

COLLEGE PERSISTENCE AND THE DIVISION II ATHLETE

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ABSTRACT

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Being a student athlete is an opportunity to gain college admission and participate in athletics at a competitive level as determined by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Student-athlete experiences in a university setting likely differ depending on the level of NCAA competition in which each particular campus participates. Unfortunately, many student athletes, despite their competitive Division, report experiences of being stigmatized by their peers and professors. The purpose of my project is to examine the educational and social experiences of Division II collegiate student athletes as it relates to their stigmatization. Drawing on existing 2011-2012 student census data from Humboldt State University, I analyze the collegiate academic experiences of NCAA Division II student athletes as they attempt to obtain their degree. I create an easy to read and cost effective report to show the persistence of Division II student athletes towards graduating despite their lack of mandated specialized academic assistance. This research seeks to break the negative stigma student athletes face on collegiate campuses. It is my goal that this project will educate staff, faculty, athletic donors and the public on the unique nature of student athletes rather than allowing speculation to determine the outcome of student athlete collegiate experiences.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
Placement and Project.....	3
Public Sociology	6
Project Significance	8
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	10
The Role of Athletics in the Academy.....	12
Stigma	15
Negative Stigma of Student Athletes.....	17
Student Athlete Collegiate Experience	21
The Effects of Student Athletes on a College Campus.....	25
Health and Psychological Effects of Negative Stigma	26
Additional Barriers and Bias Faced by Student Athletes	28
Student Athlete Academic Persistence	33
Student Athlete Measurements and Graduation Rates	37
Academic Support and Student Athlete Advising	42
Continuing Research on Student Athletes	47
METHODS	54
Study Overview and Design	54

Sample	55
Data Collection	56
Data Analysis	57
Results.....	62
Class Standing.....	62
Student Type	63
Gender.....	63
Ethnicity	63
First Generation College Students and Underrepresented Minorities (URM).....	64
Sport Participation	65
Student Origin by Region	65
Top Majors.....	66
Academic Unit Load	66
GPA.....	67
Graduation Rate	67
Retention Rate.....	68
Report Construction and Design.....	68
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	70
Future Student Athlete Research	70
Additional Data Needs.....	70
Public Education About Student Athletes	71
Campus Policy and Reporting	72
Non-Intercollegiate Athlete Reporting	73

REFERENCES	75
APPENDICES	82
2011-2012 HSU Student Athlete Report	82

INTRODUCTION

I first started working at Humboldt State University in the summer of 2007 as an admissions counselor. It was at that time that I witnessed the negative stigma assigned to student athletes. The staff and faculty that I worked with rarely had encouraging things to say about student athletes. I heard comments regarding their choice of major, the amount of physical education courses taken and how they had a sense of entitlement. I was confused because a majority of my interactions with prospective student athletes were positive. Every time I asked one of them to send in transcripts or test scores, complete a housing application or submit a financial aid requirement, they acted swiftly and completed the task with urgency. In fact, I was impressed by their level of commitment to compete at a college level despite the extra rules from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) they were required to follow just to be eligible to participate in their respective sport. In addition, they were also completing the necessary requirements from the state of California to attend a public university. For the most part, all incoming athletes I interacted with were doing exactly what was needed to be CSU admissible and NCAA eligible.

One major complaint from the admissions office staff was that student athletes always asked to apply for admission outside of the deadline required for all other prospective students. It was assumed that the coaching staff continued to recruit students even after the deadline for applications had passed and that student athletes did not think they had to follow the rules. It was true that student athletes often applied beyond the

deadline but the reasoning behind the behavior was not as the staff assumed.

Unbeknownst to the staff, there are specific times throughout the year that a coach can or cannot talk to a prospective student athlete. In addition, there are specific dates during the school year when a prospective student athlete makes the official commitment to the school they wish to attend by signing an NCAA National Letter of Intent. Unfortunately, the NCAA recruitment periods often do not coincide with normal admissions cycles.

After I was able to educate the admissions staff on the NCAA recruiting rules it was clear that coaches were simply working within the restrictions mandated by the NCAA. It was while I was working in admissions that I realized the staff and faculty on campus did not really know the specific constraints and pressures put on student athletes.

The topic of student athlete collegiate experiences is particularly important to me, as I am currently the assistant athletic director of a Division II athletics department. Unfortunately, I see my student athletes experience negative stigma from their professors and peers on campus. Professors assume student athletes do not actually care about obtaining their degree and students assume athletes do not have to do the same amount of work as their peers to pass a course. It is because of my initial experiences with student athletes that I feel a moral passion to confront the negative stigma associated with student athletes and challenge campus perceptions. I first learned of the term “moral passion” in an article by Steven Brint (2005). In it he defines moral passion as “the energy that drives us toward the accumulation of symbolic credit for pursuing a higher social ‘good’ through devoted (often misrecognized as ‘selfless’) activity” (2005:62). As soon as I read his description of moral passion I immediately realized my desire to help student

athletes stemmed from my own moral passion. As a result, my interest in public sociology as a student and my professional experience as a college administrator, helped develop the framework for my required graduate project and internship placement.

