, media, and public officials. Together these criticisms created a climate of change in reform in intercollegiate athletics.

### Reform Efforts

Organizations such as The Knight Foundation and The Drake Group have formalized the approach to reformation efforts. The Knight Foundation has been instrumental in advocating for more stringent academic requirements, running the gamut from initial freshman eligibility to minimum graduation rates for Division I member institutions (Hesburgh & Friday, 1991). While not all that ails college sports has been fixed, the academic performance measures of student-athletes and graduation rates for them have been scrutinized like never before. Actually, graduation rates for NCAA male and female athletes have been on a steady climb (NCAA, 2012).

Sperber wrote another book in 2000 titled *Beer and Circus*. As a follow-up to his earlier critiques on college sports, Sperber took the position of linking big-time intercollegiate athletics with the crippling of undergraduate education. He combines everything from the Greek system, tailgate parties at sporting events, huge undergraduate courses taught by teaching assistants, academic dishonesty, and admissions office scams into a complex conglomerate that has a direct or indirect influence on undergraduate education. Sperber (2000) concluded by asking if the neglect of general undergraduate education can end and genuine reform take place in big-time intercollegiate athletics. He answers his own questions with another: “Are Big-time U’s willing to alter their values and internal cultures in order to change, and will College Sports MegaInc. be capable of downsizing and allowing the majority of athletes to gain meaningful educations?” (p. 262).

In the subsequent years to *Beer and Circus*, it is apparent that there has been no such paradigm shift among institutions sponsoring big-time athletics. Much of the culture

and many of the internal values have remained steadfast.

Much of the criticism surrounding intercollegiate athletics focused on the academic performance of the general student-athlete population. A growing body of reports indicates that the collective academic performances of student-athletes are much stronger than once thought. The NCAA (2012) reported that men's basketball and FBS (football bowl series) football graduation rates are the highest ever. Graduation rates for Division I men's basketball climbed to 74%, up six points from last year, while graduation rates for FBS football hit 70%, up one point. In fact, the last four graduating classes of NCAA Division I student-athletes (2002-2005) remains at 80%, an all-time high for the NCAA. This is unquestionably attributed to the reform efforts that have focused on both higher academic standards for incoming freshmen student-athletes and sanctions that can be imposed on institutions that do not meet minimum NCAA graduation rates.

Furthermore, other "gaps" between student-athletes and non-student-athletes have closed. Umbach et al. (2006) compared student-athletes with non-athletes in terms of their engagement in effective educational practices. This quantitative study found that

student-athletes are at least as engaged overall, and in some areas are more engaged, compared with their non athlete peers. In addition, student-athletes report that they perceived their campus environment to be more supportive of their academic and social needs, and they report making greater gains since starting college in several areas. (p. 725)

Shulman and Bowen (2001) are economists who authored the book, *The Game of Life*. This book is based on empirical data gathered from three cohorts of athletes at highly selective and selective universities and colleges. The cohort years were 1951, 1976, and 1989. This dataset produced conclusions, some of which were positive in

relation to intercollegiate athletics and some of which are areas of concern. Shulman and Bowen (2001) reported that student-athletes earned more income on a yearly basis after college than their student-at-large counterparts, especially for males. The authors found that female student-athletes obtained significantly more graduate and professional degrees than did the female student-at-large population. In the area of alumni donations, former student-athletes give back at higher frequencies than the students-at-large; however this fact only applies to athletes from non-revenue or “low profile” sports. Certainly, Shulman and Bowman uncover several disturbing findings and trends in the empirical data. They were particularly concerned with a pattern of admissions practices (differing criteria) regarding student-athletes, even at highly selective institutions. They also concluded that student-athletes spend an inordinate amount of time pursuing athletic endeavors at the expense of engaging in effective educational practices.

In terms of connectedness, universities and colleges are in a constant struggle to develop and maintain relationships with alumni. Strong alumni relationships and networks open revenue streams for the fundraising and the endowment arm of the institutions. Adler and Adler (1988) found that being a member of a collegiate athletic team can elicit a very strong sense of loyalty. This type of loyalty is different from that found in most other organizations. The advantages presented by the formulation of this type of organizational loyalty may serve dual purposes. Student-athletes are likely to continue their association to the school, particular program, coaches, and teammates for several years. It may present networking and employment opportunities for them in the future. The institution remains in a beneficial financial position because former athletes will donate to the foundation, will spend money by attending athletic events and other

school functions, and may strongly encourage their offspring to attend the school that they attended. It is similar to military loyalty, in which many generations of a family will often commit to military service due to an intense feeling of loyalty towards that institution (Adler & Adler, 1988).

Clotfelter (2011), Duderstadt (2000), and Gerdy (1997, 2002) strongly suggest that intercollegiate athletic programs can contribute to the mission of an institution of higher learning in meaningful ways that reach beyond their roles in providing entertainment and revenue. He acknowledges that the athletic community has lost sight of the primary purpose of athletics as an educational realm. Gerdy (1997, 2002) identifies and develops three fundamental principles for the intercollegiate athletics establishment to embrace: First, intercollegiate athletics is foremost about the student-athlete; second, that coaches and administrators are, above all else, teachers and educators; and third, that athletics is a part of, not apart from, the institution of higher education. This research study explores these three critical aspects of intercollegiate athletics in depth.

Some of the discussion, skepticism, and criticism involving the current environment enveloping intercollegiate athletics could be framed within the student affairs and student development aspects of higher education realm. Perhaps, some of the current problems could be addressed and remedied within this particular professional discipline.

### **The Student Affairs Perspective**

Student learning is no longer the sole domain of academic units (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004). A major theme of this study centers on the out-of-class experiences of college student-athletes; therefore, it is necessary to consider some perspective

regarding the student affairs profession. Most of the out-of-class experiences afforded college students are administered by student affairs professionals who have the background and expertise in helping to guide and shape a student learning-centered environment.

*Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs* (ACPA & NASPA, 1997)

provided a roadmap by offering “unambiguous advice on the post product investment of time, energy, and resources of student affairs” (Whitt & Blimling as cited in Barr, Desler, & Associates, 2000, p. 614). *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* intentionally mirrors Chickering and Gamson’s (1991) work in identifying good practices in undergraduate education and was designed to be integrated into daily practice (ACPA & NASPA, 1997). Good practice for student affairs include:

1. Engaging students in active learning.
2. Helping students develop coherent values and ethical standards.
3. Setting and communicating high expectations for student learning.
4. Using systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance.
5. Using resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals.
6. Forging educational partnerships that advance student learning.
7. Building supportive and inclusive communities. (ACPA & NASPA, 1997, p. 1)

Weight, Navarro, Huffman, and Smith-Ryan (2014) explored the idea of holistic student learning in a development approach related to student-athletes. Measuring psychological outcomes such as self-discipline, teamwork, leadership and self-esteem, they found mixed results, some confirming and some refuting Astin’s (1999) *Theory of Student Involvement*. They concluded that practitioners must determine the structure and delivery of programs to cultivate benefits from intercollegiate athletics, since mere participation does not lead to universal holistic development.

The need for assessment within student affairs began to gain momentum in the 1980s with works such as *Serving More Than Students: A Critical Need for College Student Personnel Services* (Garland, 1985). Garland called student affairs professionals to: (a) assess the environment of the institution; (b) become experts on students' expectations, needs, and interests and be able to articulate them to others in the institution; (c) contribute to the quality of the academic experience; and (d) be able to explain the goals of students affairs to others in the institution in terms that are meaningful to them (as cited in Schroeder & Pike, 2001, p. 345).

One of the most forceful pieces spurring the assessment movement came from *A New Paradigm for Understanding Education* by Robert Barr and John Tagg (1995). In this article, the authors describe a paradigm shift from the traditional instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm. They argue that the learning paradigm offers an alternative lens in which to view learning and the production of learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Although Barr and Tagg were addressing primarily the academic community in their article, the elements of their paradigm included ideas embedded in student affairs for almost a century such as focus on learning and student-success outcomes, "student centered" holistic learning, and learning environments as cooperative, collaborative, and supportive (Barr & Tagg, 1995, pp. 16-17).

Similar to their faculty colleagues, student affairs professionals joined the student learning assessment movement by employing assessment practices that required educating professionals in the development and implementation of assessment systems and processes. Schuh and Upcraft's two volumes, *Assessment in Student Affairs* (1996) and *Assessment Practice in Student Affairs* (2001), offered both experienced and novice

assessment practitioners a plethora of processes and examples on which to base local assessment projects. The authors describe their second effort as, “this book is an attempt to continue the dialogue about assessment in student affairs and provide practitioners with even more practical tools to develop, and in many cases, conduct assessments” (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001, p. xii).

### **Out-of-Class Learning**

The main focus of this research study is to examine the impact of intercollegiate athletics on the student learning and development of college student-athletes from their perspective. Thus, for the purposes of this study, intercollegiate athletics are considered to be purposeful out-of- class learning and development experiences. According to Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007), “Creating the conditions that foster student success in college has never been more important” (p. 1). Expounding upon that view, in general, the ability to develop as flexible thinkers is a hallmark of learning in college and is developed both in and out of the classroom (Berger, 2010). As such, foundational work by Astin (1999), Baxter Magolda (1992, 1995), Kuh (1993), Kuh, Palmer, & Kish (2003), Kuh and associates (2005), and Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling (1996), among others, is presented in the following section.

Astin’s (1999) Theory of Involvement is a cornerstone used in much of the more recent research into student involvement and student engagement. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects within the campus environment. The objects may be generalized (the overall student experience) or very specific (preparing for a final exam in biology) (Astin, 1999). This theory also is based on these postulates:



1. Involvement occurs on a continuum, as students display different levels of involvement at different times.
2. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.
3. Both quantity and quality of involvement are important to student learning and development.
4. The effectiveness of the educational experiences is directly related practice or policy of increasing student involvement.

In essence, involvement encompasses a wide variety of experiences from the in-class and academic interactions to extracurricular activities and living on campus and working on campus (Skipper, 2005).

Baxter Magolda (1992) conducted a 4-year longitudinal study that focused on how the out-of-class experience of college students influenced their development. First-year students were randomly selected for the study, which was conducted at a public Midwestern university. Participants were interviewed in the fall of each year. The out-of-class or co-curricular categories were defined as organizational involvement, peer relationships, living arrangements, employment and internship experiences, international experiences, personal changes, and decision-making. Baxter Magolda (1992) applied these categories of experience to her Epistemology Reflection Model, which describes four ways of knowing: absolute, transitional, independent, and contextual learning. Of particular interest to this study is the concept of contextual learning as it relates to student-athletes.

Generally, college-aged students will move through these stages in a progression-like pattern not unlike Chickering's and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of psychosocial

development. In these vectors, Chickering and Reisser liken the vectors to a journey that a typical college student might take. They describe it as a progression in the following: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy towards interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity. These authors note this is not necessarily a lock-step progression and that individuals may be moving along pathways simultaneously (from Skipper, 2005).

In the second tier of the study, Baxter Magolda (1995) interviewed college graduates over a 3-year period after they had graduated. The contextual way of knowing, the last stage in this model, more fully develops post-college. Finally, it is the contextual way of knowing that is central to this research study since the study participants are post-college and are reflecting on their experiences in a more contextual way of knowing. In essence, is there evidence that former student-athletes have utilized their learning and development experiences (while in college) for developing life skills in post-college applications?

Pascarella, Terenzini, and Blimling (1996) compiled findings on a body of research on out-of-class experiences. They studied learning on a variety of academic and cognitive gains and discovered these gains on such variables as residence hall habitation, fraternity and sorority affiliation, participation in intercollegiate athletics and other co-curricular activities, on- and off-campus employment, and faculty and peer interactions. This meta-analysis approach produced mixed results for determining the direct effect of out-of-class experiences on cognitive development, particularly when focused on single experiences. This confirmed their belief that this type of learning is holistic in nature.

Pascarella, Terenzini, and Blimling (1996) identified the following conclusions as a result of their work:

1. Students' out-of-class experiences appear much more influential in their academic and intellectual development than many faculty members and administrators realize.
2. Not all out-of-class activities provide a positive influence on student learning.
3. Student affairs programs may not be capitalizing on the potential of out-of-class experiences to enhance student learning.
4. Active student involvement in out-of-class experiences appears to be critical to fostering or enhancing academic and cognitive learning.
5. The most impactful influence on student learning appears to be student interaction with peers, faculty and staff.
6. The effects of student out-of-class learning experiences are most likely cumulative rather than catalytic. (pp. 157-159)

These conclusions could help intercollegiate athletic personnel in guiding the future directions of their athletic programs by providing foundational building blocks for a holistic approach to the student-athlete learning experience. Integrating faculty, student affairs professionals, and athletic personnel towards this endeavor may expedite student-athlete learning and developmental gains.

Another body of knowledge that contributes to out-of-class learning experiences explores institutional conditions and campus ethos. Kuh (1993) researched the out-of-class experiences of college students. His data resulted in the taxonomy of 14 categories of learning and personal development, in order of frequency mentioned; they were: social competence, reflective thought, altruism, autonomy, confidence, knowledge acquisition, practical competence, self-awareness, sense of purpose, academic skills, knowledge application, vocational competence, "other," and aesthetic appreciation. Participating in intercollegiate athletics was considered a legitimate out-of-class experience in this study. This study's findings identified practices that describe colleges that emphasized

institutional missions and philosophies and campus culture, which are two key areas that will be addressed later in this chapter.

Kuh, Palmer, and Kish (2003) identified several out-of-class and co-curricular experiences that lead to psychosocial growth and development, such as inclusion in a learning community, participating in service learning and volunteerism, and being exposed to diversity issues. Such activities and experiences can increase interpersonal and intrapersonal competence. They acknowledge not all out-of-class experiences are created equal. An acknowledgement such as this could open the door for the possibility to expound on the potential of intercollegiate athletics as an important out-of-class experience. Experiences such as learning communities, service learning, and exposure to diverse populations are strategies that should be utilized by athletic department support services (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001).

Kuh and associates (2005) published *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*. The publication is an offshoot of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) research on student engagement drawing upon interviews and conversations with various professionals in higher education through Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice). The purpose of this qualitative case study was “to discover and document the policies, programs, and practices at these [participant] institutions as well as related factor sand conditions that were associated with student success” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 327). The 20 institutions that participated in this study were selected as “model” institutions that had participated in the NSSE between 2000 and 2002. From the pool of NSSE participating institutions, the ones selected represented those with both “higher-than-predicted student engagement results and higher-than-

predicted 6-year graduation rates” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 329). Data were collected over an 18-month period with two rounds of site visits to the 20 institutions that involved interviews, document reviews, and observation at numerous campus events. The research team talked to over 2,700 people including 1,300 students, 750 faculty, and 650 others, including student affairs professionals.

The analysis of such a massive stockpile of data allowed the researchers to recommend a set of guiding principles that institutions might set in motion for promoting student success on their campuses. The guiding principles were grouped into three categories: (a) tried and true (such as an institutional mission of enhancing student development), (b) sleepers (such as problems/challenges that could be converted into opportunities), and (d) fresh ideas (students flourish when their prior learning is valued and their preferred learning styles are recognized) (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 265). However, caution that just offering a portion of the guiding principles does not guarantee student success (Kuh et al., 2005).

Another immense quantitative body of research on the college student experience emanates from the work of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey represents the oldest, most diverse and expansive capture of student educational experiences to date and includes over 15 million student responses from 1900 institutions and data from over 300,000 faculty (HERI, 2013). Other surveys in this HERI group include *Your First College Year (YFCY)*, and *College Senior Year* survey.

The strengths of the CIRP longitudinal study include capturing each year that details aggregate data as well as identifying trends in higher education. As mentioned

above, the CIRP surveys focus on a more diverse perspective than other surveys mentioned in this study. Much of the work has been focused on understanding the college experience of unrepresented students with a focal point on Latino and African-American students. The HERI is also associated with the Diverse Democracy Project. This research project explores how colleges and universities prepare students to live and work in an ethnically diverse world. The aims of the project include:

- How colleges are creating diverse learning environments and are actively preparing students to live and work in an increasingly complex and diverse democracy;
- The role of the diverse peer group in the acquisition of important cognitive, social, and democratic outcomes both inside and outside of classroom environments;
- Student outcomes that can be best achieved through specific kinds of initiatives designed to increase student engagement with diverse perspectives. (The Regents of the University of Michigan, 2003)

This type of research focus is of particular interest due to some of the inherent characteristics of intercollegiate athletics. In fact, the makeup of most college athletic teams offer diverse peer groups (including coaches and support staff), when taking into account the ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic status of its members. Thus, participation in intercollegiate athletics can enhance out-of-class learning in the humanitarian and global perspectives.

### **Characteristics of Student-Athletes**

Intercollegiate athletics plays a prominent role in the co-curricular aspect of almost every American institution of higher learning (with the obvious exception being the relatively few colleges that do not offer varsity athletics). The large NCAA Division I programs include a number of other extracurricular programs related to athletics, such as the marching band, pep bands, cheerleading squads, dance teams and student booster

clubs. Many smaller liberal arts schools also field junior varsity teams and club sports teams that feed into their varsity sports programs.

A compilation of research has shown that college student participation in certain types of educational activities positively affect learning and development (Astin, 1993; Kuh and others, 1991; Kuh, et al. 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 1995, Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison & Hagedorn, 1999) Among these effective educational practices are faculty-student contact, peer interactions, experiences with diversity, and co-curricular activities. On balance, it appears that student-athletes, including those participating in the high-profile sports football, and men's and women's basketball, participate as often or more often as their non-athlete peers in effective educational practices (Kuh et al., 2007). These findings are in contrast to the findings reported at the highly selective 4-year colleges (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001) which conclude that student-athletes in the cohorts they studied did not realize gains at the levels of students at large at the respective institutions who participated in other extracurricular activities. Kuh et al. (2007) also report that compared with other seniors, senior student-athletes are more likely to participate in community service projects, culminating senior experiences and foreign language courses.