Placement and Project

I chose a public sociology internship placement with the Humboldt State University Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) office. Public sociology graduate students must complete a placement in an approved office to compliment their research area. I chose the IRP office so I could learn how a university uses existing institutional data. I planned to use institutional data for my project so seeing what projects were already being created on campus was very important to me. IRP is responsible for all institutional level data analysis and requested reports from on campus and off campus groups. They produce a series of reports annually as well as conduct additional projects as agreed upon by the university executive council and prioritized in their annual research plan. These reports often provide support to the upper administration with decision-making processes and program evaluation. I was mainly interested in doing a public sociology placement with their office to observe how collegiate institutions use the data they collect from the student population. Who uses the data they collect and for what purpose? How is the data prepared for different audiences? I sought my placement to learn more about large scale research offices and observe the institutional research office at a public university. Specifically, I wanted to see how available data could be used to promote public sociology efforts.

I was surprised to find that a number of reports were constructed from existing student data collected at the time a student applies to the university. On occasion IRP will conduct a survey of students to gather more information but they are very calculated in their approach. They stand firm that if too many surveys are administered to the student body in one academic year the participation rates will most likely fall. I would estimate that they receive a request from an on campus group to administer a survey at least once a week. They have to prioritize or help those groups find ways to gain the desired information in other ways that will not interfere with the overall priorities of the institution. The environment in which the office operates is complex but one that ultimately protects the students from an excessive number of solicitations to participate in surveys.

I had the opportunity to work on a few reports for IRP during my internship year and help create, as well as facilitate, the first ever Campus Quality Survey (CQS). CQS was created to measure the students' needs and perceptions across the campus and surrounding community so to provide a more comprehensive view of the student experience. This survey was administered at HSU and then later used by several other CSU campuses. I was able to experience first hand how an academic institution develops an idea for a study, how they gather and vet information for the study, how their data are collected and lastly how data are analyzed and presented to the public. This was the best experience I could have hoped for within my placement and it helped mold my ability to fully execute my own project. I worked with all of the IRP staff and helped contribute to the CQS project by gathering questions from campus offices, constructing the survey

instrument using Qualtrics survey software, and contributed to some of the final analysis of the information gathered. I discovered where my strengths and areas of growth were with regards to data analysis, which helped me plan my own project analysis. My placement was a valuable part of my sociological training and provided me with an understanding of the process institutions go through in regards to requested and mandatory reporting.

The NCAA, the organization that governs a majority of athletic programs nationally, requires specific reports from campuses every year so they can create annual reports about their membership. The IRP office provides the HSU athletics department with the information it needs to complete those NCAA required reports. I was disappointed to find that the athletics office does not have a campus specific student athlete report nor does it publish the reports it gives to the NCAA to the campus community. Making the information on student athletes public in an easy to read report has helped show the facts about them as a group and left little room for speculation, good or bad. If there were areas of student athlete academic performance found to be less than stellar then it would provide opportunity for improvement by the athletics department, instead of continuing an environment of stigma.

One key objective of my work with the IRP office was to create a specific student athlete report for the campus community that highlights the information of student athletes as a specific sub group. This report would allow the reader to examine whether the assumptions that exist about student athletes are valid. It would also support sharing resources to help remedy some of the challenges uniquely faced by student athletes such

as missed class time for travel to competitions or restrictions on coursework by NCAA regulations. The athletics department itself contributes to the stereotypes their students experience by not reporting the facts about their athlete population. The lack of available and accessible information leaves room for speculation from the public about the athlete sub group.

The purpose of this report is to help with the deconstruction of the negative stigma faced by student athletes by clearly providing comparative statistics about them as a sub group of students. With this paper I hope to provide a deeper understanding of the negative stigma faced by NCAA Division II college student athletes and how existing campus data can be used to effectively break down the negativity they endure. This project is from a public sociology standpoint and with a foundation in stigma theory as a basis of analysis. It is my goal to understand Division II student athletes and gain insight into their peer relationships so I can recommend improved campus relations and academic experiences for this group.

Public Sociology

Herbert Gans, the 1988 President for the American Sociological Association, provided a clear understanding of and encouragement for public sociology. He had several suggestions for sociologists who were looking to pursue a public sociology research path. He suggested they present their findings in clear English and in such a way that the lay public can understand it. They should concentrate on educating and providing “sociological analyses of American institutions and society rather than on

sociological principles illustrated with samples from America” (Gans 1988: 6). He stressed that sociology as a discipline should encourage and recruit sociologists that are eager to report their findings to their colleagues as well as the educated lay public. It should be the aim of public sociologists to get their sociological perspective into the mainstream media where it can reach the general public. Most importantly, Gans provides a clear description of who public sociologists are. They are able to speak to the academic and the public, they are interested in a wide variety of social topics and are able to maintain a professional rigor expected by other research disciplines.

After reading Gans’s address, I was encouraged that I have chosen to pursue a field that not only makes a difference in academia but also has a profound effect on the public. Despite ridicule from other sociologists like Michael Burawoy (2005), who challenges the legitimacy of public sociology as a proper field of study, I feel it is essential to make data findings as available as possible to the public.