Bowen and Levin (2003) found that student-athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics spend more than twice as much time on their sport than even the most time-intensive of other extracurricular activities. Martin (2009) stated that it is important that student-athletes are encouraged by their coaches and athletic administrators to pursue interests outside of their sport. This complicates the situation, since student-athletes in both revenue sports and non-revenue sports dedicate so much

time on their respective sport.

Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) noted that previous research on student-athletes and their college experience had produced mixed or inconclusive results. Their study compared the engagement of student-athletes in effective educational practices with that of their non-athlete counterparts. The study used a national sample of undergraduates and the research questions were derived from the underpinnings of student engagement theories. More specifically, the authors compared the educational experiences of student-athletes and non-athletes. They also wanted to know if the experiences vary significantly by the institution attended. Finally, they examined the relationship between the level of competition (NCAA Division I, II, III, NAIA) and engagement in good practices in undergraduate education, perceptions of the campus environment, and self-reported gains.

The study used data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to compare the collegiate experiences of student-athletes with their non-athlete peers. The authors assert that this study on student-athletes is not limited to a small sample size of student-athletes or institutions as many previous research studies conducted on the topic, as the sample size in this study was over 57,000 undergraduate students ranging from 395 4-year institutions.

The findings of this study revealed that student-athletes are at least as engaged overall, and in some areas more engaged, compared with their non-athlete peers. Athletes perceived their campus environments to be more supportive of their academic and social needs, and they reported greater gains since starting college in several areas. Of special note are the results, which indicate that the impact of being a student-athlete, on average,



is the same across all institutions. However, interpreting institutional effects and athlete status is more complicated when average institutional engagement, campus support, and self-reported gains are considered. The experiences of student-athletes appear to differ only slightly from their non-athlete peers, even across athletic divisions. Umbach et al. (2006) conclude that because all students at Division III schools are, on average, more engaged, feel more supported, and report greater gains than their peers at other types of institutions, athletes at Division III schools would be more engaged than students at other types of institutions. Essentially, though, student-athletes walk nearly the same path along the learning and development journey as other students do.

Engagement has a positive and significant impact on a set of college outcomes for student-athletes, which suggests that athletes can benefit from increased engagement activities in ways very similar to the non athlete population (Hu & Kuh, 2003).

One more variable that researchers have shown to be correlated with student engagement is student satisfaction with their institution (Astin, 1993). In the category of student satisfaction, Astin has reported that student-athletes are often more satisfied with the institution than their non-athlete peers. Furthermore, Astin's research suggests that combining athletic participation with academic progress and social acclimatization would lead to a more successful college experience for the student overall (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001).

Toma and Kramer (2009) note the lack of studies examining student-athletes' time spent outside of their sport participation, and how such experiences influence their learning and personal development, as well as their satisfaction with their college experience overall, as opposed to their satisfaction with their athletic experiences.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) recognized that there is considerable literature on student engagement but very little on student-athlete engagement and how it influences cognitive and affective outcomes. Inputs are presumed to shape outcomes indirectly by the ways in which students interact with the multifaceted institutional environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)

Athletic departments should be intentional about engaging student-athletes in activities that lead to desired outcomes. Departments may do this by enhancing services provided to student-athletes by building in mechanisms whereas student-athletes can interact more with general students. Such experiences have been shown to lead to desired cognitive and affective outcomes for both low- and high-profile student-athletes (Toma & Kramer, 2009). Taking this one step further, research should be conducted to identify the specific interaction mechanisms that are most effective, whether it be athletes residing with non-athletes, studying with non-athletes, or other types of interactions with non-athletes. It appears also that interracial interactions within intercollegiate athletics provide additional social and educational benefits to student-athletes (Toma & Kramer, 2009).

As discussed before, significant research has revealed the impact of participation in college athletics on those participants. Bonfiglio (2011), Gayles & Hu (2009), Howard-Hamilton & Sina (2001); Umbach, Palmer, and Kuh, & Hannah (2006) reflect on the growing body of research on the impact of participation in intercollegiate athletics on the psychological and cognitive growth and development of student-athletes. They note that such studies have produced mixed results. Many of these authors refer to the psychosocial theories of Chickering (1969) and Chickering and Reisser (1993). The manner in which these theories may be presented in student-athletes in both positive and

negative ways is explained and specific examples unique to student-athletes are outlined. The authors suggest that student affairs administrators and others working with student-athletes should link the concepts from student development theories and models and the results of research studies with institutional policies.

Le Crom, Warren, Clark, Marolla, and Gerber (2009) found that scholarship support for student-athletes (on tuition, room, and board waivers) alone is not a significant predictor for student retention. In contrast, in many retention studies involving the general student population, financial aid has been identified as a significant predictor of retention (St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000). Identifying other factors correlating to student-athlete retention and then designing and implementing interventions may help remedy the situation. Le Crom et al. (2009) identified factors such as athlete relationships with peers and coaches as attrition factors. Taking steps to improve social interactions with peers/teammates and coaching staffs may enhance the student learning and development environment.

### **Student-Athlete Support Services**

College student-athletes are typically considered a special student population with a unique set of characteristics and corresponding needs. As discussed earlier, the emergence of the student-centered learning paradigm should apply to any co-curricular endeavor including intercollegiate athletics. Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) shed light on student-athlete support programs that can have an impact on student engagement, academic achievement, and self-gain. These authors acknowledge the importance of commitment to the personal development of student-athletes. In addressing the management and subsequent assessment of such a program, the involvement of coaches,

sports medicine personnel, and athletic administrative personnel in the programmatic and evaluative process is stressed. The NCAA requires all institutions to conduct exit interviews with a sample of student-athletes (as determined by the institution) whose eligibility has expired. These interviews can be conducted by the institution's athletic director, senior woman administrator or designated representatives (excluding coaching staff members). Interviews shall include questions regarding the value of the students' athletics experiences, the extent of the athletics time demands encountered by the student-athletes, proposed changes in intercollegiate athletics and concerns related to the administration of the student-athletes' respective sports (NCAA Division I Manual, 2014). When used constructively, the data collected could serve to facilitate improvement for student-athlete support. On a final note, the authors stress that sufficient staffing and budget are necessary to provide high quality student-athlete support programs. One possibility is for the athletic department to develop relationships within the university or college community. As will be discussed later, issues such as values and culture and how they relate to a particular institution's mission can help to fill the gap between athletic departments and the rest of the internal stakeholders.

Furthermore, research has stressed that is imperative that the on-campus student affairs community is engaged in the lives of student-athletes because they are the experts charged with helping to facilitate the development of all students. In other words, a holistic approach to dealing with student-athletes is advised much as the same with their non student-athlete peers (Toma & Cross 2000). Expounding on this, Martin (2009) warned that depending solely on the resources and services provided by an athletic department can be detrimental to the holistic growth of student-athletes.

Broughton and Neyer (2001) discuss a proactive advising and counseling model for college student-athletes. They note that the unique circumstances surrounding the student-athlete population results in approximately 10% of that population requiring serious counseling intervention. The authors recommend a counseling model for the student-athletes that focuses on life skills development as opposed to the more traditional academic counseling model. The psychosocial development principles of Chickering and Reisser (1993) emerge as the foundation of the counseling model, mixed with cognitive development strategies. The authors suggest further that a full-time mental health counselor be appointed to administer comprehensive student-athlete counseling and advising at institutions with large athletic programs.

Hill, Burch-Ragan, and Yates (2001) provide some recommendations for student affairs professionals to help student-athletes develop the skills necessary to succeed in the college environment. Among them are to develop an understanding of college athletics and student-athletes, provide for campus-wide leadership in this endeavor, develop, cross-functional teams and interdisciplinary approaches to assist student-athletes, conduct systemic inquiry regarding student-athletes, translate knowledge about student-athletes to the media and public, and implement a strategy for responding to rapidly changing technology and information systems (Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001).

What seems counter to some of these recommendations is the formal position taken by The Drake Group. The Drake Group is comprised of a group of scholars that advocate for academic integrity and reforms in intercollegiate athletics. It states that institutions should require the location of academic counseling and support services for athletes be the same as for all students, and require its direct supervision under the

institution's academic authority (The Drake Group, 2012).

The notion that intercollegiate student-athletes are a special student population has been introduced before. Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) recognized student-athletes as a diverse special population because of their roles on campus, atypical lifestyles and their special needs. They must deal with public scrutiny and extensive time demands. Because of these factors, student-athletes require effective student support services. One such program is the Challenging Athletic Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS)/ Life Skills program. This program is sponsored by the NCAA and was introduced to the membership in 1994. There are five components of the CHAMPS/Life Skills program. They include academic, athletic, career development, personal development, and service components. Of particular interest is whether there is existence of or efforts to create an assessment tool for CHAMPS/Life Skills programs.

Oaks (2011) conducted an evaluation of the University of Southern California CHAMPS/ Life Skills program. Her ultimate findings were that the NCAA provides an award called the "Program of Excellence" for recognizing institutions with outstanding CHAMPS/Life Skills programs. The NCAA designed the award to recognize Division I athletic programs that have established student-athlete welfare as the cornerstone of their operating principles. However, the NCAA-provided template is actually a self-study of the institution's CHAMPS program. The criteria for bestowing the award are somewhat vague, as it serves as a formative evaluation tool. It is not an outcomes-based evaluative process. Oaks (2011) concluded that the USC athletic department did a good job of meeting the NCAA-outlined standards for exemplary life skills development programs, but there is so much more potential for developing the life skills of their student-athletes

right on campus. This would most certainly require going beyond the benchmarks set forth in the NCAA's "Program of Excellence" criteria.

Andrassy and Bruening (2011) specifically investigated the service component of the NCAA/Life Skills program. They compared NCAA Division I athletic department mission statements as related to student-athlete community service efforts. First, they found that 10 of the 80 schools identified for the study could not be used due to the lack of an athletic department mission statement. Second, there was evidence of disparity between the stated mission and actions of the athletic departments in terms of community service. In the case of the NCAA DI institutions involved in this study, "the amount of service performed by members of the athletic department is not always a reflection of the mission statement in regards to community outreach" (p. 281).

### **Intercollegiate Athletics and Values**

There has been a significant amount of research and scholarly publication on the topic of intercollegiate athletics and values (Bowen & Levin, 2001; Clotfelter, 2011; Gerdy, 1997, 2002, 2006; Southall, Wells, & Nagel, 2005). Understanding the value system pertaining to intercollegiate athletics can help explain this century-old dichotomy. But on the surface it is not that easy to explain or understand. It requires a careful analysis of all the stakeholders' perspectives and viewpoints about intercollegiate athletics. A better understanding and respect for each of the stakeholders' values systems could help each side arrive at a more symbiotic relationship.

In the formative years of intercollegiate athletics, the varsity coaches were typically male faculty members and were expected to be teachers first and foremost. The role of the teacher is to educate, nurture, and empower student-athletes by providing

opportunities for personal growth and development. These are objectives that can be easily achieved in practices, yet decisions and behaviors of coaches in the midst of competitive situations are often at odds with educational ideals (Naylor, 2006).

Contrary to what many of the critics may perceive about motives of many of today's college coaches, Vallee and Bloom (2005) found that a primary coaching objective was to develop the whole student-athlete. The paradigm shift from the teacher-centered to the student-centered orientation among many student affairs professionals on college campuses could and should have a profound effect on how intercollegiate athletics is administered. There are many reasons and ways in which the educational value system can be convoluted. College athletics, in most of its entirety, could certainly be considered a forum of the teacher/coach-centered philosophy. Head and assistant coaches have a tremendous impact on the lives of their athletes, so it is crucial for them to become active in creating an environment within their programs that is conducive to the positive academic and social development of their student-athletes (Gerdy, 1997, 2006).

Historically, and noted previously, there has existed an inconsistency of values in intercollegiate athletics (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Trail and Challadurai (2002) explain that the dichotomy is presented in the contrast between amateurism and commercialism and/or incongruence between academic values and athletic values. The NCAA advocates a position of amateurism for college athletes, yet the NCAA is a commercial giant by virtue of its exclusive broadcasting contracts. Many NCAA Division I programs are cashing in on millions of dollars per year as a result of copious revenue streams. Obviously, this complicates the values system in collegiate athletics, particularly at institutions that are members of Bowl Championship Conferences (BCS).



Sack (2009) views the situation somewhat differently. He sees the dichotomy as caused by differences in core assumptions about higher education rather than on differences in values. He explains three sets of assumptions: intellectual elitism, academic capitalism, and athletes' rights advocates. Academic elitists assume that athletic scholarships, excessive spending and relaxed admissions standards for athletes as detractors of academic accomplishment. Academic capitalists assume that college sports are commercialized and believe athletics provides career preparation lessons and the needed revenue to broaden access to higher education and improve academic support for athletes. Athletes' rights advocates assume that college sports as big business, and assume that college student-athletes are being exploited since they are not considered as employees yet provide much of the product. Allen Sack has an interesting background. He was a heavily recruited football player in high school who went on to play at the University of Notre Dame and was member of the 1966 national championship team. He is now a professor of sociology and sports management at the University of New Haven. He has published a number of scholarly works, including two books and his particular experiences as a student-athlete at a prestigious academic institution at which he also was a member of a national champion football team is noteworthy. Smith (2008) remarked "Allen Sack has lived the dream and yet seen the nightmares of college sports." Therefore, he is a former "insider" as a football player at Notre Dame, yet now looks through the lens from an academician's perspective.

Of course, many factors have exerted influence on intercollegiate athletics values systems over time. A significant portion of these forces involve the stakeholders, both externally and internally. Considerable research on this topic has been produced

including (Coakley, 2007; Cooper & Weight 2011; Duderstadt, 2000; Frey, 1994; Ridpath, 2008; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Trail & Chelladurai, 2002). Some of the internal stakeholders are the student-athletes, coaches, athletic staff and even faculty. Some external stakeholders are characterized as alumni, boosters, and various media. Often these two forces pull at each other in opposite directions. As early as the 1800s, administrators felt they were caught in the middle as they tried to reconcile the academic integrity of their institutions with the athletic demands of very strong and influential external constituencies (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Frey (1994) argues that value discrepancies in college athletics are caused by the structural and organizational characteristics of the institutions because schools on the whole tend to operate with the norm or assumption of departmental autonomy. Thus athletic departments develop independent values. These values are subsequently rewarded by various *external* forces which help provide resources for athletic department operations. Clotfelter (2011) noted that a counterculture emerges, resulting in a values “clash” with the institutional academic missions.

Trail and Chelladurai (2002) contend that the assumptions of college athletics are rooted in the values of its stakeholders. Hence the values of the most powerful stakeholders influence the goals and processes of a particular athletic department. Identifying the powerful stakeholders is not so simple because stakeholders tend to cluster around values like winning or education and not group membership such as boosters or faculty. The stakeholders create rites, rituals, and symbols to celebrate their values. Beyer and Hannah (2000) suggest that because the stakeholders care so much about sports and the norms and values they have come to represent, that these

constituencies pose as significant obstacles to change in intercollegiate athletics.

Not all basic assumptions which exert influence on the athletic culture come from the external environment. The *internal* environment may also play a major role in shaping an institution's assumptions about athletics. Coakley (2007) states that NCAA non-Division I schools may operate on assumptions that support the academic values of higher learning; however, the overwhelming majority of research on value discrepancy in college athletics has been focused on Division I member institutions. As a result, this research may be conveying a distorted view of intercollegiate athletic programs at Division II, III, NAIA, and other member institutions. These institutions typically exhibit a smaller scope in terms of the institutional emphasis placed on athletics, in regard to financial support, infrastructure, marketing, and community and alumni outreach.

It is now widely accepted that student/faculty interaction and engagement enhances student learning and development. Ridpath (2008) argued that the academic faculties—as internal stakeholders—drive the value of academic integrity toward a path to reclaiming the morals and character of college athletics. He suggested that faculty involvement in governance may result in more accountability and transparency regarding academic values. Furthermore, this may lead to more faculty engagement with the student-athlete and the development of more mutual respect among faculty and athletic staff. Interestingly, Ridpath recommends retiring the term “student-athlete” because it stigmatizes them. He reasons, for example, that terms such as “marching band student” do not exist. Ridpath urges faculty not to “sit this out on the sidelines” (p. 19). Similarly, many student-athletes believe at least some professors treat them differently—either positively or negatively—because of who they are (Potuto, 2007). Though this NCAA-

sponsored study notes that this could have something to do with many student-athletes perceiving themselves more as athletes than students. However, one may still wonder if specific faculty behaviors contribute to such perceptions.

Cooper and Weight (2011) performed a study to program elements that are most highly valued by NCAA Division I athletic administrators. More specifically, it compares administrators' values between revenue and non-revenue sport programs. Their theory postulates that organizations within the same social system are influenced by one another and tend to imitate one another. So athletic departments within an institution will espouse similar core values to the institution at large, and athletic departments within the same conference will espouse similar core values.

A portion of scholarly work has addressed the lack of recognition and articulation pertaining to intercollegiate athletics in institutional mission and vision statements. Cooper and Weight (2011) ultimately report that in an era where the educational mission of intercollegiate athletics is in question, and critics acclaim the educational mission has been lost, the findings indicate that educational values within intercollegiate athletics to be quite strong. Both Toma (2003) and Clotfelter (2011) conclude that universities need to address the sponsorship of big-time Division I sports as part of their mission. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests a divided system at the Division I level. The conclusions drawn are that, on the surface, athletic administrators responded unquestionably that academics are of the utmost importance. But when categorized by revenue and non-revenue sports, their values tended to vary, with more importance on fan support and fundraising outweighing the untainted core values related to the Olympic sports (Cooper & Weight, 2011).

Ultimately, this research implies some practical implications for athletic administrators and coaches. The existence of a “unified” set of NCAA program values (athlete conduct, academic achievement, athletic success, and community involvement) supplies coaches with a sound understanding of the program elements that are consistently being emphasized among Division I athletic departments. One should keep in mind, however, that some of the values given great esteem by athletic directors may simply be a manifestation of conditioned rhetoric rather than the true values they represent (Cooper & Weight, 2011).

Academic faculty have long been an internal stakeholder influence on intercollegiate athletics. A study by Ott (2011) examined faculty satisfaction with intercollegiate athletics. After reviewing how university and college presidents viewed the current state of affairs regarding athletics, she wondered what rank and file thought about the topic. The study determined the level of satisfaction of faculty members with athletics on their campuses and how faculty members’ satisfaction vary according to individual attributes as well as characteristics of their campuses and athletics programs.

The findings indicated that more faculty were satisfied or very satisfied than dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with every item pertaining to athletics. They were especially pleased with academic integrity with respect to student-athletes. These results also implied that rank and file faculty may be more in-touch with academic progress than the presidents at their institutions.

### **Intercollegiate Athletic Culture**

As presented earlier in this chapter, institutional ethos can play a vital role in student learning and development. If one were to consider all the factors and variables

affecting a particular college athletic department, the nuances associated with the athletic culture may have the most influence on whether a particular school is effective in fostering the holistic learning and development of its student-athletes.

Kuh et al. (2005) concluded that culture matters as a factor in yielding successful educational outcomes. Bowen and Levin (2003), Sack (2001), and Duderstadt (2000) all point to a growing academic–athletic divide in higher education due to the presence of a *strong* athletics culture on many college campuses across the nation. When the separation between athletic departments and the rest of the institution occurs, the athletic department is susceptible to creeping too far away from the mission of the institution and their responsibility to educate students. Toma (2003) and Clotfelter (2011) suggest that institutions of higher education could be doing more by articulating the relevance of intercollegiate athletics within institutional missions.

Academic values and missions are central at American institutions. But the conversation cannot end there. It must include consideration of the importance of collegiate life and claims of significance that institutions use to connect with those who provide them with the resources needed to maintain and build them. (Toma, 2003, p. 277)

Instead, the “culture” has relatively stagnated in this regard. Gerdy (1997) argues more often than not “athletic programs are still about winning, making money, and providing entertainment rather than about education and, as a result, are not contributing to the mission of the university in significant ways” (p. 4). The commercial arm of the NCAA and many of its Division I member institutions continue to accentuate this perception today.

Schroeder (2010) examined intercollegiate athletics departments in the realm of organizational cultures. In earlier works, Beyer and Hannah (2000) suggest that a barrier

to reform in intercollegiate athletics is its cultural significance in higher education. Many scholars (Brand, 2001; Dempsey 2001) have acknowledged a need for culture change within college athletic departments, yet note that change has been gradual at best. Although several frameworks have been developed to assess institutional culture, intercollegiate athletics inhabits a unique position between sport and education. Schroeder offered a model for assessing cultures in intercollegiate athletics. The model consists of four elements: institutional culture, external environment, internal environment, and leadership and power. Each of these elements is present at every institution; however, their differing interactions at each institution create unique athletic department cultures. Schroeder's case study conducted at a private West Coast institution found an athletic department culture that embraced a "teacher-coach" model. Of particular interest in Schroeder's work is the potential for some examination of considering and combining models of assessment involving intercollegiate athletic culture with student-athlete learning and development.

Along similar lines, Rocha and Turner (2008) explored organizational effectiveness and the role that athletic coaches play in the process at their institutions. These authors recognize that often coaches can harbor competing interests as it relates to the overall effectiveness of the athletic department of the institution overall. The study examined the "extra-role" behaviors of coaches and their affects on the athletic department. The "extra-role" behaviors were defined as organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors. This study concluded that the specific extra-role behaviors measured were not good predictors of the effectiveness of athletic departments. The authors submitted that the limitations of their study, including the notion that the

nature of coaching collegiate sport has inherent characteristics of the extra-role variety, confounded the study findings.

A more detailed look at Schroeder (2010) introduces the development of a model of intercollegiate athletic cultures, which consists of four distinctive, but not mutually exclusive elements. These elements include: (a) institutional culture, (b) external environment, (c) internal environment, and (d) leadership and power.

Institutional culture is impacted by the school's mission, academic rigor and admissions standards. These factors can influence the national organization (such as NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA) in which the athletic department is a member and at what level (Division I, II, III) its teams compete within that organization. Other parameters include how the department is situated within the university structure. On its own, an athletic department has more freedom to develop its own culture as opposed to being housed within an academic department or within student life. The final parameters are the way athletics is funded and the residency situation for the campus. These factors or parameters combined will influence the actions of administrators, coaches, and athletes, which lead to athletic department values and assumptions (Sperber, 2000). Duderstadt (2000) discovered that student-athletes can fall victim to the considerable administrative and cultural separation that exists at many institutions between the athletic department and the rest of the organization. This can add to the student-athletes' feelings of isolation and disengagement from the rest of the campus. Athletic administrators and coaches should value the student-athlete as a "whole person" rather than as a warrior, weapon, or winner.

The second element of an athletic culture is the external environment. The external environment is a critical element to understand because it can reach every aspect



of an athletic department. Alumni, fans, and boosters (and even sponsors) are fixated on college sports and, together with the media, these entities can impact athletic department values, and influence stakeholder perceptions of the department (Schroeder, 2010). The community in which the institution resides is also part external environment. Finally, governing bodies such as the NCAA, NAIA or NJCAA exert external influences that constrain athletic department culture. Their rules restrict the actions of administrators, coaches, student-athletes, and boosters.

The third element of athletic department culture is the internal environment. This includes artifacts such as mascots, logos, rituals, and ceremonies which serve as historical underpinnings of the department. The meanings of these artifacts and departmental history may be difficult for outsiders to understand (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). Deciphering the true meanings of the artifacts can help identify the true assumptions of the culture which, in turn, allows for a comparison with the athletic department's stated mission. In this way the homogeneity of the culture may be assessed (Schroeder, 2010).

The sports with successful traditions may have influence on departmental values. Likewise, programs with historical links to the external environment (like boosters) or the institutional culture (like faculty) can exert cultural influence in those respective directions. Southall, Wells, and Nagel (2005) indicate that subcultures can develop from a variety of sources (male/female sports, revenue/non-revenue, winning tradition/losing tradition) and that each can accept, enhance, or challenge the assumptions and values of the entire athletic department.

The final element in the intercollegiate athletic department culture model is leadership and power. Those in leadership positions are capable of negotiating and managing balance between the institution, department, and external environment. It is at this juncture where leadership can be very challenging. Athletic cultures have formal and informal leadership. Typically, athletic directors are the formal leaders with some regular involvement from college presidents, but the informal sources of leadership can alter, augment, or undercut the formal leadership. Sometimes, it may be boosters or alumni. In some cultures, the informal leadership may emerge from what Sperber (2000) calls a “power coach.” A “power coach” may best be described as a coach who has a powerful presence at the institution and/or is even renowned for his or her coaching prowess and influence at the national level. The influence of coaches can be a positive or negative influence on the student-athletes. The groundbreaking work of Adler and Adler (1988) found that, by virtue of their position of authority, coaches wield enormous influence over the lives of their student-athletes. Martin (2009) suggested that in many cases, student-athletes are not encouraged by their coaches to integrate into the “mainstream” of campus social networks, student clubs and organizations, and various other forms of campus life. A negative characteristic of some “power coaches” is the wielding of too much power or authority.

Another element of leadership within this culture is how decisions are made and communicated (Tierney, 2008). Many institutional decisions are the result of public, committee-driven process, or in some other form of the institution’s governance structure. Decisions occurring in athletic departments are rarely as deliberate. Finally, the selection of leaders must be examined when defining culture.

This applies to leadership at the top of institutions as well as the head of athletic departments. Cultures in search of change may choose leadership with a contrasting set of values to act as agents of change. Cultures seeking the perpetuation of the current cultural values and assumptions might hire from within. If that culture has maladaptive values, the leaders that embrace them will probably inject deeper cultural problems (Schein, 2004). Beyer and Hannah (2000) feel this type of hiring may be one of the root causes of the problems facing athletics.

In essence, the final piece to the puzzle might be how a certain culture within an intercollegiate athletic department fits into a particular institutions' culture. There is evidence that when these two cultures mesh in a cohesive way, all sides seem to thrive in terms of striving to attain core student learning and development goals. So far this had only been demonstrated on the micro level, i.e., in case studies at specific institutions. But what if a template for a cultural "renaissance" could be established at the macro level? Of course there will always be outliers, but if a significant number of institutions could achieve a balance amongst academic learning and development and out-of-class student-athlete learning and development the gap may finally start to close.

### **Summary**

The review of the literature reveals the complexity of the problems that have perpetually been present in intercollegiate athletics across campuses on the American higher education landscape. Over many decades, entire books have been dedicated to the glorified history of intercollegiate athletics, and many have been penned about its troubled past. A brief but descriptive critical perspective on the history of the problems (Gerdy, 1997; Sperber, 1990, 1993, 2000; Thelin, 1994) was presented by the literature

review. Clearly, the perceived problems that the existence of intercollegiate athletics in American higher education present have remained for many decades.

The paradigm shift from a teacher-centered approach in higher education to a student learning-centered focus was explained. This movement was ushered in largely by the student affairs profession. The concept that student learning development takes place in multiple areas outside the academic classroom was acknowledged (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Kuh and Associates, 2005).

The era of learning and outcomes assessment was ushered onto the higher education landscape. Simply recognizing that student learning was taking place in co-curricular endeavors was not sufficient. Student affairs professionals were provided a basis for assessment with the help of Schuh and Upcraft (1996, 2001).

A synopsis of student development theories (Astin, 1993, 1999; Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1995) was presented and out-of-class and co-curricular learning and development studies (Kuh, 1993; Kuh et al., 2003; Kuh et al., 2007; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1996) were reviewed. Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) and Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) remarked on the body of research on student-athletes and the affects or impact of participation on their psychological and cognitive development as a mixed bag in terms of results—inconclusive at best.

Some of the typical characteristics of athletes as college students have been captured and outlined in the literature (Bowen & Levin, 2003). A variety of ideas and concepts for providing academic, personal, and social support for student-athletes have been described (Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001; Nite 2012). The NCAA's CHAMPS/Life Skills program was discussed, describing its

evolution upon intercollegiate athletics and study conducted (Oaks, 2011) on a specific CHAMPS/ Life Skills program at a Division I institution.

The literature review included a review of scholarly work on intercollegiate athletics and values. Shulman and Bowen (2001) and Bowen and Levin (2003) along with Trail and Chelladurai (2002) have contributed considerably on this topic.

After a review of literature on values in athletics, an exploration of intercollegiate athletic and culture was presented. The significance of understanding the culture of college athletics may be a key asset for determining how the complex pieces of the puzzle can fit together. Schroeder (2010), Sack (2001), and Duderstadt (2000) all have made considerable scholarly contributions about the fascinating relationships between intercollegiate athletics and higher education.

The review of literature related to the topic discovered some areas where little, if any, significant research or scholarly activity has taken place. A particular area of concern is the apparent lack of research on specific learning and development characteristics of intercollegiate student-athletes according the student-athletes themselves, upon reflection years later. More specifically, what are some specific and intentional mechanisms for fostering student-athlete learning and development? The abundance of research seems to group athletic participation as one category in the broader cache of educational out-of-class experiences. More specifically, Issett (2011) noted that little, if any, research exists that specifically targets what students are learning in student affairs functional areas or out-of-class educational experiences and how they make meaning of their experiences.

An emerging piece of out-of-class learning experiences is the outcomes assessment of this process. This void is even more pronounced in the area of intercollegiate athletics. There appears to be little evidence of routine evaluation or assessment of student-athlete learning and development outcomes aside from the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills programs. This could be because there is often a lack of systematic coupling of student affairs professionals with athletic department professionals. In any case, there is potential for future research and scholarship in these areas.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This chapter addresses the characteristics of a qualitative research project in which the phenomenological approach is central to the inquiry. This entails data collection by utilizing semi-structured interviews of former college student-athletes. The study participants are asked to reflect on their experiences as student-athletes and their perceptions on what they may be able to attribute as developmental and learning outcomes from their participation in an intercollegiate athletic program.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the out-of-class experiences of former intercollegiate student-athletes. Specifically, the study seeks to identify how student-athletes develop and learn from their experiences as student-athletes and what strategies and methods were effective in fostering their student learning and development. The study will help to examine to the assertion that athletics can be a valuable out-of-class learning and development vehicle when administered within the appropriate context and can help fulfill the educational missions of institutions of higher learning. The study may also help identify area student-athlete learning and development topics in which further inquiry is warranted.

#### **Research Questions**

1. What are the perceptions of former intercollegiate student-athletes regarding the extent to which participation in athletics affected their learning and development?

2. How do former student-athletes identify and describe the methods, techniques, or strategies that the athletic department employed that affected their student learning and development?
3. According to the student-athletes, who or what was most influential to their learning and development during their collegiate athletic career?
4. What can college athletic departments systematically incorporate to help integrate their educational mission with the institution?

This qualitative study centers on how former student-athletes perceive their learning and development outcomes related to their experiences as student-athletes at the various institutions they attended and participated in varsity athletics. The research questions were devised after considering that “the question needs to be liberating in the sense that it affords the researcher latitude to explore” (Bryant, 2004, p. 52).

### **Qualitative Design Rationale**

There are few qualitative research studies (Umbach et al., 2006; Toma & Kramer, 2009) pertaining to the perceptions and outcomes of the educational experiences of college student-athletes. A definition of qualitative research is research that generates findings not arrived at by using statistical or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The characteristics of qualitative research and qualitative analysis require that the researcher makes sense of the relevant data gathered from sources, such as interviews or documents, and responsibly presents what the data reveal (Caudle, 2004). Qualitative research can also be thought of as a situational activity with the observer located in the world, whereas the observer or researcher must interpret or make sense of the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

At least five types of qualitative designs are found in social science research: basic qualitative study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case studies.



While these types can be distinguished from each other, they all share the essential characteristics of qualitative research—the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, the researcher as primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of field work, an inductive orientation to analysis, and findings that are richly descriptive. (Merriam, 1998, p. 11)

Ultimately, the qualitative researcher should invoke the powerful tool of inductive reasoning to discover meaning in the holistic or descriptive narration that has been heard.

Creswell (2003) asserts that qualitative research allows emerging details of the individual stories to come to the surface, which permits the researcher to analyze the perspectives of the participants and develop common themes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that an emerging design philosophy encompasses a qualitative study—meaning that a definitive research study design is not necessary—but instead should be flexible because the study must develop and unfold with the emerging themes. These characteristics of qualitative research design should be appropriate for the type of data collection and interpretation that most likely occurs in studying former student-athletes.

A phenomenological qualitative study approach was employed to capture the essence of the experiences of the student-athletes who participated in this study. This type of research, according to Patton (1990), is based on “the assumption that there is an essence to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (p. 70). This approach help explain much of the participants’ perspectives in such a distinctive group as intercollegiate student-athletes. In essence, the researcher should be able to conceptualize that experiences and perceptions of a group of athletes in a particular setting can be transferable to the experiences and perceptions of athletes, for instance, at another school or for a different sport.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated a phenomenological study relies on a researcher's commitment to understanding social phenomena from the participants' perspectives. Furthermore, each individual participant experience can be considered unique and the researcher must "temporarily set aside belief in its reality" (p. 489).

Patton (2002) maintained that phenomenological research has three assumptions: The first assumption establishes the importance of recognizing what people experience and their interpretation of those experiences. The second assumption is for the researcher to really understand what another experiences, he or she should be able to experience the phenomenon for themselves. This stresses the importance of participant observation and the utilization of intensive participant interviews. The third assumption is realizing there is an essence to shared experiences. These assumptions further validate that a phenomenological study is an appropriate design approach for investigating the experiences of college student-athletes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Creswell (2003) noted that a researcher is an instrument in a qualitative study and, as such, he or she comes complete with biases, personal values, and certain assumptions. I have an employment background in professional, intercollegiate, and recreational sports. The bulk of my professional work for the past decade has been in the area of direct supervision of intercollegiate athletics programs. During this time, my daily interactions with college student-athletes could range as an instructor, advisor, mentor, and even confidant. It is sufficient to say that I have interacted in the daily lives of countless student-athletes. These experiences have definitely influenced my personal values and biases regarding all aspects of intercollegiate athletics.

My interest in the research topic grew from my aggregate experiences at the last two institutions where I worked. The first institution decided to disband its NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics program while I was employed there. The decision was met with some local media rancor but was largely applauded by the faculty. At my most recent institution, I believe athletics was viewed as a “necessary evil.” More specifically, from an organizational structure viewpoint, athletics was housed in student life and given secondary status to student clubs and organizations, both in funding and other institutional resources. Few employees, even within the student development arm of the institution, exhibited any interest in the program.

Thus, early on in the doctoral program, my interest grew for investigating ways in which I might be able to help demonstrate that intercollegiate athletics, when properly administered, can mesh with almost any institution’s mission and core values. The topic of student-athlete learning and development became of particular interest to me as a viable out-of-class learning experience. Being able to witness firsthand the learning and development of so many student-athletes has strengthened my belief that a well-intentioned collegiate athletic program can foster and enhance the skills and characteristics that college student must possess to be successful after college.

With my previous experiences in mind, I must acknowledge some biases regarding this research topic in its entirety. Undoubtedly, I have formed my own values, beliefs, and opinions on this subject over many years and must be ever cognizant of these biases as I conduct each segment of this research study.

Moreover, I hope that this research study not only will be able to contribute to the knowledge base of student-athlete learning and development, but can serve as a

springboard to developing assessment tools and programs for student-athlete learning and development outcomes. Ultimately, such research may help to lend more credence to the value that intercollegiate athletics can contribute to the missions and core values of institutions of higher learning.

### **Qualitative Techniques**

After the research questions were developed, the next step in the research process was to determine the data that were relevant to the research questions. “The set of questions to be answered is derived from what is technically known as the theoretical framework of your study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 44). Careful attention was also devoted to the structure and sequence of the interview questions. A slight variation in wording can inhibit response to a question, rather than allow researcher to access the perspective the perspective of the participant being interviewed (Patton, 1990). With this in mind, the interview questions were constructed using the following guidelines: (a) questions should be short and precise, avoiding questions that contain embedded parenthetical phrases, (b) only one question should be asked at a time, (c) questions in which the answer is either given or implied will be avoided, (d) language will be used that is understandable and comfortable for participants, and (e) asking “why” questions will be avoided (Dana et al., 1992).