As a student of public sociology I find it extremely important to provide opportunities for those outside of academia to be educated on sociological topics. As for the study of stigma, how would society benefit from the outcome of stigma research if it were only presented in such a way that those in academia understood? I can only imagine the possible societal shift that could occur if more sociologists put their research and results in a format that the public could easily digest. If the main points of a sociologist’s work could be presented by video or graphic image, like much of the information the public consumes in present society, then it could reach more individuals and create social change. I am not suggesting that sociological research should by any

means be “dumbed down” but I do think the results of our work can be marketed to different audiences in different ways thus having a greater social effect. It is with this in mind that I set out on a journey to discover how data can be used, presented and constructed so that it can have a desired outcome.

Project Significance

As a culmination of my experiences as a sociology graduate student, working on a college campus and within an athletic department, and my time spent in the IRP office, I wanted to create a project that could not only help improve the collegiate experience of athletes, but also serve as a model for other campus groups. In the overwhelmingly bureaucratic climate of university campuses, budget constraints can often postpone projects from becoming a reality. However, the project I have constructed is one that had little financial cost to the athletic department or school. The information is displayed in such a way that the public, as well as those in academia, should be able to use it to deconstruct the stereotypes that exist in regards to student athletes. Although student athletes are the specific group I chose to examine, the report itself can easily be altered to reflect the academic persistence of any particular student group on campus. Now that the model has been created, there is a template other stigmatized groups can use to improve their college experience. It is my assumption that the information in the report will reflect positively on the student athlete group and that other campus groups will follow suit to enhance their group’s collegiate perspective. Of course, there are many different lenses through which this report will be read and the outcome may not be well received

by some. There may be data that is perceived negatively, but it should be seen as an area to focus on improvement rather than a way to reinforce negative stigma. By vetting the data used for the report to other campus offices and spending time making sure the numbers accurately align with campus data, departments most likely will be able to work together in analyzing the results, making recommendations for the future, and breaking down the barriers that exist for student athletes.

The next chapter of this paper will provide a review of the literature relevant to this project. I will include topics such as why the student athlete population is important, academic performance of student athletes, stigmas they face and how university personnel can better support the student athlete population. Next this paper will describe the method used in acquiring campus data, comparing it to the university student body data and designing a layout for the report that can clearly portray the data in a visually pleasing way. Furthermore, the chapter will report the results of the data and analysis. Here I will discuss the importance of aggregate data within the report and make note of any statistically significant areas. Cross tabulations by sport, sex, race, origin and first generation were run on all data points to obtain additional relevant information. Lastly, I provide recommendations for future research and programs the campus may be able to implement to enhance the student athlete collegiate experience.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this research is to examine the educational and social discrimination collegiate student athletes experience due to their stigma on college campuses from the faculty and general student body. This research provides a better understanding of whether or not student athletes experience educational and social discrimination due to their athlete status. The following review of literature offers valuable advice and suggestions on how to promote healthy student athlete relationships between faculty and other non-athlete students. Many topics pertaining to student athletes have previously been explored and I will contribute to the ongoing conversation on how student athlete academic experiences differ from that of what the general public assumes.

With this review I provide a preview of literature that helped inform me on the issues surrounding student athletes. Specifically I explore stigma and the negative effects it can have on individual well being, then discuss the importance of student athletes as a group on a college campus as well as their contributions on campus. I'll also address barriers and biases student athletes face on their college campus and the connections to their collegiate experiences. Next, I'll examine the academic persistence of student athletes, their graduation rates and the academic support that is, or should be, provided to them. Lastly, I'll distill what areas of further research are needed to better understand student athletes. This review will help provide the basis for the development of my project and the frame of analysis of my findings.

Intercollegiate athletics have been considered an integral part of the U.S. higher education system (Despres et al. 2008) by bringing public attention to higher education institutions. Historically, there has been a concern for the academic achievement among collegiate student athletes due to their participation in their chosen sport. Often, the athletics department is one of the largest units on a college campus and provides economic, social and political resources for the institution. As a result, athletic departments have become increasingly influential on their campuses and provide areas of consultation that is often unavailable from other departments (Putler and Wolfe 1999). Since college athletics is a major social institution in our society, it is important to understand the hurdles student athletes face while attending school and working to obtain their degree (Peach 2006).

In studying collegiate student athletes it is critical to know exactly what type of athlete we are discussing. In this review, collegiate student athlete refers to a student registered with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) clearinghouse for a given approved sport at any divisional level. NCAA divisions are made by the criteria set by the NCAA based on the number of scholarship athletes, number of sports offered, and other factors (Price 2010). The NCAA governs most national collegiate teams and helps to distinguish student athletes from club and intramural student athletes. NCAA student athletes are registered with the NCAA clearinghouse, which verify and certify they meet the specific academic standards required for competition. Students who participate in club sports, intramural teams, or sport classes on campus are not considered a student athlete according to the NCAA definition.

For the purpose of this review, educational experiences will a reference to any experience that directly affects the academic success of a collegiate student athlete. This may include the recruitment of an athlete to a campus they may not be academically ready to attend, the pre-collegiate education of an athlete, the pressure of friends and family to succeed athletically or pay for college through athletic talent and certainly the interactions with individuals on their collegiate campus.

The Role of Athletics in the Academy

Student athletes have long constituted one of the most recognized populations on American college and university campuses, attracting honors and praise for their successes along with resentment of their privileges and special status (Fletcher et al. 2003). Researchers have contended student athletes should be considered non-traditional students with their own culture and problems in relating to the university system and larger society (Engstrom and Sedlacek 1991). Often, a student athlete has a hard time disconnecting their identity as an athlete despite the stigma they may face.