After construction of the interview questions, the next step in the process involved practice interviewing techniques and skills. The opportunity to practice interviewing had already taken place multiple times over the course of developing this dissertation topic. Similar interview questions had been developed and piloted for future use. Previously, qualitative pilot studies involving participant interviews were conducted utilizing relevant

questions and interview techniques. The earlier pilot studies reinforced the hypothesis that participation in intercollegiate athletics can help foster student learning and development as perceived by former student-athletes. The themes that emerged from those studies stimulated an urge to investigate the topic on a deeper level. It was apparent that some of this student development occurred as intended outcomes, while some of the gains could be attributed to the intrinsic learning and development that can occur in any form of co-curricular activity.

Hence, the pilot studies made me curious as to how and why these former student-athletes perceived that gains in learning and development had occurred. I then wanted to explore how programmatic activities and pedagogies may enhance or accelerate student learning and development. Furthermore, were these student-athletes being immersed in purposeful learning environments with intended learning outcomes? This also piqued my interest in investigating how the learning and development of student-athletes could be assessed on a formal basis. Ultimately, a research study could be designed and conducted that would guide intercollegiate athletic professionals in designing athletic programs based on the student-centered paradigm and on learning and development outcomes which, in turn, would fortify the athletic departments station within the mission of the institution.

### **Recruitment and Selection of Participants**

The next step in the research process was to recruit participants to take part in the interview process. A purposeful sample strategy was followed as the primary means to recruit participants (Patton, 1990). Patton (1990) states that “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich for study in depth” (p. 169). Patton

(2002) asserts that small, homogeneous sample sizes are preferred for in-depth phenomenological studies of this nature. Recruitment efforts were conducted to achieve relevant variability of student-athletes with regard to gender, sport(s), and collegiate divisional level of competition. The target sample included males and females from any varsity sport(s) and may be representative of NCAA DI member institutions. This sample strategy allowed for comparing and contrasting student-athletes experiences in relation to size and scope of athletic departments in which they participated.

A secondary strategy utilized for gaining study participants is called snowball sampling. This strategy is employed by asking interview participants to provide the researcher with other potential participants to contact for inclusion in the study (Merriam, 1998). I relied on this sampling method because it can be used to access new participants when other contact avenues have dried up. It also often delivers a unique type of knowledge (Noy, 2008).

With this in mind, invitations to participate in this study were extended to those who could contribute in a meaningful way to the research. I began by contacting the athletic departments of member institutions of a Midwestern NCAA Division I conference and requesting that they distribute a recruitment letter (Appendix A) to potential participants. The former student-athletes from those institutions who agreed to participate were asked to dedicate 60-75 minutes of their time for an interview in which they would answer no more than eight or nine questions and that they be available, if necessary, for follow-up questions at a later time. The only criteria that were placed on a suitable participant were that they had obtained a minimum of a bachelor's degree and that they had participated in a varsity sport for a minimum of 3 years. After receiving the

completed questionnaires, respondents were then requested to complete the consent form (Appendix B) and a participant questionnaire (Appendix C). The pool of study participants was augmented by the snowball sampling technique, whereas several of the study participants recommended, or even contacted, other former student-athletes for participation in the study.

### **Interviews**

The qualitative researcher can choose from one of several interview structures. An interview can be structured, semi-structured, unstructured, or of an oral history format (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For this study, respondent interviews were conducted in the semi-structured style. This allowed for more freedom to explore topics (Merriam, 1998). Dilley (2000) recommends gathering information about interview subjects as an important first step in interview preparation. Therefore, I sought general demographic-type information about each participant prior to the interview session. Dilley (2000) also suggests memorizing the interview protocol, which can assist in the progression of the interview. The questions can then lead the participant on a journey toward the larger research questions in the study. Ultimately, the interviewer should make every effort to make the respondent feel at ease so that he or she will answer questions fully, intently, and with candor. There are some limitations or disadvantages to the participant interview process. Among them are that data are provided solely from the viewpoint of the participant, the presence of the researcher may affect participant responses, and the participant may not be particularly articulate in an oral fashion (Creswell, 2003).

The interview sessions with respondents were scheduled for 1 hour in length. The interview questions were not intended to take that amount of time but left ample time for

establishing the study and participant background, follow-up questions and anything else that arose (see Appendix D). At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were encouraged to contact the researcher in the future with any other pertinent information that might occur to them after the interview session. Also, requested was whether a second or follow-up interview would be acceptable to the participant. While conducting the data analysis phase of the study, I did follow-up with two study participants for further inquiry and interpretation of some of the responses they provided in the initial interview. The interviews were audio-taped for later transcription and notes were made throughout each interview session.

### **Documents**

The inspection of documents can be a rich source of data in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). This study included a review of the general and athletic websites of each of the institutions represented in this study. A participant profile form was also collected as part of the interview process. In addition, I recorded notes and observations during the interview process of the study. A careful analysis of these documents, particularly the websites, provided a more detailed perspective on the institutions and the athletic departments from each of the respective schools in the study than the former student-athletes could provide within a 1-hour interview session.

### **Data Analysis**

Phenomenological analysis involves grasping and elucidating the meaning and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a group of people being studied (Patton, 2002). This step requires a careful approach to obtain the richest and fullest descriptions of the respondents' experiences as they relate to the research topic.



Therefore, interview transcripts recorded during the fieldwork must be reviewed carefully. To do this, a method of separating the gathered data called coding was utilized. Coding separates data into categories of themes or patterns. Then coding can lead to analysis or comparison of similarities and differences within the data (Caudle, 2004). There are different options for units of analysis for coding purposes. There is line-by-line analysis, examination of a whole sentence or paragraph, and examining an entire document to determine if it is the same or different than other coded documents. Regardless of the option used by the researcher, the unit of analysis used should be the same for each individual transcript (Caudle, 2004). The naming of codes by the researcher requires that the code name closely match the concept it describes. Normally, codes are considered either descriptive codes or interpretative codes (Caudle, 2004). Open coding assists in discovering the concepts that are the formation of a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). I considered his process when interpreting my own understanding of Baxter Magolda's (1992) theory on conceptual learning and my interpretation of earlier studies on out-of-class learning and development experiences.

The coding of qualitative data allows the researcher to re-contextualize the data. A key issue is what to do with data once it has been selected, fragmented, and categorized (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The researcher can then create pathways through the data (Dey, 1993). This process should assist in the transformation of coded data into meaningful data. The researcher should be looking for patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities (Delamont as cited in Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Finally, it is essential to expand on rather than reduce the data by taking categories and exhausting their full analytical potential (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Naming the Categories**

Once the coding of the interview process has taken place, the construction of categories can begin. On the surface these two procedures may seem like the same process when, in fact, they are not the same. The construction of categories is an integral part of the qualitative analyses because it allows the researcher to begin to apply theories and concepts relevant to the research questions themselves. Dey (1993) warns “we may retain ‘coding’ as a term for replacing full category names by brief symbols,...we should not confuse this with the analytic process of creating and assigning the categories themselves” (p. 58). Merriam (1998) provides these guidelines for creation of categories:

1. categories should reflect the purpose of the research (they are answers to the research question(s);
2. categories should be exhaustive;
3. categories should be mutually exclusive;
4. categories should be sensitizing (in other words, as sensitive to the data as possible);
5. categories should be conceptually congruent (this is probably the most difficult criterion to apply). (pp. 183-184)

Merriam (1998) recommends making a chart or table so the researcher can see how all the parts fit together. Once these categories have been developed, cross-analysis of the coded categories can be performed. “Cross-analysis is especially important in a level of analysis that goes beyond a categorical or taxonomic integration of the data toward the development of theory” (Merriam, 1998, p. 187). The use of visual tools can enable the researcher relate thinking processes to assist in organizing the patterns that can emerge from the data analysis. Thinking maps or concept maps (Hyerle, 1995) include many types of thinking about the data including metaphorical thinking, dialogical thinking, evaluative thinking, hierarchical thinking, and systems dynamic thinking.

As the interview and data collection phase of the study proceeded, I was continually reviewing my field notes from the interviews in an effort to interpret how the initial data analysis was linking to the theoretical framework on which the study was based. Early on in the interview phase, this helped to affirm that the research questions framed in the study were appropriately constructed. Stake (1995) states that identifying and refining important concepts during the iterative process of qualitative research is important. Sometimes, conceptualizing begins with a simple observation that is interpreted directly, “pulled apart,” and then put back together in a more meaningful way. Again, I carefully considered my own understanding of conceptual learning theory and out-of-class student learning experiences to guide my overall data analysis process.

Finally, the researcher in a phenomenological study must put prior beliefs about a concept of interest aside, so as not to interfere with intuiting the elements of the phenomenon. An intuitive grasp, in which belief can be temporarily suspended, results in consciousness itself being heightened. This can allow the researcher to examine his or her heightened consciousness in the same way that an object of consciousness may be examined (Merriam, 1998).

### **Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

Qualitative researchers can utilize several methods to validate their findings. The researcher is obligated to adhering to an ethical approach to how their results are gathered, interpreted, and reported and how the research participants or respondents are treated. The Illinois State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol was followed in this study. The confidentiality of the research study participants was protected by changing their names and the institutions of higher education at which they

participated in intercollegiate athletics.

Various methods were employed in this study to enhance internal validity. Patton (2002) states that there are sets of criteria used for judging the credibility of qualitative research. Two of those criteria for judging credibility that were employed in this study are triangulation—which utilizes multiple means of gather data such as interviews and document analysis—and reflexivity—which involves critical self-reflection of the researcher's biases.

Other strategies employed in this study were member checking and peer examination. Member checking, which involves requesting that the informant review the transcript material for accuracy and palatability (Stake, 1995), was utilized by checking with the participants for some follow-up to reconfirm findings and ask if they had thought of anything else to add subsequently. Also, an additional or supplemental interview can be conducted with a volunteer to help affirm the perceptions of the actual participants in the study. The peer examination was done by conversing with professional colleagues, many of whom had extensive experience in the fields of student development, coaching and/or athletic administration and, some of whom were former student-athletes, to listen to their feedback about what the interviews had revealed.

It is critical that the researcher respect and protect against biases in research studies. I have biases that are inherent to the nature working in the profession of intercollegiate athletics administration. Patton (2002) suggests that the researcher seek to remove, or at least to become aware of, prejudices and assumptions regarding the phenomenon under review. Essentially, the suspension of judgment is critical to witnessing the experiences in their innocence and purity.

### **Ethical Issues**

To provide assurance that participant confidentiality was maintained, the participants' names and any other identifiable characteristics were changed in this study. The study was conducted under the auspices of Institutional Review Board protocols, and the rules and regulations of Illinois State University were observed. Creswell's (2003) guidelines for addressing ethical issues in qualitative studies were adhered to in this study: the research objectives were communicated verbally and in writing to the participants and written permission to proceed was obtained from each participant.

### **Summary**

The learning and developmental outcomes of intercollegiate student-athletes have been overshadowed recently by other concerns surrounding the merits of intercollegiate athletics within higher education. This research study explored the premise that the intercollegiate athletic experience is a viable component of the out-of-class experiences portfolio on campuses of higher learning. The qualitative research study using the phenomenological approach helped to capture evidence of the learning and development outcomes of student-athletes, according to former student-athletes.

The experiences of the intercollegiate student-athletes who participated in this study greatly enhanced my goal in answering the research questions. It also allowed me to generate ideas for further inquiry into this research topic. Further probing of these topics and questions may assist institutions of higher education and intercollegiate athletic departments in implementing and assessing programs that propagate productive out-of-class experiences for their student-athletes. The findings of this research project are reported in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings relevant to this research study according to the four research questions. Profiles of the study participants are included at the beginning of this chapter. The four research questions this study sought to address were:

1. What are the perceptions of former student-athletes regarding the extent to which participation in intercollegiate athletics affected their learning and development?
2. How do former student-athletes identify and describe the methods, techniques, or strategies that the staff in their athletic department employed that affected their student learning and development?
3. According to the student-athletes, who or what was most influential to their learning and development during their collegiate athletic career?
4. What can college athletic departments systematically incorporate to help integrate their educational mission with the institution?

#### **Participant Profiles**

All of the participants in the study had attended NCAA Division I member institutions located in the Midwest. Each indicated that they graduated with at least an undergraduate degree, while several had attained graduate degrees. They all exhausted their 4-year athletic eligibility and had been out of undergraduate college ranging from 5 to 20 years. All names are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Ace played baseball at a Midwestern school. He began his career under a renowned coach who established the program as a regional power. He is currently a high

school physical education/health teacher and high school baseball and football coach.

P.J. played baseball in college. He graduated with a 3.2 GPA and is a high school physical education teacher.

Cal played baseball in college. He later played professionally in Europe and Australia. He now has a master's degree in special education and has coached high school and college baseball, as well as high school football and wrestling.

Mike played baseball at a nationally renowned baseball school. He now works as a business analyst for a Fortune 500 company in the Chicago area.

Chip played football at his hometown college. He has a masters degree and serves as the dean of students and head football coach at a high school in Indiana.

Harry played football in college. He is currently working for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

Ted also played football at a Midwestern school. He was a Gateway Conference All Academic recipient. He has a doctorate degree and is a consultant and adjunct college faculty member and former campus recreation administrator.

Jake was a men's swimmer prior to that institution's decision to discontinue the varsity program. He is currently a high school math teacher and the boys' and girls' swim coach for that school.

Alice was a female track and field athlete. She was an NCAA All American, Academic All American and has been inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame at her institution. She has been a high school teacher and coach.

John was a men's track and cross country athlete representing his school. He earned an MBA degree and is currently a community relations specialist at a hospital.

Marty was a track and field athlete. He attained All Conference status and was a champion at a prestigious event. He has taught high school physical education and coached track and field at the high school and collegiate level.

Kurt was a track and cross-country athlete at his university. He won the Presidential Scholar Athlete Award with the highest undergraduate GPA of 3.93. He has a master's degree and works as a program coordinator at the same institution.

Sara competed in track and cross-country. She was All Conference in track and cross-country and listed on the Conference Commissioner's Honor Roll. She has a master's degree and is a reading specialist for an elementary school district.

Krissy was a women's basketball player. She transferred to the school she graduate from after her freshman season at the University of Toledo. She graduated with a 3.9 GPA. She is now a pharmaceutical sales representative.

Dickie played basketball at a Big Ten school for a highly reputable coach. As a senior, he received numerous all conference and all America accolades and then became a first round draft choice of the National Basketball Association. He now works in medical devices sales and real estate development.

Malcolm played basketball at a Big Ten university. He is a pharmaceutical sales regional manager and coaches high school basketball part-time.

Jose played basketball in college. After college he became a college student personnel administrator and adjunct faculty member. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration.

Mack played basketball at a Midwestern school and was an all-conference player and academic all-conference team member. He is currently a high school math teacher



and basketball coach.

T.D. played men's basketball in college. He has a master's degree is currently a campus recreation director at a community college in the southwest.

### **Research Question 1**

This research question examined the perceptions the participants had regarding the impact of their college athletics experiences on their overall student learning and development. Participant interviews provided an in-depth, descriptive narrative of their perceptions of how intercollegiate athletic participation affected their learning and development. Eleven themes emerged from the data analysis. Almost all of the participants described the following gains from their athletic experiences: accountability, time management skills, handling criticism, failure, and success, teamwork and collaboration skills, work ethic and dedication, and a network of close personal relationships. Other common themes were: self-motivation, communication/interpersonal skills, improved self-esteem, valuing educational opportunities, critical thinking skills, and self-discipline.

Many, if not all of the themes that emerged from the data analysis can be categorized as life skills. Furthermore, when participants discussed their current careers, many of these same attributes emerged as strong influences on their career successes. These themes will now be discussed and explained in further detail.

#### **Accountability**

Most, if not all, of the participants described the aspect of accountability as a major element of their development as a college student-athlete. It was described as both a sense of duty to self and a responsibility to others, such as teammates, coaches, and

even the institution. Taking it a step further, some explained that, as an 18-year-old freshman, the student-athlete experience put them on a fast track to adulthood by forcing or expecting them to “grow up.” Chip, a football player, explained that he developed a sense of urgency:

You develop a sense of urgency, which is important because a lot of time, things happen right now. You learn to avoid excuses with that, for example if you don't get out of the locker room with some urgency and get back on campus before the dining hall closes—you are not eating—period. And that carries over to other things in life...if you screw up, you are going to be held accountable. Would I have skipped more classes if I didn't have coaches, teammates, or academic counselors watching me? Would I have been exposed to the college peer pressures of doing things I should not have been doing? Those are things to consider as well. Overall, I was only 17 when I got to college and developed a lot of traits that helped me translate them into skills for later life.

Overall, the accountability trait was reflected as recognition and respect for the importance of maintaining the appropriate focus on the academic endeavors of the student-athlete, with most of the participants acknowledging that academic were their first priority. Malcolm, a Big Ten men's basketball player said,

I knew there was value in going to class every day. If I was able to graduate, I knew that I would put myself in a good position to make decent money without having a 70 or 80 thousand dollar tuition bill.

Ted, a football player animatedly described how one of his coaches demanded accountability from the onset:

As an 18-year-old coming to campus, my defensive line coach was a Vietnam War tunnel rat... he was an extreme authoritarian yet an extreme 'do-it-yourself' guy meaning you're not getting any favors from him. I remember all the 18-year-olds got on campus early...all the new recruits were trying to find out where to register... where classes were at and one of the players says, 'hey coach, where is my engineering class?' and he says, 'figure it out yourself, son'. Right there I thought okay, I will get the campus map out [laughs]...in terms of your ability to be an adult, that definitely fast-tracked that which I thought was good.

Of course, a heightened sense of accountability was an expected outcome to be perceived by the former student-athletes in this study. It permeated their thought process in terms of athletic and team-related functions but, for most, in their academic and social realms as well. Some participants indicated that they felt non student-athletes were typically disadvantaged as college students in the sense that many of them didn't have the same accountability expectations as the normal college student-athlete.

### **Time Management Skills**

This theme closely resembles the accountability theme, with more specific aspects of prioritization. Participants emphasized the importance of being on time to practices, conditioning, film sessions, classes, and academic study halls. Some pointed out that, to this day, they always strive to be early to appointments and other instances in the workplace setting.

Participants described the time constraints placed on them due to the rigors of being a college student-athlete. Therefore, it was critical to their success that they were able to manage and prioritize their time while juggling, classes, study tables, practices, contests, travel and other team functions. Several observed that when students first get to college, there is a lot of free time for the first time in most of their young adult lives. As a result, the non-athlete student may not have the time management skills necessary to cope with this situation. Such is usually not the case for student-athletes as illustrated by Dickie, a basketball player from a Big Ten university,

Did it take up a lot of my time? Sure, but I still had a lot of time to mess around. I had less time than the average student...but I would argue that all that time that the average student has probably helps get them booted out of college. There's too much time on your hands and I didn't have that. If you have to get up at 5:30 a.m.

to lift weights—that might get your ass in bed at 10:30 p.m. when some other students are out screwing around.

Several of the participants described similar scenarios, in which it was suggested that their time was managed more productively, with less margin to make bad choices with that time. Baseball players in particular, noted that during their spring semesters, time management was ultra critical. Not only did they have midweek non-conference games but conference double headers almost every weekend, which made traveling resemble being on a professional baseball team. Cal noted,

If you couldn't plan out how to pack for travel, get your assignments for what you were going to miss in class, and then make the team bus for the away trips, you were bound to fail—both academically and athletically.

Overall, many of the participants noted that most of their time was consumed by the daily requirements of being a student-athlete. Obviously critics have pounced on this aspect of college athletics, yet the vast majority of the study participants believed this to be beneficial in their overall growth and development. Some stated that they didn't have significant time left over for other co-curricular activities or general socialization, yet that was a net benefit for them.

### **Adversity and Failure**

The perception that participation in intercollegiate athletics helped in dealing with adversity, failure, criticism, and even success was widely held by the participants interviewed. One participant stated that college basketball taught him that life is not fair. For example, most of them were elite or high performing high school athletes. Many had never or rarely experienced adversity or failure in terms of their individual athletic performance. Nor had they faced much criticism from coaches or even a fan base.

However, NCAA Division I athletic participation and competition is an entirely different realm than interscholastic sports competition. Added to that, the sphere of academics is much greater in a higher education setting. More than likely, they will face adversity, criticism, and failure in the classroom as well. I must note that all of the participants, with the exception of one, indicated that they achieved at least 3.0 grade point averages during their undergraduate careers and felt that they performed more than satisfactorily in regard to their academic goals. Some participants noted that if they were expected to perform and excel on the field, it was just second nature for them to excel academically as well. Malcolm, a basketball player from a Big Ten university talked about participating in high-pressure athletics,

Playing in front of 20 or 25 thousand people on TV...a lot of people ask me today, 'how do you stay so calm in this situation'? Well to me, having about 50 people directly reporting to me and a couple of people above me...this is nothing compared to having 23 thousand people yelling and screaming at you...whether you are at IU with 20 thousand people who hate you essentially, or on TV yelling at you after every mistake...hey now I am in a work environment just calm, collected...and my thought process is one I am able to direct.

A common thread for many of the participants was that their participation as a college athlete prepared them for many of the challenges that work and life presented because of the foundation that had been laid in facing adversity, criticism, failure and success through intercollegiate athletic participation. Sara, a cross-country and track athlete, explained,

I think emotionally...you know, running long races was very tough...and getting through those races...I think helped me to be stronger as an individual, not only in sport but in life. There are times in life that you face obstacles and I think the experiences I had in cross country and track carried over into my life today...making me stronger now.

Conversely, some of the participants allowed that their experiences helped them to deal with success as well. Mike, a baseball player said “I almost lead the nation in hitting one year. I don’t think that success and little bit of notoriety hurt. That didn’t stop me from going for more....success breeds success.”

For most of the former student-athletes, their experiences as college student-athletes captured some of the essence of their future lives. They experienced adversity, criticisms, failure, and success in their personal lives and their careers. Yet, the multitude of experiences as college student-athletes had prepared them well for handling many of the challenges that they were to face later on in life.

### **Teamwork**

It may be rather obvious that former college student-athletes identified teamwork as a trait that was developed during their participation in college athletics. However, the ways in which they described how the trait developed and how many of them utilize the concepts of teamwork and collaboration in their current lives and careers may not be as obvious. Participants in the study came from both team sports and individual sports. Some of them described their situations of a competition for a spot in the starting line-up as a form of teamwork or collaborative effort rather than an adversarial competition. Some of the participants from individual sports, such as track and field and swimming, described how even though their individual performances were intrinsically important, the concept of “team” would somehow emerge. Jake, a male swimmer at a Big Ten school said,

It was my last competitive race—the conference championship meet—because our school was dropping men’s swimming at the end of the year. I had been swimming on a couple of the relay teams all year long and wanted to really finish

out my last relay races as strong as I could. There were a couple of guys on the team—seniors who had been there 4 years and put in all that work and dedication to our program—but had really never been good enough to get into the lineups in meets for individual races or relays. Myself and another swimmer decided to have these guys take our places on the relays for the last meet. It was awesome to see them get to take part in, really, a momentous occasion. And it made us all feel better about a really sad time. I hadn't really thought too much about that happening until now...but wow, it really emphasizes the concept of team to me when I think back on it now...they had been a part of something for 4 years without ever really getting any reward or glory for swimming in competitive meets but they got to finish it out in style.

Alice, female track and field athlete elaborated,

I was always a team player, but I think it (athletics) taught how to sometimes... you need to be more selfish and sometimes you don't. You grow up a whole lot and you learn it's not just about you all the time. It was an individual sport but I ran on relays and our team was good so we looked for team titles and you always had to do your job as an individual to contribute to team titles but sometimes it came to that relay for the team title.

It is a fascinating look at the paradox between selfishness and competitiveness, and teamwork and selflessness. The perception at the time may have been that they were losing or giving something up, yet they later realized that they were really gaining something—either as individuals or for the team. T.D., the male basketball player described how, “coach literally forced me to switch positions. Of course I had major problems with it. As it turned out, it helped the team out a lot in the long run.” Some of the participants described how they utilized the lessons learned from experiences such as these as they have moved throughout their work careers in various professions, such as sales and marketing, coaching, and teaching.

Here is an example of Baxter Magolda's (2004) position that “people actively construct or make meaning of their experience—they interpret what happened to them, evaluate it using their current perspective, and draw conclusions about what the

experiences mean to them” (p. 1).

Another trait mentioned by several participants was how they formed bonds, mutual respect, and generally tended to look out for one another and stick up for each other—in the classroom, on and off campus, and eventually after they had moved on after graduation.

### **Work Ethic and Dedication**

A common denominator for all the participants were the characteristics of work ethic and dedication. While many of them acknowledged that they may have had a sense for a good work ethic and were dedicated to their sport and even academics prior to college, their intercollegiate athletic experiences advanced these characteristics to a whole new level. Many participants confessed that the work ethic instilled by their college athletic experiences was a critical factor in their present-day lives and careers.

Some of the participants, and this is a common thread in Division I athletics today, likened their college athletic and academic experiences to a job. A few participants referred to travel to and from away contests, or road trips, as business trips. That was how their coaches treated them and that is how they expected the student-athletes to approach them and conduct themselves while traveling. This is how a Malcolm, a Big Ten men’s basketball player, described it,

There is a lot of preparation involved. An example is like when traveling to a tournament like the Maui Shootout. People think it’s all fun and games. Flying to Hawaii granted, is first class, but then you’re on a bus the whole time—directly to practice, study halls, eat as a team, scouting reports. So a lot of people think it’s “hey, lets go to the beach” but that is really not the case. It’s a business trip so to speak, that’s what it’s like—that is all it is. Really don’t have time to do much more, if you are missing class, then realistically, you have make up work you need to do.



Many of them described a sense that the work ethic and dedication that they exhibited in participating in their particular sport tended to carry over into the academic arena, and later on had manifested in their work careers and other areas of their lives. For some, their work ethic today was elevated by those in a particular position of influence. Dickie, a men's basketball player, describes how playing for a legendary coach affected him,

But the lessons you learn...it's "how hard does this guy (Coach) work"? If I want to compete and be good at anything...you just see what work ethic is. Why is he one of the best? It's not all show. He's logging the hours. In the trenches watching video-making tapes of just **you**...and calling you to say "hey, I made a video for you" and it's two hours of video of **just me** making mistakes and making good plays. He's doing that just for me. So at some point in time, it just sinks in...that if I ever want to be good at **anything**, I have to pay the price. That's how hard you really have to work to be really good.

It is very possible that many of these former student-athletes were hard working and dedicated by nature, but it came through clearly from the interviews that whether or not they possessed this characteristic inherently, the sense of work ethic and dedication was only accentuated through their experiences as student-athletes. Jose, a men's basketball player said "I was by far the hardest worker, most dedicated high school kid in my school. But when I got to college, it was a whole different concept."

It became very clear that most, if not all, of the study participants perceived that their experiences as college student-athletes had a profound impact on their work ethic. Many of them acknowledged that they believed they were hard workers and driven individuals prior to their college years; however, student-athlete lifestyle only served to enhance their work ethic. Most of the participants attributed a great deal of their subsequent successes in life to the work ethic and dedication that was nurtured through the college student-athlete careers.

## Personal Relationships

One of the aspects of the collegiate student-athlete experience that most of the participants valued most was the personal relationships that they developed with teammates. This aspect of their college athletic experience typically affects them in multiple ways. First, there is the aspect of the lifelong friendships that are established as part of the journey. Many participants detailed that they had been in each other's weddings, still played golf or fished together, and supported one another through both the good times and bad times. Chip, a football player elaborated that,

Your team is almost like your fraternity. So you hang out with those guys as much as possible...not all of them... I mean you get your own cliques within the team and do whatever on the weekends. I mean, I went fishing with those guys all the time, just stuff like that. So that kind of consumes you...becomes your culture... who you are and who you hang out with. No doubt in my mind that I got the benefits of a fraternity.

But just as important is the network that is established almost inevitably by the student-athlete experience. Being a college athlete was a conversation starter for them when searching for jobs. Dickie, men's basketball player relates,

I've never flown under the radar in the hiring process—ever! Name recognition came from playing college basketball. I can honestly say that I've never gotten past the second interview that—as a tall guy—the basketball association doesn't come up. It pays the bills though. It presents opportunities...opens doors...but at the end of the day, it won't sign the checks...keep a job for you. Now I'm probably in the best situation possible...in Indianapolis, close to Bloomington... surrounded by alumni from my school...the opportunities are always there for me.

Almost all of the participants had stories of how their careers and job searches were given a boost because of this. A male track-and-field athlete explained that,

Did my experience as a student-athlete help me get jobs—absolutely! I got my first teaching job in high school physical education because people knew Coach. The networking got me my first teaching job. Do I think I could have

landed the job on my own? Absolutely! But just knowing that people were going to bat for me, I think helped. As far as making the move from teaching and coaching in high school to coaching in college...I would not be in college coaching if it weren't for Coach.

Finally, many participants indicated that they remained close to their former coaches, in both personal and professional realms. One of the questions I asked was what might have the participants lost from being a student-athlete in relation to the rest of the student body. Several indicated that they may not have experienced the same social scene or setting as many of the non-athletes but that they perceived some advantages in this regard. They said that they may have missed the "party" atmosphere that often is associated with college life, but there were few regrets. A male cross-country and track athlete observed,

I think some student-athletes and non-athletes can live the party lifestyle and some can do it successfully. I never partook in that...never felt that it was something that I had to have. Some may say, well, I missed out in that---that was my time in college to live free and let it all go...and I don't feel like that at all. My type of party was doing what I was doing...traveling across the country with my brothers and sisters and having a great time, and seeing things I never would have seen without athletics.

### **Self Motivation**

The notion of self motivation was apparent while interviewing most of the participants. One stated that he believed that Division I student-athletes were simply "wired" differently. While most highly successful people can probably point to self motivation and a competitive drive, there are some aspects of the student-athlete experience that may accentuate this trait. They also expressed that this trait had remained an important part of who they are today. Sara, female cross country and track athlete described:

I have an example for you. It was the outdoor conference championships my junior year...and I begged my coach to let me run the 1500 meter race. Not many people do this in a middle distance race, but I false started. I don't know how it happened but the starter said, "Eastern! You're outta here. Eastern—outta here!" I had to pick up my stuff and walk away...I was so mad. My parents had traveled to see me compete. My boyfriend, who was also a serious runner, was there. I was really upset. I mean, I didn't even get to run in the conference meet. It had a really big impact on me. And the next day, I went out with some friends because I was really down. That day I decided to train really hard for the next year indoors and outdoors. And the next year... senior year...outdoor conference meet...top three are all-conference—and I didn't win. I didn't false start either. I got third place so I was all-conference and got a medal on the podium. My coach credited me publicly, in front of the team, for my competitive attitude. And the girl who won it...and I was leading her for a while...she actually turned professional and was sponsored by Nike.

Now as an elementary teacher and a parent, she reflects on this experience as a valuable learning moment. She also respects how powerful such an experience can be to others in similar situations.

A somewhat contrasting experience, by another student-athlete in an individual sport was described by John, a male track competitor:

I'd say coaches influenced me but coaches don't motivate at the DI level. And the reason I say that is because if you don't want to put in the work...if you don't want to do the weight and conditioning work...instead you want to go party... then there are 4 or 5 guys that will take your place. These guys [coaches] are not there just to motivate you. That's not what their job is! That's why I say a DI athlete is a little bit different person. The people who aren't self motivated are the people who end up doing other things. However, you are motivated by your teammates. You have these guys around you that are just as good as you...who are ready to take your place...if you are hurt, something else. In my college career I missed two meets total—both indoor and outdoor seasons—again because I could not afford someone else running in my place...setting their own new PR [personal record]...it was that simple.

Several of the study participants credited their experiences as a college student-athlete as a major influence on aspects of their career today. A women's basketball player described:

I'm in sales and having that competitive drive helps me in my territory. I want to beat everyone in my district and even in my own company. I think they distribute those company sales charts for a reason. In basketball, I never won a Missouri Valley Conference championship. We came in second and were in the conference championship twice...so I never quite tasted that ultimate victory. In my company, we have these yearly sales competitions for incentives like free trips and I view that as my chance to win the MVC tournament. You know—I want to beat everybody and it's just ingrained [laughing]. I have that drive and I think I had it growing up as well, but playing in college increased it 100%. Its intense and being focused and being driven. When you get out into the workforce you thrive in it because you are used to routine and structure—having high expectations for your self and setting goals that you try to reach.

Most of the former student-athletes in this study related that the self motivation or competitive drive that had been developed or accentuated by their experience had aided them up to this point in their careers. Most elaborated that always striving to be better at whatever they were doing—teaching, coaching, sales and marketing—emanated from the college student-athlete experience. The literature reviewed (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Umbach et al, 2006; Videon, 2002) supports this interpretation of the participants' perspectives.

### **Valuing Education**

Several of the study participants indicated that they were better able to realize their potential by being exposed to the opportunity that higher education affords. The actual ways in which they described their educational experiences had different meanings for many of them. At least half stated that they probably would not have attended the institution that they did had it not been for the intercollegiate athletic opportunity. Also, the financial aspect of receiving either full or partial athletic scholarships had a huge impact for many of them. Several indicated simply that the opportunity to receive a college education—through the vehicle of intercollegiate athletics—had a profound

impact on them. A male basketball player from a Midwestern school said that he was the only male in his extended family who had received a college education to date. Dozens of his male relatives were gang members or incarcerated at an early age. For him, being able to play college basketball was his escape from a potentially bleak future, and he never has had to follow the path of so many of his relatives and peers. Another baseball player from a traditional baseball power explained that “he really didn’t even want to attend college after high school but wanted to continue playing baseball.” Since he wasn’t drafted by major league baseball, he decided to give college a try even though he was not a particularly good student and didn’t have any career interests outside of baseball. Today, he has two master’s degrees and is a respected teacher and coach. Being college-educated had become important to him a little later on, but now he encourages all those he teaches to explore all the opportunities that higher education has to offer.

Most of the participants suggested that attending college as a student-athlete had impacted them academically in ways that they had not anticipated. All but one participant indicated that they were as serious as or more serious about academics than they had been in high school. A baseball player said,

Being a college student-athlete actually helped me focus more in the classroom. We had mandatory study tables for a certain amount of time—6 hours a week. But I did more than that. I always got my work done and was motivated to do so. I never, ever fell behind in classes or with academic work. I had always liked doing schoolwork but this was better and I knew I had to do it. But it was so well balanced academically and athletically. Some programs it’s strictly baseball that they care about.

Many of the participants have had careers in teaching, coaching, and educational administration and the value of education aspect that was nurtured during their times as college student-athletes remains an inspiration to them in their current careers and lives.

## **Interpersonal Skills**

Several participants related that they could attribute the growth of their interpersonal skills through the college student-athlete experience. More specifically, communication skills, dealing with people from diverse backgrounds, and the previously discussed networking, collaboration and teamwork aspects and how that can be balanced in such a competitive environment. A men's basketball player explained how his communication skills were enhanced:

It helped me with communication skills. There are situations where you have to communicate in front of people, with your teammates and the coaching staff. Coach asked us a lot of times to go and speak to young kids and community groups...where you start out being afraid. It scared the dickens out of me but I got to the point where that has really helped me throughout my career...being able to speak in front of people and feel comfortable doing it. Dealing with the media... we went to the NCAA Tournament twice and being on that stage with all the lights and national media attention on me was a pretty good learning experience-learning to deal with all that stuff. The communications skills were huge for me.

Being exposed to new and more diverse people and cultures was also a positive aspect for many of the participants. A female track athlete described,

I think I gained so much experience learning to know other people. Like I said, I grew up in a real small town [in Wisconsin] and Terre Haute is not huge by any means but was a lot bigger...and I was exposed to a lot more cultures and I got to travel and do stuff I never would have had the opportunity to do if I wasn't a college athlete.