The participation in a sport can yield a deeper understanding of the self in relation to society (Banks 1983), which contributes to the dedication and discipline most athletes put towards the development of their athlete identity. College sports have become increasingly influential in American society since the early 1900's when the NCAA was established. Increased media coverage of major college sporting events has translated into large amounts of revenue for university athletic programs (Watt and Moore 2001).

College student athletes are a special and unique student population requiring support for their academic, athletic and personal needs and issues. Unlike other college students, student athletes face an additional set of complex social demands, academic stresses, and time management challenges arising from their involvement in a competitive sport (Broughton and Neyer 2001). Many experts in the field of student change and student services believe the student athlete population on a college campus fits the definition of “non-traditional” or “special needs” student groups (Hyatt 2003). For the purposes of this research, it is assumed that student athletes are indeed a special population on their college campus.

Student athletes have all of the needs that non-athletes have, but in addition they have many needs unique to their status as student athletes (Kirk and Kirk 1993). Playing an intercollegiate sport adds an unexpected complex layer to student life (Watt and Moore 2001). They must balance two schedules, one for academics and another for sport, including practice and travel time. Finding and maintaining a balance between athletics and education are ongoing challenges for student athletes (Fletcher et al. 2003). A popular motto for NCAA athletics is “Life in Balance” and athletic departments are encouraged to do their best to provide an exceptional student athlete experience as well as maintain a balanced academic experience.

Being a student athlete is an opportunity to gain college admissions and participate in one’s sport at a competitive level. The student athlete is assisting the institution by displaying athletic skills and the institution is assisting the student athlete by providing an educational opportunity (Kirk and Kirk 1993). Student athlete

experiences in a university setting likely differ from that of non-student athletes. Additionally, the experiences student athletes have are very different from one another when examined through racial, gender and socioeconomic lenses. The different experiences may either negatively impact the academic success of a student athlete or convince them to adopt the negative stigmas associated with their athletic identity.

One problem with being a student athlete on any campus is the “dumb jock” reputation that athletes must choose to accept, ignore or disguise. Identity theory (Becker 1963) posits that a person’s master status (Blumer 1969) has the ability to overshadow an individual and influence the behaviors of the individual to align with the given assigned master status. As a result, athletes must hide their academic interests or accomplishments in order to conform to societal expectations of the auxiliary traits associated with the athlete master status.

Despite the negative status that can be associated with being an athlete, many young adults aspire to become college athletes and look forward to the opportunities participation in college athletics provides. Some of the benefits of sports participation for the athlete include raising educational aspirations, encouraging successful academic achievement, fostering social integration and acting as an agent for upward social mobility (Despres et al. 2008).

One of the most important results of participation in athletics is the development of leadership skills. Leadership development of student athletes focuses on four main components: high athletic skill, strong work ethic, enriched cognitive sport knowledge, and good rapport with people (Wright and Cote 2003). It is common to read the sports

section of a newspaper or watch a broadcast of a game on television and hear a reference made to the effective leadership a particular athlete possess to help their team to victory. Leadership is at the core of the student athlete experience. All NCAA governed athletics departments are required to have a Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC). This group is comprised of at least two student athletes from each intercollegiate team on a campus. In addition to providing advice to the athletic administration, they also serve as the leaders to their teams. Even outside of their sport, athletics departments and the NCAA continually strive to provide student athletes with opportunities to grow as leaders through involvement in SAAC. Providing leadership opportunities help some athletes to guide fellow student athletes in to volunteer activities that enhance their collegiate student athlete experience.

Stigma

Stigma, whether positive or negative, has an uninvited effect on an individual's life. Stigma is most easily understood as the phenomenon whereby "an individual with an attribute which is deeply discredited by his/her society is rejected as a result of the attribute. Stigma is a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity" (Goffman 1963:3). Stigma as we know it today, is not merely a physical mark but rather an attribute that results in widespread social disapproval which, in the words of Goffman (1963), can lead to an inflated social identity. There are two common components used in the various definitions of stigma – the recognition of difference and devaluation or the feeling of being less (Bos et al. 2013).

A stigmatized person can feel discredited by the unwanted characteristics assigned to them by the stigma society associates them to. For example, a person with a physical abnormality is stigmatized and may be viewed as someone who has a less happy life due to his or her physical abnormality. Stigmatized attributes that are clearly visible such as biological sex, race, or physical appearance are examples of stigmas that can discredit an individual. Labels that are not as visible such as sexual orientation, criminal identity, athlete or mentally, ill are examples of discreditable stigmas that unless disclosed have the potential to be stigmatizing for an individual (Chaudoir et al. 2013; Goffman 1963). The study of stigma in sociology is important because of the intense pressure stigmatized individuals feel, which in return dictates some of their behavior. Unfortunately, the experience of being stigmatized is the ever-present possibility that one will be the target of prejudice and discrimination (Goffman 1963). In regards to student athletes, this discrimination can be at the expense of their collegiate educational experience. In addition to the discreditable stigma of the student athlete social status, it is important to note that they may also experience discredited stigma based on their racial, sexual, or socioeconomic status. This multi level stigma can cause some athletes to conceal their status as athlete to reduce further discrimination (Simons et al. 2007; Harrison et al. 2009). Additional barriers experienced by and bias shown towards student athletes will be discussed further on in this review of the literature.