And the Big Ten men's basketball player added this:

There is no doubt about it, I learned a lot about life skills as a student-athlete... from how to tie your tie and have a corporate or business look to you. One time we had lunch at Tavern on the Green. Lots of corporate types in there that day. The guy who invented the pop-top for soda cans...being able to speak and act professionally. From a cultural standpoint, I looked at a map of the United States and I've been to every part except for the northwest corner. Every major U.S. city. I've been overseas and it teaches you how to act in different cultures, the rules to abide by over there. There are many, many lessons I have learned in my four years there that stick with me today.

The participants overwhelmingly indicated that the college student-athlete experiences provided them valuable skills in how to interact with others in vastly unique or different situations, and often times vastly different than that the typical experiences of non student-athletes.

### **Self Discipline**

Many participants stated that their sense of self discipline had been strengthened or enhanced through their experiences as student-athletes. While self-discipline appears to be very similar to time management and self-motivation, it may have been perceived as different for some of those interviewed. For some, it could be the way they responded to peer pressure, or how they handled the treatment by their coaches, or just how they approached both their athletic and academic responsibilities, such as practices and conditioning, taking care of their bodies, attending classes regularly, and practicing good study habits. No matter how they perceived the definition of self-discipline, they could credit their experiences as college student-athletes to the level of self-discipline that they exhibit in their current lives and careers. Kurt a cross country/track athlete explained:

If people quit a sport in college because of time constraints, I see that as sort of a copout. Because to me, athletics allowed me to frame, structure, and organize my life in a certain way. I knew when I had to study, when to have things done...the organization of life was structured because of being in athletics. When you look at a regular student and they basically have 24 hours to do whatever they want with-it's hard to determine when they are going to accomplish what they need to accomplish...just take school in general, as a student-athlete you have to know what your schedule looks like, when you're traveling, and the limited number of hours you have...on a day-to-day, week-to-week, year-to-year basis. For me athletics helped me structure my life and set me up for success in life after that. And I think some student-athletes may be able to live a party lifestyle and get by with it, but not very many.



It appears as though the student-athletes recognized their potential pitfalls, challenges, and temptations that not only they might face as college student-athletes but that most non student-athletes would typically face in college as well. Cal, a former baseball player, stated, “after the first few weeks in the program as a freshman, I knew how to get things done, without a coach, academic advisor, or professor having to remind me or nag on me all the time.” Some of the participants doubted whether students at-large were afforded the same opportunities to develop and exhibit this trait by themselves. As Jose recalled, “I had friends and roommates that were not athletes. More than half the time they were messing around, not going to class and so forth.” However, the self-discipline instilled in them by their development as student-athletes helped them meet those challenges while in college, but has carried over into the current careers and lives. As stated else where in this chapter, a participant said, “...how you play in practice is how you play in the game.”

As stated earlier, self-discipline can be a trait that is hard to differentiate from some of the other traits in which the study participants perceived gains from athletic participation. Yet, the study participants were able to articulate a difference between their overall experiences and their perceptions of what the typical undergraduate non student-athlete entailed. Ultimately, many of the study participants believed that their sense of self-discipline was uniquely enhanced because of their student-athlete experience.

### **Self-Esteem**

Some of the participants credited their participation in college athletics with improving their self-esteem. Both male and female participants described growth and development in this area. For some it was as simple as taking better care of their bodies

or by the physical improvements that were taking hold in their bodies, from the increased training and conditioning that they were going through. For some, it may have been a more emotional experience. For instance, they felt a connection and a sense of belonging that came with being a part of a team. Some described the nurturing environment cultivated by caring coaches and support staff and the assurance and self-confidence that was reinforced by such a culture.

Another way in which the student-athletes described higher levels of self-esteem related to a sense of accomplishment. This could have been accomplishments in athletics, academics or both. Some described a scenario in which they were either a walk-on to the team or lightly recruited either by the school they chose to attend or their athletic recruitment in general. Some earned scholarship money later on, and while this was an obvious financial gain, they saw it as a self-esteem issue as well. Most saw the realm and spirit of competition, whether with themselves or against others, as a self-esteem and confidence booster. They indicated that it carried over to their professional careers as well.

### **Critical Thinking Skills**

The concept of critical thinking has been a focus of attention in higher education for some time now. As Pacarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, and Hagedorn (1999) suggest, some of the participants identified critical thinking skills that they perceived were enhanced through the experiences as student-athletes. They explained that performing in stressful situations and having to think and analyze situations quickly in competitive situation like the contests or games in which they performed, were invaluable in helping them problem solve and make decisions. The men's basketball player who played the position of point guard for his team explained:

My coaches and teammates expected me to be the leader on the floor. Again, when you talk about the pressures of playing in front of that many people, it helps me with critical thinking, with problem solving, and being able to make good decisions. It's funny how the lessons I learned through college basketball are why I think I get good reviews at work. The way it translates into my job is why I get stellar reviews over the years. The pharmaceutical industry is a competitive industry and basketball helped with that. Pharmaceutical companies are trying to get their drugs to market. Not only that, but the FDA [Federal Drug Administration] are sticklers. They can come in and shut you down, so the decisions you make...I mean, I am preparing my employees for like when the FDA comes in here at any second. The adage is you play how you practice.

A former baseball player related:

When I'm teaching or coaching, I often find situations where I have to think on my feet and be adaptable. I think playing college baseball helped my critical thinking skills...and now I stress to my pitchers and catchers during games to be able to adapt and respond to changing situation without me having to help them every step.

The scenario above captures how others explained ways in which their critical thinking and decision making skills had been developed and honed during the student-athlete years. Most of the team sport athletes, where strategies and play calling in relation to the opponent were important, mentioned it. Even some of the participants from individual sports talked about race strategies and the analytics of their techniques as areas in which their critical thinking and problem solving was enhanced.

### **Negative Impacts**

The study participants were also given the opportunity to reflect on any perceived negative impact they may have experienced as a result of their participation in intercollegiate athletics. One of the interview questions asked what they believed they had gained or lost both personally and educationally as a result of their experiences as a student-athlete. Typically, participants would begin their response by describing the positive ways in which they had been affected by athletic participation. A few would

remember that it was a two-part question and would address any negative aspects of their personal and educational experiences. But in the majority of interviews, I would need to remind them that they had been asked if their experiences had any negative effects.

Only a few participants articulated any specific negative aspects of their experiences. Two negative aspects emerged in these cases: lack of social opportunities and lack of free time. There appears to be a strong relationship between these two aspects. Some participants indicated there just was not enough time to partake in the typical social realm of an undergraduate student. A football player explained:

At the same time, I think there were some takeaways too. In my opinion, it takes away from your socialization...granted we could socialize with the general student population but we didn't get time to do that much...and we had a ban on going to the bars. And if you're hurt, which I had a severe injury to my foot sophomore year...if you're in that situation and some of your coaches and some of the players shun [ignore] you...then you don't have the general student population either because you haven't spent time with those kids.

Several other participants addressed the lack of time factor as it related to their social opportunities on campus, but often rationalized that it may have resulted in a net positive in terms of their academic and athletic successes. A male track athlete from expounded:

What did I lose experience wise...maybe just being a normal college student. But what is a normal college student? I don't know. Looking back on it now as an adult and as a coach, it is a very good thing. Sometimes a normal college student loses track of the real reason they are in school [laughs]. I think being a part of a college athletic program that there are important and not important things [laughs]. So I might have missed out on the "normal" college experience but it's not something that I look back on and say, "Oh, I wish I hadn't been in athletics so I could have experienced that."

Likewise, Ace, a baseball player concurred:

As far as losses, did I lose time with friends? For sure, but at the same I was gaining 30 other friends and gaining that network and building teamwork skills. We even hung out some with other baseball teams and had some camaraderie that way within the sport.

Many of the former student-athletes expressed that the friendships they developed with teammates was at least as valuable to them as those friendships made and social opportunities they may have experienced as non student-athletes.

In another interview question, I asked the participants if they thought that their participation in intercollegiate athletics had long-term positive or negative effects on their subsequent careers and professions. There was unanimous agreement among all participants that their experiences as college athletes had an overwhelmingly positive impact on their careers. In fact, only two participants even addressed the question as to any detrimental effects on their careers with both citing rather nebulous examples.

A football player, after citing many positive effects on his career to this point, explained:

Now conversely, I am going on a different career path, applying for academic teaching jobs now, and it [college student-athlete] doesn't play as significant of a role. Actually, when applying for academic jobs, I have to be very careful because some folks don't like student-athletes. And you know, at one point, being a student-athlete was a big party of my definition as a person...later on I have decided that it should no longer define me as a person.

A Big Ten men's basketball player profoundly described his feelings when a business opportunity doesn't go in his favor:

But there is a negative side to that. I would never cry foul. It's blessed me a million times over, but there are people who want you to fall on your face. There are people in business where, if it is "even steven" between me and somebody else...give it to the guy that needs the opportunity because they assume I don't need it. I lose like that some of the time...but I can't live like that. Go back to the second question. You don't cry foul on something like that. That I got cheated because I played basketball and they are going to give somebody else a chance instead. I mean there are fans from my school **everywhere** that don't want me to get an opportunity like... "hey, he had his time, now it's my time...when I was on campus he was getting free drinks in a bar while I was studying." Those people are surprising but they're everywhere...season ticket holders who don't want me to win now.

In conclusion, the major themes that emerged from the data obtained from the interviews were not at all surprising. What was somewhat surprising were the fascinating stories that many of the participants told in rich detail. This accentuated how strongly they all perceived that their experiences as student-athletes positively contributed to their growth and development as college students and beyond.

### **Research Question 2**

This research question examined the methods, programs, techniques, and strategies utilized by the athletic department personnel that affected the student-athletes' learning and development. The main themes that emerged from the participant interviews were mentors and role models, academic support programs or systems, teammates and peers, and a general framework or structure to help guide and support the student-athletes as they pursued their athletic, academic, and social endeavors. When these factors appeared in plural, according to the descriptions presented by the participants, it presented a picture of a holistic approach to the development of college student-athletes.

#### **Mentors and Role Models**

Many of the participants imparted the importance of mentors and role models in their overall learning and development. Often times these mentors and role models were head coaches, assistant coaches, support and academic staff. A men's basketball player said,

We had a great group of assistant coaches who mentored us...that you could go and talk to about anything—any issues or concerns. Like sometimes you might think the head coach is your worst enemy so you establish that relationship with the assistant coaches so you can let some of that stuff out. They would help you work through the situations. As an athlete you may not see the overall picture... why the head coach was doing this way...and they helped you understand that it was not a personal attack of you...that it was making the team better by doing this

or we are going in this direction because in the long run, it will help us in March or whatever it might be.

A male track athlete discussed his head coach as his role model to the present day and the primary reason he was able to get into the teaching and coaching profession that,

Coach M.—he was my father away from home. He was the one who I could just go sit down in his office and talk with. His approach on how to develop and teach and mold young men really fit my personality. I just gravitated towards him. Looking back on it now from this perspective...I understood he was my coach but at the same time I felt comfortable taking things to him...but I understood there was a line there that I didn't get too comfy and take advantage of him.

However, some stated that teammates, usually upperclassmen and peers, were also influential in regard to their development as student-athletes. Whether the athletic departments designed the program or a system that provided mentors and role models intentionally or not, the positive outcomes they helped to produce are obvious from the student-athlete interviews.

The Big Ten men's basketball player described his situation:

At college, after my parents gave me a foundation, as a freshman I looked to the upperclassmen [name] and those guys. You'd like it to be a coach but then the college environment was different. I grew up in a household where the f-word wasn't used. So I couldn't attach myself to that with the coaches. So it was the upperclassmen on the team and my roommate. They helped with the transition to college, study habits, focus, the mental aspects of college athletics. There was more than just rolling out a basketball and playing...but one thing I appreciated about Coach [name]...it seemed like going through hell while you were there, but when you graduate it usually pays off later with good jobs and careers and so forth.

Overall, most of the participants in the study had at least one role model or mentoring figure, and many had more than one who helped them learn and develop as student-athletes athletically, academically and socially.

## **Academic Support Programs**

The importance and contributions of academic support programs and services was mentioned by virtually every student-athlete who participated in this study. There were a variety of components mentioned by the participants and several similarities described by those who attended the various institutions represented in the study. And what they described, for the most part, were comprehensive, intrusive academic advising, counseling, and tutoring services and programs. The younger participants often described this support as more than they could ask for, or likely even needed. Nonetheless, they were genuinely grateful for these support services.

The reports of satisfactory academic support services are not at all surprising. First, the older participants in the study described extensive academic support services when they attended in the 1990s. Not one indicated that they perceived a lack of support from the athletic department staff or the academic faculty in general. This supports the literature review (Carodine, Hall, & Gratto, 2001; Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001; Howard-Hamilton & Sina; Nite, 2012) in demonstrating a relatively strong academic support services philosophy in intercollegiate athletics.

Second, since the NCAA implemented much more stringent requisites regarding graduation rates and annual academic performance rates for Division I member institutions (with serious playoff eligibility implications), the academic support services among most NCAA DI schools has been essentially forced to insure that their academic support services and programs protect against sanctions for failure to meet the more stringent requirements. A student-athlete who played football in the 1990s explained:



We had excellent support in terms of tutoring if we needed it. For instance, I had to take a couple of accounting courses and that just wasn't my forté even though it turned out well in the end. However, we had the ability to obtain a tutor very easily and frequently...not saying that the normal student body couldn't do that because they could as well. But I took full advantage of that, and we had mandatory study hall. Of course, at the time, that was not on the top of your list in college, but at the end of the day, that was extremely important to keep you on track. The path associated with athletics can be cumbersome and it's extremely to have that balance with academics.

Another component that some of the participants mentioned as an integral part of their academic support system was a program commonly referred to as a freshman seminar, first year experience course, or something similar in nature. Basically, it was a mandatory course for all incoming student-athletes at a particular institution. At one university it was called University 101 and according to a female track athlete "taught you basic survival skills for college, where to go for help in certain situations...and we got nutrition advice." At least four participants from this particular institution mentioned this in their interview. This is not unlike the various first year experience and freshman seminar approaches that many higher education institutions have implemented for their general student population. However, in this case, it was geared to first year student-athletes at that particular school.

Some participants mentioned that becoming involved in student organizations, particularly those related to their academic majors, such as a business fraternity or the health and wellness majors club, helped them by strengthening their academic pursuits and helping them from the networks that would assist them in finding jobs and careers.

Ted, a football player, explained:

I think it was my sophomore year that I joined a society that was composed of those in my major [recreation administration]. Not everyone in the major was in it but once I joined that...it was excellent. There were maybe one or two other

student-athletes in there...no one cared much about sports in that group. Some of them did but they were not in it because of sports. So, in my opinion, that was really positive because it was time I could focus on a career and academics...meet new colleagues and friends that didn't care about me being an athlete. I really enjoyed that because you could put football in your back pocket for a while.

Several participants in the study spoke of the importance of community involvement and service work as valuable contributors to their overall learning and development as student-athletes. For some, it was the first time in their lives that they had been exposed to or encouraged to participate in such programs. They worked with underprivileged children, the elderly, and people afflicted with serious illnesses.

Mack, a men's basketball player, explained:

On Tuesdays we went to read at one of the elementary schools to the youngsters, which was really cool to have that interaction with them. We did some other community involvement...every once in a while we would go to the community's dialysis center and talk to patients...we would go places when Coach requested it or a community group had a request. It helped you to become a well-rounded person...dealing with the youth got you involved with the overall community. The dialysis center was very eye-opening...you think you have struggles when you're tired at practice or conditioning sessions go long until you see what other people are dealing with and you just laugh at yourself...complaining that you have it rough because you're physically or mentally tired.

For many of them, this encouragement to become involved in their local community, and the exposure to service or volunteer work has continued in their current lives as a result of those types of opportunities that they were initially afforded as college student-athletes.

### **Sense of Structure**

Many of the participants explained that a sense of structure or a basic framework that helped shape their daily lives as student-athletes was very important to their overall development. While not a person, place or thing—instead a concept—that has served as a

template for how to achieve success. Many described that the way that their lives were organized, whether this took place by accident or by design, helped them adjust and flourish as college students athletically, academically, and socially. More interestingly though, is how several participants have used this same concept of structure in their adult lives and in their careers. It might be described as a sense of security and self-confidence—because they know that this has worked for them before, or they have had success in doing things in a certain process before—that they are confident in achieving future success in life if they continue to follow this structure of framework. Perhaps this resembles Baxter Magolda’s concept of self-authorship which involves the ability to know yourself, know what you know, reflect upon it, and base judgments on it. It typically begins to evolve as college students near graduation but is more evident in their late twenties and early thirties (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004).

### **Research Question 3**

This research question sought to answer “who or what was most influential to the student-athletes’ learning and development during their intercollegiate athletic career?” Nearly all of the participants explained that it was a person or persons who exhibited the most positive influence on their growth and development. Most of them named coaches, teammates, family, and academic faculty as most influential. Some of what follows will overlap or will emerge as very similar to the data and discussion presented for research questions 1 and 2. This is a direct result of the people who were most influential to the student-athletes because they usually had a primary role in creating the environment in which the student-athletes inhabited.

Many participants named coaches as the most influential person or persons in their learning and development. For them it was the role often portrayed by a coach as a role model or mentor or as someone who had fostered a culture for student-athlete growth and development. A female track athlete from explained,

The one who definitely had the most influence on me was Coach G. He was our head women's coach and was the one I started off with the first relationship in college...he was also from Wisconsin [where she was from]. He didn't start off coaching me because I worked under Coach M. as a sprinter/hurdler. But he was the one I could go talk to about things and relate to him. I could go cry in his office if I needed to. He was a huge mentor and almost like a father figure away from home. I think that was it and he still is that way to me today. I called him and emailed him all the time after I graduated and when I started my coaching career.

The Big Ten male basketball player described the culture created by his head coach in elaborate detail.

Without question it was my head coach for 1000 reasons. There might be a lot of guys that I played with that would come up with a different answer. I'll try to condense this or we will wear the tape recorder out. I had been on a million AAU and high school teams before college. My first ever team meeting my freshman year...we are going to be the #1 ranked team in the country...late August meeting and the first time the freshmen are included in a team function...so me and the other freshmen take off for the basketball arena to get there 15 minutes early for a three o'clock meeting. So we get there way early, right...wish we slept another 10 minutes, right...open the locker door and every single upperclassmen is already sitting in there. I remember it like it was yesterday. All the seniors all looking at us...sitting straight up...like, "what are you freshmen doing?" Talk about a wake-up call! So what did that mean? It meant that way before that day, a culture had been established. And I remember thinking, "oh my god, what did I sign up for?" And that culture was like a classroom.

Those are two extremes on the role of the coach and mentor continuum, but no doubt that they both had profound impacts on the student-athletes in this study.

In other cases it was an assistant coach who had the most influence on a student-athlete. For some athletes they just felt that assistant coaches could relate more to them.

Perhaps they were younger—closer in age than that of a head coach. Or it was a simple as they were the position coach for that particular athlete so that induced closer relationships. A baseball player shared the following:

My pitching coach my freshman year was the first time anyone had broken down my pitching mechanics for me. He made me a brand new pitcher because I was bad. He let me know I was bad! The biggest compliment I ever received throughout my college career was in December of my freshman year. He said, “you are the pitcher who made the biggest improvement in the shortest time in all my years of coaching. And that is strictly due to your dedication and trusting what I have told you. I didn’t recruit you. You were the former head coach’s recruit and I wanted nothing to do with you. But you are a very coachable kid...probably the most coachable I’ve ever had and if I could do it over I would recruit 100% more players like you.” I would say that had a profound impact on me.

Other former student-athletes named professors or academic advisors in their area of study as the most influential to them. The same football player who discussed the importance of participating in the student organization for recreation administration majors described the influence of a professor.

I’m going to say—at the end of the day—that it was a professor. It was a professor that understood the rigors associated with athletics. He understood your time constraints...not to say the coaches were bad or didn’t influence me positively, but there was a professor who kind of mentored me. He was a recreation administration faculty member, which was my major. He mapped out my career plan and advisement and really kept me going while I was there. I had what was almost a career ending injury...I thought to myself...the Chicago Bears are not going to be knocking on my door...so that injury hurt me athletically. So while at SIU, it was that professor who influenced me the most.

Another participant identified a professor who encouraged him to pursue a master’s degree after graduation, which neither the student-athlete nor his family had ever contemplated. That influence resulted in a teaching, coaching, and eventually an administration career. The men’s track/cross country athlete intimated:

It was Dr. H. I was the first person in my family to go to college...neither my parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles...so I was the first to go through it. So I

finished my undergrad in P.E. and health and figured I would see what jobs are out there...maybe go back to Kokomo...and Dr. H. came to me and asked if I ever thought about getting a master's degree and I said "me, a master's degree, yeah right?" But I got through with a 3.93 GPA and was the Physical Education Student of the Year and some other honors and that was all cool to me. I thought my job was done and I was finished with school. She said to me, "you need to come be my grad. assistant and receive a stipend...you need to pursue a master's degree...you are the kind of person that could benefit from more higher education. So when someone believes in you like that...I was like, immediately I am going to do it.

A men's baseball player related to a similar experience with his academic advisor:

Outside of the coach, it was my academic advisor, Dr. K., who is still in the PE department at my school. She sat me down freshman year and was very open and we developed a relationship. I got to know her family by going to our women's basketball games. She sat me down and made a map of my college academic career year-by-year...So I had a map and if I ever had a question or concern, I had no problem going to her door and being able to sit down and talk with her, or if I had a frustration with a class or didn't understand something, her door was always open. I still talk to her to this day.

Overall, the participants felt that they received genuine interest and support for their academic pursuits at all of the institutions represented in this study from academic faculty and advisors not related to their respective athletic departments. They thought that the faculty and administrations at their institutions were vested in helping them succeed and, often times were enthusiastic supporters of athletics on their campuses.

Another category of influential people was teammates and peers. Two participants had interesting perspectives on how a teammate or a peer had the most impact on that individual as a college student-athlete. A football player explained:

Well there were several influences obviously, but it was a teammate named "Foster Scott" who was another outside linebacker. Matter of fact, I broke my leg right before my junior season and he took my starting outside linebacker position. After that, senior year we were both starting linebackers together. We were the same age...he was very disciplined, spiritual, hard-working, over-achiever type of guy. People like that I am drawn to. Positive, hard-working people that have a lot of the same goals...we worked out together, drank beer together, all of those

things ...we fed off each other and pushed each other. There were a few other teammates like that...that whatever field you are in, you need to find people who are going to push you. You have to find mentors too that are going to push you to be successful. He was the same age, we came in together and that was good.

Here is a good example of how college student-athlete was able to articulate a concept that would he would identify with later on in his profession. It captures how people thrive in an environment where they are motivated by others they work with and are more comfortable around others with similar ambitions.

A more somber story involves a male track athlete who shared the story of how his best friend, who was a student-athlete at another university, became his biggest influence:

Mine is going to be different than anybody else's answer. When I was a sophomore at my school, my best friend who was a golfer at another school died in a car accident. We were best friends since 7 or 8 years old. We had run in a meet at Purdue that evening, and I was actually going up to his university that weekend to visit him. But I decided I wasn't going and called and left him that message. I found out about an hour and a half later that he had been killed in the accident. I had talked to him the day before for about 40 minutes. So that just motivated me to run a lot! I ran for him—I really did. My next meet, which was the next weekend, I ran my best collegiate meet of my career—with little sleep—the weekend after my best friend died. And so I would say that a lot of my motivation stemmed from that. Still today, he motivates me...you only have one best friend and mine died at a really young age...he may have even become a professional golfer. So being able to put in the time—that drive...he was part of my work ethic. That was my biggest influence.

These findings indicate that the experiences of the student-athletes who participated in this study were significantly engaged with both in-class and out-of-class endeavors. This evidence further supports the student development theory of engagement that scholars and practitioners have stressed as a primary strategy for the holistic learning and development of college students (Astin, 1999; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Kuh, 1993; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003; Kuh and Associates, 2005; Kuh et al., 2007).

As equally important to the practice of student engagement was that each student-athlete was able to identify those people on campus who were involved in this engagement and how these interactions impacted them for the long term. As research literature has shown, it really does not matter if the influence emanates from mentors, role models, or peers—what matters most is that effective student engagement takes place (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006; Kuh et al., 2007).

#### **Research Question 4**

The research question “what can college athletic departments systematically incorporate to help integrate their educational mission to the institution?” was developed primarily with future implications and further research in mind. I did not fully expect the study participants to be able to answer this question, given the format of the participant interviews. However, the interviews did help me formulate a response to this research question. In addition to the interview data, I utilized my own experiences as a practitioner to further inform this response.

#### **Evaluation and Assessment of Athletic Programs**

One of the interview questions asked the participants what type of feedback they were asked to provide to their athletic departments regarding their overall experiences as student-athletes at their institution. Sometimes, I literally received a blank stare as an initial response to this question. Usually, the participants were able to cite some examples of where they were able to provide feedback. Of course, many of them had indicated that they had solid relationships with their coaches and felt comfortable in approaching them, even with constructive criticism or concerns about that particular team or program.



Far fewer participants indicated that they recalled or were aware of formal feedback or program evaluation conducted on behalf of the athletic department. In the interviews, I would provide an example of how this may have been done, comparing it to how most of them evaluated their academic courses and participated in instructor ratings at the conclusion of academic courses. Many of the participants stated that there was a student-athlete advisory council or panel at their institutions and some of them were representatives at their respective campuses. Some recalled exit interviews with their respective coaching staffs or end-of-season individual meetings with their coaches. Of course, each institution's athletic department may have operated somewhat differently, but the evidence gathered indicated a general lack of formal athletic program evaluation and assessment in place at the institutions that the participants attended.

I asked each interview participant to respond to the criticism that intercollegiate athletics does not fit within the mission of higher education. There was a wide variety of responses to this question. The emotions of the student-athletes ranged from passion to anger to cynicism. Some of them ranted about what they perceived as the hypocrisy of the NCAA. A Big Ten men's basketball player erupted when referencing the NCAA:

We could sit here for 5 hours and talk about the NCAA—what they are all about. All the Ed O'Bannon stuff...where the NCAA is selling a player's jersey on their website...and they've been suspended for raping somebody yet the NCAA is selling their jersey for \$99...that's disgusting. Why do these institutions have to follow these NCAA rules? Why? Who are they? I think the landscape is going to change dramatically...because, who are they? It's mafia...why are they in control of so much? Here is the book of rules that's this thick [gestures with hands about 12 inches apart]...now follow them all. We had rules changed all the time when I was on campus...you couldn't even believe! We couldn't take a recruit to a steakhouse because it was 1.2 miles away from the campus epicenter. So now, we were taking them to Subway at the Union because it's within 1 mile. Why...because the NCAA said so.

Either directly or indirectly, every participant responded, unequivocally, that they perceived their own experiences as an intercollegiate student-athlete to fall within their institution's overall educational mission. A female track athlete related: "as a student-athlete, I was always learning and that is supposed to be the mission of higher education."

The student-athlete population is commonly referred to as a special population among a given college student body. Therefore, institutions and athletic departments should make available sufficient student support services for their student-athletes (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Most of participants praised the level of student services support they received, particularly in the areas of academic counseling, tutoring, and study skills. One area where some of the participants indicated a gap in student-athlete support services was in career services, more specifically in the areas of career exploration and assistance with internships and summer employment. Krissy, a female basketball player, concluded:

Where there could have been more, I am thinking help with summer jobs, when we did have time to work and internships. More career counseling may have been helpful...but summer time jobs that fit your current or future career interests would have been great. It's so hard for anybody to get summer jobs anyway, just for a couple of months...that you want to get some practical work experience for the future..."real world" or career-related work experience.

One aspect of the data analysis that was somewhat surprising was the emphasis that the student-athletes placed on academic endeavors. Only three participants did not explicitly describe themselves as students first, or rather that academics were not their primary focus as college student-athletes. Of those three, two student-athletes went on to play professionally in their respective sport and the other participant was looking to college athletics as an avenue to escape the poverty stricken and gang-related environment in

which he grew up. However, each of these student-athletes graduated from their respective institution, and two of them have graduate degrees.

It is apparent from the interviews that many of the coaches had imparted or reinforced this attitude in their student-athletes. It is clear that many of them matriculated with a perspective that was focused on the importance of academic excellence. Yet, many of the student-athletes expressly conveyed how their coaches, and even teammates, imparted the importance of academic achievement. Either way, this finding supports the notion that intercollegiate athletics—for the institutions represented in this study—may have a justifiable position within the educational missions of those institutions.

In an effort to more deeply explore the mission, vision, and values statements facet of this study, I investigated the currently accessible mission, vision, and core values statements of each of the eight institutions represented in this study via their website content. What I found was that only one institution specifically mentioned intercollegiate athletics as a component. It was included in the institution's vision statement as a component in which the institution strived to be recognized as a leader among public research universities. This cursory document analysis corroborates the scholarly literature asserting a lack of explicit institutional mission focus pertaining to intercollegiate athletics (Clotfelter, 2011; Duderstadt, 2000).

Intercollegiate athletic departments may be able to demonstrate their educational contributions to student-athletes in the following way: (a) explicitly describe how athletics fits within the mission of their institution, (b) perform formal evaluation and assessment of the holistic development of their student-athletes based on widely-accepted college student development models, and (c) at least partially justify the resources

allocated to college athletics by demonstrating that intercollegiate athletics is a legitimate out-of-class student learning and development platform.

### **Chapter Summary**

The findings of this research study suggest that intercollegiate athletics can be a significant and impactful undergraduate out-of-class learning and development experience. All of the participants in the study were able to articulate what the college athletic experience meant to them and the lasting effects that those experiences had on them. Many of them explained how certain persons associated with their respective athletic departments had been instrumental in their development and growth as college students and many still had profound influences on them to this day. The participants demonstrated in the interviews that there are particular life skills and career skills that they have utilized and continue to utilize, and they perceive that those skills were developed and enhanced through their participation in intercollegiate athletics.

All of the study participants believed that intercollegiate athletics had a relevant place within the mission of higher education and within the missions of the institutions which they attended. Although several acknowledged the inherent problems and abuses associated with NCAA Division I athletics and recognized many of the aspects of the criticisms leveled at college athletics, they were adamant in affirming that the experiences gained through their participation in intercollegiate athletics justified the existence of athletic programs on college campuses. To sum it up, during my interview with a men's basketball player from a Big Ten university, he rhetorically asked me, "Without college basketball, what did I learn? Without my athletic experiences, what did I learn? It was all life skills."

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS,  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will provide a summary and discussion of the research findings and recommendations for further research related to the topic. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of intercollegiate athletics on the student learning and development of student-athletes. More specifically, the research investigated former student-athletes' perceptions of how their experiences as intercollegiate athletes contributed to their career and life skills. In this chapter, the conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for additional research will be presented.

**Overview of the Study**

There is significant evidence that out-of-class experiences contribute to the learning and development of undergraduate college students (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1995; Kuh, 1993; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996; Astin, 1999). The research also concludes that college out-of-class and co-curricular experiences can enhance psychosocial growth and development (Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003) as well as cognitive gains (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). For this research study, participation in intercollegiate athletics was considered to be a purposeful out-of-class or co-curricular set of experiences. Furthermore, the study examined how former college student-athletes viewed their learning and development through the lens of their participation in

intercollegiate athletics. More specifically, the study focused on the perceptions of the influence of intercollegiate athletic participation on the development and growth of life skills and career skills of the study participants.

Intercollegiate athletics has historically faced harsh criticisms related to its position within the higher education model and therefore its value and contribution to the mission of higher education (Sperber, 1990, 2000; Gerdy 1997, 2002, 2006; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Bowen & Levin, 2003). Some of the criticism is legitimately derived. Thus, there have been several major movements in the last century to reform intercollegiate athletics. But these reforms have not always realized their intended results. Instead, today's intercollegiate athletics landscape presents more complex issues for higher education institutions than ever before. The intention of this research study is not to hush or repudiate the critics of college athletics, but to explore the possibility that intercollegiate athletics can provide viable out-of-class learning and development experiences. Furthermore, intercollegiate athletics can be a relevant component of the mission of higher education.

Several scholars (Clotfelter, 2011; Coakley, 2007; Cooper & Weight, 2011; Duderstadt, 2000; Ridpath, 2008; Schroeder, 2010) have examined intercollegiate athletics and the complicated relationship that has developed over time regarding core values and missions at most American universities and colleges. The general consensus is that the gap between athletic values and culture and academic values and culture continues to widen. There does not appear to be a concrete formula or approach for handling these divergent paths.

According to Umbach et al. (2006), there is surprising little evidence at the national level about student-athlete learning and development as compared to other students on campus. Furthermore, there is little evidence that systematic assessment is being performed regarding intercollegiate athletic programs at most institutions of higher education (Hagedorn & Horton, 2009).

### **Purpose of the Study**

With a dearth of qualitative research and data about student-athlete development and learning outcomes, I chose a phenomenological study approach in hopes of adding to the rather small body of research on the topic. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of intercollegiate athletic experiences on the student learning and development of college student-athletes. More specifically, the study explored former student-athletes' perceptions on how their college athletic experiences affected their life and career skills. This approach may also help identify new aspects in the student-athlete learning and development model that emerge to implore future research in these areas.

### **Research Design**

The study included 19 participants who completed their undergraduate academic and athletic careers at Midwestern NCAA Division I institutions. They participated in one-on-one interviews with me responding to semi-structured interview questions which were designed to allow the participants to describe their experiences as student-athletes in rich detail. Analysis of the data collected in the interview process entailed transcription of the interviews followed by a coding process to identify common themes in the body of data. The data were then re-coded to improve the reliability of the data. I used a method of peer debriefing (Merriam, 1998) in which I asked the same set of interview questions

to three former student-athletes that I knew who were not participants in the study. These three reported a range of experiences very similar to the participants in the study.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question 1**

This research question sought the perceptions of former student-athletes regarding the extent to which their participation in college athletics affected their overall learning and development. The data analysis revealed 11 themes that were categorized across student learning and developmental gains. The vast majority described accountability, time management skills, handling adversity, failure and success, teamwork and collaboration, work ethic and dedication, and personal relationships as valuable assets which they attributed, in part, to their experiences as college student-athletes. Other themes that emerged were self-motivation, communication skills, improved self-esteem, critical thinking skills, self-discipline, and valuing education.

The study participants related that they perceived these attributes as indispensable components in their individual life and career skill sets. Furthermore, all of the study participants attributed much of their career and life successes to the pervasive influence of their intercollegiate athletic experiences.

Overall, the findings related to Research Question 1 were not unexpected. Attributes such as time management, accountability, teamwork, and work ethic have been traits long associated to former student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1991; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Cooper & Weight, 2011). What was somewhat surprising was the lack of negative feedback provided by the study participants related to their perceived student and learning and development process. They were each given the opportunity to provide such



feedback in two of the interview questions. Overall, the participants expressed very little negative experiences or net diminished returns in their student learning and development process. All of the participants were effusive in their praise of the student learning and development experience at their respective institutions.

One of the predominant themes that was somewhat surprising was how the former student-athletes expressed a sense of “valuing education.” I found this to be a complex theme. On the surface, many expressed that if not for their athletic attributes they may not have attended college, for financial reasons among others. But to most, it was reflected in just how serious they were about the academic realm of being a college student-athlete. Most of the participants stressed that academics were their first priority, and often stated that their college coaches and academic advisors did not have to reinforce this attitude. For some, it took an even deeper meaning in how they approached their careers, since many of the participants were in the teaching and coaching professions, and they continued the same approach in their tutelage of students and athletes.

Overall, the study participants provided effusive and descriptive narratives regarding the positive impact that intercollegiate athletic participation had on their learning and development. Very few expressed any net negative impact or lasting effects which might have hindered the development of their life skills and career skills. Furthermore, the participants were able to relate aspects of their learning and development as student-athletes and apply that learning to their present situations, essentially affirming an element of contextual learning.