Often intercollegiate athletes are not thought of as stigmatized but instead are seen as privileged. Their stigma is one that is discreditable but they are often not given the opportunity to disclose their status or not. To be an athlete is to be in the public eye and

therefore there is little they can do to avoid stigma (Simons et al. 2007). The college years are a period of intense learning, a shaping of the minds and values of young students (Banks 1983) and as athletes develop into young adults, hopefully they see themselves as more than the stigma they've been assigned.

Negative Stigma of Student Athletes

“With social identity comes a sense of belonging and self esteem for an individual”
(Roper and Halloran 2007: 920).

Student athletes' social identity is often directly linked to their status as an athlete. Researchers have found that negative perceptions of athletes can influence their own views of themselves (Howard-Hamilton 2001; Engstrom and Sedlacek 1991). However, due to the participation in intercollegiate sports many student athletes experience discrimination and bias within academic settings (Simmons et al. 2007; Harrison et al. 2009). Most student athletes express that they have experienced negative academic discrimination at some point in their collegiate career due to their athletic status, which creates an unhealthy relationship with faculty.

“Within higher education, the label ‘student athlete’ has been severely discredited and tainted by the actions of a few, relatively speaking, misdirected and misguided coaches and student athletes. Their actions have led to the proliferation of negative perceptions, which reinforce the dumb jock, low intelligence stereotype. These perceptions, combined with institutions' low expectations for athletes' academic performance and goals, have had a significant impact on students' collegiate experiences, social engagement with non-athlete peers and ability to be academically successful” (Horton, 2011: 27).

A less recognized burden faced by athletes is the negative perceptions and expectations by faculty and other students about their academic capability and motivation (Simons et al. 2007). They are seen as academically unqualified students whose primary interest is athletics and not completing degree requirements. It is assumed that student athletes expect special treatment from professors and others. Many collegiate faculty subscribe to the negative stigma of student athletes and become increasingly closed minded of their needs. Typically this is due to a negative situation with one athlete that then labels the rest of the entire population. Many student athletes choose not to disclose their athletic identity within the classroom in order to avoid negative stereotypes from faculty and peers. As a result, a student athlete could struggle with poor academics but never seek help from their peers or academic advisors for fear of discrimination.

Faculty are usually very aware of who the student athletes are in their classes. “Athletes need to be made aware that their behavior is more salient to faculty than other students” (Simons et al. 2007:270). This is often because athletes are easily identifiable by the sports apparel they’re issued to wear. Athletes also need to understand that since faculty members are not required to make any accommodations for athletes they should not treat their request for accommodations as an entitlement (Simmons et al. 2007).

Based on the qualitative research done by Baucom and Lantz (2001), faculty perceive male athletes with sub par academic qualifications as benefiting from special admission provisions. Faculty expressed concern that male athletes received full scholarships to attend college and paired with special admissions could indicate inferior academic performance in college. Additionally, faculty expressed negative attitudes

toward the provision of specialized academic tutorial services for male athletes and the coverage of out-of-class activities, all contributing to the stigma that athletes cannot excel in both their sport and in the classroom (Baucom and Lantz 2001). Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991 and 1995) have provided evidence that negative stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes toward male student athletes are indeed held by fellow students and university faculty (Engstrom and Sedlacek 1991; Engstrom and Sedlacek 1995).

The public has become increasingly skeptical about the quality of education for college athletes and distrustful about the role of athletics in American higher education (Shulman and Bowen 2001; Benford 2007). It is suggested that faculty harbor prejudicial attitudes toward both revenue and non-revenue athletes in the areas concerning out of class achievement, admission to the university, reception of full scholarships, and expanded tutoring services for athletes (Baucom and Lantz 2001). Athletes are accustomed to being coached and the coach's authority is perceived to be absolute. Athletes are more rewarded for following directives than engaging in independent thought. This behavior can be perceived as arrogance by faculty, advisors and peers (Despres 2005). Unless a student athlete is a team captain or in a leadership role, this perception is true for a majority of a team's members.

Due to their participation in intercollegiate sports many student athletes experience discrimination and bias within the academic environment on college campuses (Simmons et al. 2007; Harrison et al. 2009). Concerns have been raised about the difficulties athletes themselves face once on campus. They, like members of minority groups, face prejudice and discrimination (Aries 2004). Often, many student athletes

choose not to disclose their athletic identity within the classroom in order to avoid negative stereotypes from faculty and peers. As a result, a student athlete could struggle with poor academics but never seek help from their peers or academic advisors for fear of discrimination. It is imperative that college counselors recognize the lack of help seeking behavior reported (Despres et al. 2008; Watson 2005) among student athletes as a group and work towards providing opportunities for student athletes to feel comfortable exposing their athlete status. As a result of the negative stigma present on college campuses towards athletes, many choose to be invisible and silent on their campus in the academic setting. In particular, female athletes feel silenced not only in the classroom but also in the entire industry of collegiate athletics as described by Cooky and colleagues (2010).

Student athletes are aware of the negative cultural stereotypes assigned to their population. For example, student athletes are sometimes stereotyped as less intelligent and less academically motivated. Unfortunately, this negativity found in the classroom setting poses a threat to the identity of student athletes which in turn can create a less than stellar performance academically (Harrison et al. 2009; Biernat 2003). In turn the poor academic performance only further confirms the stigma that created it in the first place.

It is often a necessity of college athletic departments to ask for accommodations to campus policy in order to support the unique circumstances that surround student athletes. For example, student athletes frequently must miss classes in order to travel to scheduled sporting events and typically are required to make up missed material, assignments, and exams. Some institutions, however, do not have policies to protect

theses students from being penalized for missing class, although their participation in athletics necessitates their absence (Fletcher et al. 2003).

“Athletics programs should not maintain watered-down expectations to give the illusion that student athletes are truly being successful. In order to properly assist student athletes to be the best they can be, institutions must find ways to transcend the negative perceptions and stereotypes their student athletes are confronted with on a daily basis” (Horton, 2011:28)

Working with college administrators to provide fair and equitable accommodations for student athletes, much like what already exists for students with learning disabilities, would help improve the relationship between athletes and faculty.

Student Athlete Collegiate Experience

The overall stigma attached to collegiate student athletes shapes their academic and social experiences (Aries 2004; Comeaux and Harrison 2011; Fletcher et al. 2003; Harrison et al. 2009; Knapp 2001; O’Hanlon 2007; and Watson 2005). Educational experiences that student athletes have on campuses can vary from interactions in the classroom, outside of the classroom, with peers or with faculty. Any of these things can negatively or positively impact the education a student athlete receives. Athletes must function within a multilevel system that includes NCAA rules and regulations, university policies, athletic department standards, and team dynamics (Fletcher et al. 2003). Understanding what these systems require and how they affect athletes is a first step in conceptualizing student athletes’ issues and planning interventions.

Student athletes divide their time over three areas: Athletic, academic and social/personal (Miller and Kerr 2002; Howard-Hamilton and Sino 2001; Broughton and

Neyer 2001). Student athletes face all of the challenges experienced by the regular student body with regard to social and academic adjustments; however, they have added demands imposed by their sports which can create considerable challenges to student life (Comeaux and Harrison 2011; Jolly 2008). As student athletes navigate their college career, they encounter new ideas, values and norms (Comeaux and Harrison 2011). The qualitative study by Alder and Alder (1991) of Division I men's basketball teams over a four-year period gave great documentation into the academic progress over their college career and insight into their daily lives. It provided an opportunity for the public to really get a glimpse of how student athletes perform athletically and academically within a collegiate environment (Alder and Alder 1991; Miller and Kerr 2002).

Many student athletes believe at least some professors treat them differently, either positively or negatively, because they are student athletes (O'Hanlon 2007).

“Too often, many of these impressionable young people have been conditioned to believe that their athletic talents give them a ‘free pass’ from attending class (or learning), obeying the laws of the land, or taking personal responsibility for their actions” (Lumpkin 2008: 24).

Faculty must work with students to accommodate mandatory travel time for competition but also teach student athletes how to pre plan for rather than react to poor academic marks. Student athletes do not arrive on campus knowing how to manage their time or plan ahead. Faculty can assist the intercollegiate culture by working with athletes rather than using harsh inflexible means of discipline (Lumpkin 2008).

There has been an historical concern for academic achievement among NCAA collegiate student athletes. Academic standards for student athletes have been revised and

restructured over the past 20 years to ensure that high school students are prepared for the academic rigors of college as well as NCAA athletic competition. Some (Bauman 1986) suggest that student athlete academic success has to be predicted by more than just standardized tests. Instead, a combination of high school college preparatory courses coupled with test scores earns student athletes their eligibility to compete.

Peer integration and interaction is also a common concern among administration and faculty on college campuses (Black 2002). Most student athletes have extremely structured schedules that leave little time for extracurricular activities in which their peers are perceived to be participating. There is a balance that exists between peer related activities and athletic commitments for student athletes (Gaston and Hu 2009). Gaston and Hu (2009) found that 80% of student athletes report having some type of social or personal interaction with students other than their teammates, which proves that athletes do not segregate themselves from their peers. This is encouraging given the assumption that athletes miss out on important college social experiences due to their commitment to their sport.

Student athletes can often be perceived as exploited and denied the opportunity to be “real” students. This might be how it looks to an outsider but student athletes do not seem to feel that way (O’Hanlan 2007). In truth, athletes spend over 50% of their time interacting with the student body and participating in non-athletic activities (Aries 2004). This is proof that student athletes indeed have collegiate experiences that are not directly associated with their competitive sport. The degree to which student athletes are able to integrate with their campus environment varies from individual to individual. It is

dependent on the level of positive self-identity and the extent to which social and /or academic integration is personally relevant to their college experience (Comeaux and Harrison 2011).

Although the NCAA holds member institutions accountable for supporting the academic success of student athletes, many college campuses still view student athletes as unmotivated students. In a study by Knapp (2001), the general student body at a large NCAA Division I school supported intercollegiate athletics but were skeptical about the seriousness of student athletes (Knapp 2001).

“Seventy-two percent of the student body agreed that athletic accomplishment increased the prestige of universities but only 30% agreed that memories of one’s college years will be enhanced by intercollegiate events” (Knapp 2001:100).