## **Research Question 2**

Research question 2 focused on identifying the methods, programs, and strategies employed by the athletic departments and their personnel that had an impact on the participants' learning and development. In much the same ways that student development personnel and support services professionals recognize the importance of certain practices that aid the college student learning and developmental process (Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007), the participants related that they observed similar practices being utilized in their respective athletic departments and institutions. The primary themes which emerged were mentors and role models, academic support programs and systems, teammates and peers, and a general framework to assist in the guidance and support of the student-athletes in all of their endeavors. More importantly, when these factors were apparent in multiplicity, it appears to have had an even more beneficial effect, centering on a holistic approach to student learning and development of student-athletes.

Many participants expressed how important their relationships with head coaches, assistant coaches, athletic department personnel, and faculty and academic advisors in their respective majors were to them. Such relationships were crucial while they were student-athletes, but several participants expressed how the bonds formed had an impact on them even today, as they remained in contact with those important individuals over time. In fact, some stated that they had depended on mentors and role models in their lives and careers to date and deemed the relationships crucial to their career successes.

A theme that was named "sense of structure" was somewhat difficult to describe by many of the former student-athletes, but it became more apparent to me after the data

analysis. What I was able to interpret was a concept that these participants were able to construct a framework that could help pattern their lives—personally, socially, and professionally—and that they attributed this in some way to their experiences as intercollegiate student-athletes.

Almost all of the former student-athletes indicated that they believed there were sufficient academic, athletic and social support services in place within their respective institutions to assist their overall student growth and development. A few even felt that the assistance and support was more than necessary and well beyond what the students-at-large were receiving. Of course, some of this support infrastructure is mandated by the NCAA. On the negative side, a small minority of study participants indicated that they wished they had more career exploration and counseling as student-athletes.

Finally, because many of the former student-athletes expressed the profound importance of mentors and role models had on them while student-athletes, this provided a segue into Research Question 3 by emphasizing the huge impact that *people* had played in their overall student learning and growth.

### **Research Question 3**

Research question 3 sought to identify who or what (program, specific event) was most influential to the learning and development of student-athletes according to the student-athletes themselves. The data analysis revealed some significant overlap of themes regarding the previous research questions. Not surprisingly, almost all of the participants indicated that it was a person or persons who were most influential in their growth and development as college student-athletes. My expectations prior to the interviews were that most, if not all, of the participants would name a coach as the person

that exerted the most positive influence in their college careers. This occurred in large part, as a majority related that either a head coach or an assistant coach was their source of primary influence.

To my surprise, a significant number of participants shared that it was someone other than a coach who was most the most influential person. A few named someone in the academic ranks of their institution, usually a professor or an academic or program advisor. This was particularly encouraging in light of the crux of criticism surrounding intercollegiate athletics. It also reinforces the statement that student-athletes were just as engaged as the students-at-large (Kuh et al., 2007).

Equally surprising to me was the indication from a few participants that it was a teammate or a peer who had the most positive influence on them during their college career. In one particularly tragic case, it was the passing of a student-athlete's best friend in an automobile accident that provided the student-athlete with the inspiration to greater achievement as a student-athlete.

Those who identified coaches as the primary influencer typically viewed that person as a mentor or role model. Many expressed great respect for those people and what they had meant to them and their life and work careers. Several stated that they remained close to those mentors to the present day and they continued to provide influence and guidance to their former student-athletes.

Overall, this research question had some significant overlap in terms of data and the themes that emerged. However, this may have served as a form of validation in the assertion that the former student-athletes involved in this particular study experienced significant gains in their overall student learning and development as a result of their

participation in intercollegiate athletics.

#### **Research Question 4**

This research question sought to address the strategies that college athletic departments can systematically incorporate to help integrate their missions into the missions of their respective institutions. It was designed to reflect on a combination of considerations. It is surrounded by an overarching debate that has vexed the academy for over a century. Those initial controversies may be highlighted by the private battles between President Theodore Roosevelt—a vigorous supporter of athletics—and the president at his alma mater, Harvard, over the continued existence of college-sponsored football (Miller, 2011).

One area of interest regarding this research question was participant feedback and the overall involvement in the evaluation of their athletic departments. The data were somewhat vague in the final analysis in regard to athletic department evaluation processes. Many of the participants did not specifically recall any opportunities to provide feedback to the athletic department on a formal basis. However, some did mention that they had an exit interview with an athletic department administrator or that they served in some capacity on a student-athlete advisory council or board. In most interviews, I presented this question to insure that the participants understood the question and that they had sufficient time to recall any information that would be helpful in answering this question.

Of course, many of the participants indicated that they were able to provide team and program feedback in a more informal method on a consistent basis. They revealed that their coaches had an open-door policy and many felt comfortable in taking advantage

of this and sharing their opinions and personal beliefs whenever they needed. Thus, they felt the relationship was really a two-way street in which they could reveal their true feelings and emotions to coaches or staff members. This reflects back to the coach as a mentor or role model approach.

In the participant interviews, one of the questions I asked was if the former student-athlete, based on his or her personal experiences, believed intercollegiate athletics belonged within the mission of higher education. The answer was in the affirmative in each of the interviews, and it was often emphatically articulated. It was evident in all 19 interviews that the former student-athletes believed that their educational and developmental growth was directly attributable to their experiences as intercollegiate student-athletes.

Interestingly, some of the participants expressed varying degrees of bitterness toward the NCAA. In these interviews, I could determine that these participants had been following the developments regarding NCAA matters since their collegiate days. For example, some scoffed at the notion that student-athletes were employees, yet were bitter about not receiving what they felt was fair treatment, such as a student-athlete stipend, on-campus jobs, and player likeness infringements. But, never did any of them harbor any resentment toward their respective athletic department coaches, personnel or the institutions they attended.

### **Conclusions**

The study participants perceived net gains in their student learning and development as a direct result of their participation in intercollegiate athletics. There were myriad factors articulated as significant factors in their growth. Prominent among

these factors were the presence of certain proven strategies for promoting college student learning and development. First, these participants overwhelmingly indicated that they received sufficient student support services in academic, athletic, and social respects. They were profuse in the descriptions of how academics were not only stressed but reinforced by the counseling and tutoring support that was available. Not to be overlooked was the sense that their coaches and athletic departments embraced that they were students first. As refreshing was the attitude of the vast majority of participants that their academic endeavors came before their athletic pursuits.

The concept that intercollegiate athletics represents a valid out-of-class learning and development forum was established from the interviews with the former student-athletes. From the data, I gathered that these student-athletes experienced student engagement in many of the ways the scholarly research has described it (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003). In fact it should, given the captive audience that student-athletes represent and the significant amount of time that they spend within their athletic team endeavors. The fact that coaches actually spend so much time engaged with their student-athletes lends itself to a positive learning and development model.

There are several aspects of the college sport team environment that Kuh, Palmer, and Kish (2003) attribute to psychosocial growth and development, such as learning communities, service learning and volunteerism, and exposure to diversity issues. Indeed, many of the participants described settings in which they were privileged to exactly this type of environment. The participant interviews established that the student and learning development perceived by the former student-athletes was holistic in nature.

The participants conveyed that their overall experiences as intercollegiate student-athletes were valuable, and often invaluable, to them in terms of their life skills and career skills portfolios. Furthermore, most stated that they would not be in their particular stations in life if it were not for their overall experiences as student-athletes.

The theoretical framework which helped guide this research study was based on Baxter Magolda's (1992) Epistemological Reflection Model (ERM). More specifically, the study sought to explore the contextual knowing concept included in the ERM to compare this concept to the data that emerged from the interviews. The final conclusion after interpreting the data is that the former student-athletes in this study exhibited a pattern of contextual knowing as related to their student learning and development process. However, Baxter Magolda (2004) notes that the development of contextual knowing is typically not apparent in undergraduate students, although it gradually replaces earlier ways of knowing in the initial years after college. This pattern was evident as they explained scenarios and experiences as student-athletes and applied them to "real world" experiences they have had in their careers and in their adult lives.

Furthermore, characteristics of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) were exhibited by many of the former student-athletes who participated in this study. I could detect just from the interviews that these participants had the ability to know themselves, recognize what they knew, could reflect upon it, and base judgments on what they knew.

Another element of the theoretical framework in this study was the out-of-class learning experience model (Kuh, 1993; Kuh, Palmer, & Kish, 2003; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). The basic concept is that co-curricular or extracurricular



programs provide college students with ample opportunities for student learning and development. However, a heavy emphasis is placed on the intentionality of said programs. Herein, I believe, is where this study ends and future studies could begin. This topic will be discussed further in the recommendations section of this chapter.

Ultimately, the former student-athletes participating in this study perceived that they benefited from their participation in intercollegiate athletics. They were able to articulate those benefits in the form of enhanced skills that they were able to utilize in their lives and their careers. Whether these gains were the result of intrinsic values emanating from participation in a co-curricular activity, such as intercollegiate athletics, or the formulation of intentionally designed methods for fostering student learning and development remains a question to me.

### **Implications**

One aspect that is clear from this study is that these former student-athletes believe that the endeavors of their respective college athletic departments were in concert with the overall mission of their respective institutions. I believe that to be extremely important in the realm of higher education. All of these former student-athletes would do it all over again. They expressed very few regrets or reservations about their respective student-athlete experiences. It was apparent from the interviews that they would want to re-live their student-athlete experience all over again. This reflects on the aspect of student satisfaction, which scholars have referred to in the overall importance of the efficacy of an institution of higher education (Astin, 1999; Kuh et al., 2005).

This study was designed to investigate perceptions of former student-athletes regarding their student learning and development and the influence that participating in

college athletics impacted that process. Clearly, the study participants credited their student learning, growth and development in large part to their intercollegiate athletic experiences. Whether this learning and development process was inherent or was intentional by design is not entirely clear, but it appears as though a combination of intentionally designed methods and programs and inherent values attributed to out-of-class learning opportunities played a central role.

Therefore, athletic departments should be doing much more to convey the message that intercollegiate athletics can serve as an integral contributor in the overall student learning and development process. They must be able to identify and accentuate the positive aspects of their programs relating to the growth and development of their participants, and disseminate such information both internally and externally. The need for outcomes assessment in college athletics extends further than graduation rates and academic progress rates. It has become apparent that independent researchers are the primary sources of research related to student-athlete developmental and learning outcomes. This highlights the current lack of interest in systematic outcomes assessment by the NCAA and the institutions themselves. Such efforts may help to close the gap between the academic and athletic cultures on campuses to which critics correctly have alluded.

The NCAA has been late arriving at this juncture. The perception that the NCAA has been preoccupied with the commercial aspect of intercollegiate athletics has overshadowed much of the progress made in terms of academic reforms. Again, critics have correctly asserted that the commercial aspect of college athletics has spiraled out of control. Considering the many factions that currently make up the NCAA membership, I

do not expect much to change regarding this issue in the near future.

Clotfelter (2011) refers to the potential utility of intercollegiate athletics as a “beacon of campus culture.” By this, he is referring to the strengthening of bonds among the campus community, more specifically, the sense of school spirit and community involvement that often accompany college spectator sports. Furthermore, alumni relations and donor contributions are commonly associated with the presence of an intercollegiate athletic program on campus. Since it is abundantly clear that intercollegiate athletics are firmly entrenched on the American higher education landscape, it may make sense for college administrators to incorporate this aspect into the missions, values, goals, and objectives on their respective campuses.

Ultimately, it is up to college presidents, athletic directors and coaches, and faculty to collectively work to establish college athletics programs that can effectively differentiate between the commercial purposes and the educational purposes of the athletic cultures on their respective campus. Critics have effectively shown that the lines are often blurred with regard to the purposes and intention of college athletics. One way to begin to this difficult task could be to evaluate institutional missions, visions, and values coupled with athletic department missions and values to create a more purposeful and integrated overall mission and vision that accounts for the current imbalance that exists on so many college campuses. Even if the concept of intercollegiate athletics integrated within institutional missions, visions, and values remains far-fetched, efforts to include the realm of intercollegiate athletics within institutional goals and objectives, along with other co-curricular and out-of-class learning experiences seems entirely practical.

### **Limitations**

The major limitations of this study were:

1. Only Midwestern NCAA Division I institutions were represented in this study.

Furthermore, these participants were selected because they were identified from a small pool of volunteers.

2. The study was limited to 19 participants and only 3 were female.

3. The researcher has been a college athletic administrator for a significant period and his biases must be considered.

4. The study participants were volunteers and could be biased in favor of intercollegiate athletics.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

There are several recommendations for further scholarly research as a result of the review of relevant literature, data collection and analysis, and the interpretations, implications, and conclusions of the study. First, a study that involves participant samples from institutional affiliations other than NCAA Division I could allow for investigating student-athletes who may have received less formal institutionalized or subsidized student support services. Of particular interest might be these student-athletes' perceptions of the learning and developmental gains and losses derived from their participation in intercollegiate athletics. Of interest would be the comparable levels of the student-athletes learning and development gains and losses across the different levels of competition (NCAA DII, III, and NAIA). A variation of this research approach could examine comparisons and contrasts among individual and team sports, or revenue sports versus Olympic sports; and studies that are gender specific.

A second future research topic could be a study that more deeply explores the methods and processes student-athletes commonly identify as effective educational tools. For example, a study may be able to differentiate specifically between benefits realized intrinsically from participation in college athletics versus what strategies or programs, such as community involvement/ service work, team building exercises, and role models and mentors, were perceived to be most effective by student-athletes. My study did not specifically address such differentiation per se.

Another important future study could explore the culture and values systems at institutions that explicitly include intercollegiate athletics in their mission, vision, and values statements versus those institutions who do not exhibit integrated missions and values with their respective athletic departments. The first challenge would be to identify such institutions that reflect an integrated mission, because many scholars and researchers have identified this gap (Clotfelter, 2011; Duderstadt, 2000; Schroeder, 2010). Such a study could compare and contrast the values of internal stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, and students at-large, with those of athletic department personnel and student-athletes among the various institutions in the study. Perhaps, strategies could be identified to assist in melding the differences, if they did exist. A secondary potential study could explore the impact of intercollegiate athletic programs on the campus community in terms of school spirit, community bonding, and overall student body satisfaction in relation to intercollegiate athletics. This study should be qualitative in nature, focusing on internal stakeholders such general student populations. Clotfelter (2011) notes that some similar quantitative studies have been conducted with mixed results.

Finally, a study involving the formal and systematic assessment of student-athlete holistic learning and development should be pursued. Perhaps a theoretical framework could be based on practical student development assessment models that are already readily utilized. Furthermore, pre-testing and post-testing of college student-athletes gains in terms of cognitive and psychosocial abilities may be very revealing as to significance and value of athletic participation measured as an out-of-class learning and development experience. Exploring further, a study that explores the reporting structure of athletic departments within the institution organizational charts may reflect on differences among outcomes and assessment models. For example, there may be noticeable differences between athletic departments that report directly to student affairs versus departments that report to the president's office, academic affairs, or some other unit.

### **Final Remarks**

There is no question that the former intercollegiate student-athletes represented in this study were able to articulate the powerful and meaningful ways in which their experiences as student-athletes had a direct positive impact on their lives and careers. There may be evidence to suggest that a typically positive student-athlete experience can augment and, even accelerate, the learning and development patterns of typical college-aged students in relation to Baxter Magolda's ERM model (1992, 1999) and Chickering's and Reisser's (1993) vectors of psychosocial development model.

However, critics of intercollegiate athletics are not categorically wrong with respect to many of their criticisms. It seems as though it all comes down to how one views the mission of higher education as it relates to undergraduate students and their education. In that respect, there is much more to come and much more work to be done.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Wendy Troxel in the College of Education at Illinois State University. I am conducting a research study to assess learning and developmental outcomes of student-athletes who participated in intercollegiate athletics. I am requesting your participation, which will involve one interview with me at a time and place convenient to you, and last about 60 minutes. The interview will be audio taped.

Your participation in this study, of course, is voluntary. The results of the research study may be published, but your name would not be used. I will take all precautions to maintain your confidentiality.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation may assist others in improving the quality and supporting the advocacy of intercollegiate athletic programs.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Chad Good

If you are interested in being a part of my study, please indicate below, along with the best way to reach you to set up an interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone # or e-mail

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-2529, or Dr. Wendy Troxel at (309) 438-7668.

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear John Doe:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Wendy Troxel in the College of Education at Illinois State University. I am conducting a research study to assess learning and developmental outcomes of student-athletes who participated in intercollegiate athletics. I am requesting your participation, which will involve one interview with me at a time and place convenient to you, and last about 60 minutes. The interview will be audio taped.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty of any kind. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. I will take all precautions to maintain your confidentiality.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation may assist others in improving the quality of intercollegiate athletic programs.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Chad Good

I give consent to participate in the above study. I understand that my comments will be kept confidential, and will be audio-taped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-2529, or Dr. Wendy Troxel at (309) 438-7668.

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Institution(s) Attended: \_\_\_\_\_

Sport(s) you participated in: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of seasons: \_\_\_\_\_

Scholarship or Non Scholarship (circle one)

Highest Degree Attained: \_\_\_\_\_ Undergraduate GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Awards/Recognition: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Race or Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Job Title or Position: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Were you actively recruited to come to the school to participate in your sport? If not, How did you become involved in a varsity sport(s)?
2. Please tell me what generally you have gained both educationally and personally from your participation in your collegiate sport.
3. Who was the most influential person during your time as an athlete? Was it a coach, teammate, or someone else? In what ways were they influential?
4. Were you involved in any other out-of-class or co-curricular experiences as an undergraduate student-athlete? If so, how did that compare or contrast to you over all experiences as a student-athlete?
5. Reflecting back on it, do you believe your experience had any long term positive effects on your career so far. If so, explain how or why you believe that.
6. Do you recall ever being asked to provide any feedback to the coaching staff, athletic department of the institution itself in regard to your experience as a student-athlete at college xyz? Such as what you may have learned, skills and traits developed while a participant?
7. Reflecting on the athletic program in which you were a participant, do you have any recommendations or suggestions that could enhance the overall learning and development of its student-athletes?
8. Critics of intercollegiate athletics may state that athletics has no place within the mission of higher education. For example, athletics is a waste of money, the student athletes do not belong in academia, etc. How would you respond to such criticisms?