Overall student athletes were unfortunately not perceived in a positive light by the student body in the Knapp (2001) study. They were seen by a large segment of the sample as receiving special treatment. This judgment should be of deep concern to student athletes themselves, and to college administrators and athletic directors. It should help drive the measure schools use to enhance the collegiate experience of student athletes.

Additionally, some athletes only attend a certain institution due to the value of the athletic scholarship that was offered. Research done by Ward (2008) shows that an increase in financial resources for athletic departments allocated to recruit high academic and athletic achieving students does not necessarily correlate positively with an increase in learning outcomes for student athletes. This is important to note that academic

achievements of student athletes will not improve simply by increasing budgeted monetary resources. In order to maintain a healthy learning environment for student athletes of all socioeconomic backgrounds, universities need to focus less on the commercialization of athletics and more on the overall collegiate experience athletic programs provide their students (Shulman and Bowman 2001; Alder and Alder 1991). As Jolly (2008) suggested, the best way to improve the educational experiences of student athletes is to create informal social interactions gaining a level of trust so student athletes can feel open to approach faculty and other student peers.

The Effects of Student Athletes on a College Campus

It is believed that athletics has a positive effect on the overall welfare of a university. Athletic success attracts more donations to a university's general fund as well as a wider pool of applicants (Alder and Alder 1991). Positive perceptions of intercollegiate athletics include student athletes who achieve high graduation rates are well-rounded individuals as well as excellent university ambassadors. Other positive effects are athletics ability to help increase contributions from alumni, make a college more attractive to potential students, and provide an advantage when a university competes for state funds (Putler and Wolfe 1999). Students who participate in extracurricular activities such as sports are likely to have higher academic achievement and higher levels of commitment and attachment to school (Black 2002). Not only is maintaining good academic standing important to be permitted to stay in school, it is also a requirement for student athletes to compete.

Additionally, athletics brings attention to a University that benefits the entire student body through financial contributions (Howard-Hamilton 2001). College sports have increasingly become a popular form of mass commercial entertainment (Duderstadt 2006). In the month of March, it is estimated the NCAA gathers two-third's of its annual revenues from the NCAA Division 1 Basketball Championship Tournament through television, advertising and ticket sales. Varsity athletics, especially men's basketball and football, are often viewed as commercial enterprises and as feeder systems for the professional leagues (Banks 1983)

College presidents, listening to alumni during their reunions, realize the power of athletics as a molder of minds (Banks 1983). Intercollegiate athletics are an integral component of life to many colleges and universities (Comeaux and Harrison 2011). They provide publicity to their campus, entertainment to their community and financial support from donors (Comeaux and Harrison 2011). Athletic departments often operate as separate entities that receive substantial funding from outside sources such as gate receipts, contributions from booster organizations, revenue generated from granting media rights, and corporate sponsors (Fletcher et al. 2003; Duderstadt 2003). These outside dollars help enhance the athletic experience for students and fans but more importantly, do not take away from the general fund of the university to do so.

Health and Psychological Effects of Negative Stigma

The overall health and well being of a student athlete can be hard to keep in balance with the stress that can come from participating in sports. Student athletes may

be reluctant to use clinical counseling services because of the high visibility of the student athlete could threaten confidentiality or privacy. Student athletes on many campuses enjoy a type of celebrity status because of their athletic abilities and may not want to be seen at the counseling center for fear it will tarnish their image by revealing a perceived need for help. As a result, student athlete's help seeking preferences are normally only in relation to sport performance development from coaches and injury related issues from athletic trainers (Watson 2005). Asking for psychological help is a rare occurrence with the student athlete population. Individually student athletes are rarely receiving the psychological help they might need so another option should be available. It would be wise for athletic departments to adopt a team or group counseling approach with regard to student athlete issues so to allow anonymity from the student population as a whole (Watson 2005). Unfortunately, student athletes remain an underrepresented group in counseling services at campuses nationwide (Watson 2005) and the effects of negative self esteem and depression among student athletes is exceptionally understudied (Armstrong 2009). Perhaps, this is an area of further study that can allow the creation of outreach methods to encourage student athletes to utilize the counseling offices available on their campuses. However, the less positive attitudes towards help-seeking behavior reported by student athletes might be a contributing factor to the underutilization of college and university counseling centers among the population (Watson 2005).

Athletes are often under extreme pressure and stress to perform peak ability at every competition and practice. Student athletes experience significant disappointment

and fears when their team has key losses or when they perform poorly. Among the athletes' fears is the fear of losing the opportunity to compete because of injury, fear of being cut from the team or fear of being forced to retire from sports (Fletcher et al. 2003). These students also have severe limitations due to their time limitations with academic schedules and practice or competition times. Both athletes and counselors tend to believe that student athletes can get the help they need in the athletic department, and athletes often fear that they would be perceived as weak if they sought outside counseling (Broughton and Neyer 2001).

“Holistic support programs that address psychological issues in academics and athletics can provide necessary assistance to student athletes, through intervention and strategies that view the athlete as an individual with changing needs and skills, rather than exclusively as an athletic participant. Because student athletes are a unique population, the process must include both education and treatment” (Kirk & Kirk 1993:xxviii).

It would be best if counselors could create specific programs for athletes to help get the psychological help they need without being afraid of asking for it.

Additional Barriers and Bias Faced by Student Athletes

In addition to the negative stigma that exists for student athletes, cultural bias often exists in the subculture of athletics. Race Logic, as used by Coakley, describes the phenomenon of conceptualizing different expectations regarding athletic ability and success for Caucasian and African American athletes (Fletcher et al. 2003). In particular, Black male athletes are found to have a much more difficult experience with college faculty than those of their white peers (Comeaux 2008; Beamon and Bell 2006; Comeaux and Harrison 2007). Due to the overrepresentation in athletics, black males, are less

likely to have meaningful interaction with their white professors. Most NCAA institutions are comprised of a majority of white professors (Comeaux 2008). The graduation rates for Black men participating in the revenue producing sports of NCAA Division I football and basketball have historically been low (Hyatt 2003). Although the graduation rate for this group of athletes has improved over the past several years, they are still lower than their white teammates (Hyatt 2003).

Black males are over-represented in the sports world, which has recently been attributed to the intentional and intensive socialization of African Americans into sports (Beamon and Bell 2006). Research has contended that black athletes are presumed to be naturally athletic in relative comparison to their white counterparts. Others have observed that white athletes have been symbolically portrayed as natural leaders of their respective team sports irrespective of their aptitude (Halone and Billings 2010). By temporally understanding how racialized dynamics of sport communicatively transpire, a newfound opportunity now exists from which to intentionally readdress those unintentional dynamics that have historically served to racialize sport over time (Halone and Billings 2010).

The academic success of black athletes in the revenue producing sports of men's basketball and football is to some extent contingent upon the specific nature of their interaction with faculty (Comeaux 2008). As a result, black male athletes are more likely to seek out mentors off campus who will encourage their academic success and make them feel accepted within the academic realm (Comeaux 2008). Through trainings on racism and cultural sensitivity, perhaps the relationship between Black male athletes and

their professors can improve. White male basketball players graduate at a rate of 52%, while their Black counterparts graduate at a shocking 21% (Beamon and Bell 2006). This shows that there must be more in depth research done on how we can help this group achieve as high a level of success as their counterparts. “This has prompted scholars of sport to concede that the domain of sport is replete with racist ideologies” (Halone and Billings 2010:1646).

Faculty who are committed to creating more equitable educational experiences for all students could benefit from learning about the types of conscious and unconscious prejudices and discriminatory attitudes directed toward black student athletes. (Comeaux 2008). “Because the faculty population remains predominantly white within degree-granting institutions in the USA, black student athletes often interact with faculty whose race or ethnicity is different from their own, which may have implications for their learning” (Comeaux and Harrison 2007:200). Institutions need to encourage a wide range of forms of faculty communication and mentoring that are responsive to the needs of both black and white male student athletes of different abilities (Comeaux and Harrison 2007).

Labeling black athletes as “naturally” athletic might celebrate the biological superiority of the black body, but at the same time it preserves white privilege through the assumed mental superiority and work ethic of Whites (Harrison et al. 2011). White athletic success is often explained as a result of “hard work” whereas the athletic performance of blacks is seen as a direct result of “God-given” talent (Harrison et al. 2011). When athletic success is attributed singularly to one explanation based on skin color, this discussion turns into a subtle form of racism (Harrison et al. 2011). Faculty

and others who frequently interact with student athletes could benefit from learning about the types of conscious and unconscious prejudices and discriminatory attitudes directed toward student athletes (Comeaux and Harrison 2007).

Gender and sexuality are two areas of athletics that are often disguised behind the over exposure of Title XI. Although Title XI, a measure that demands equality and even resource distribution among male and female athletes, has helped to balance the playing field for all athletes it has almost acted as a crutch for other gender and sexuality issues that keep female athletes feeling trivialized (Cooky et al. 2010). Through the analysis of sporting oppression, Anderson and McCormack (2010) still see the discrimination of student athletes based on their sexuality and race. The intersectionality of student athletes and the oppressions they face beyond their student athlete status need to be continually discussed so that collegiate programs are able to adequately address the needs of their athletes beyond the academic realm. With more attention on the attitudes college students have towards student athletes of varying sexual orientation, perhaps the overlapping stigma of such student athletes would begin to improve rather than perpetuate negativity and discrimination (Roper and Halloran 2007).

It is important to look at the interplay between gender, athletic identity, and negative academic stereotypes about college athletes in a classroom context (Harrison et al. 2009). Minority women seem to have more difficulties than do minority men (Fletcher et al., 2003). Female college athletes can suffer identity threat when the link between their athletic and academic identities is made salient prior to completing a moderately challenging task (Biernat 2003; Harrison et al. 2009). Specific guidance and

sensitivity to female athletes who are struggling with identity threat should be given when completing moderately challenging tasks proves to be abnormally difficult.

Additionally, researchers should be looking for the cues that cause college athletes to experience identity threat and/or affirm confidence in an academic context (Harrison et al. 2009). Alarming, female athletes perform worse academically when their athletic identity is made salient in a classroom context (Harrison et al. 2009). This is consistent with other research that shows women possess less confidence in the classroom than their male counterparts even though they are often the higher academic achievers (Shulman and Bowen 2001). Women who engage in college athletics may also struggle with role conflict between social norms for femininity and attributes needed to succeed in sport. Conflict can arise for female athletes when they confront negative stereotypes such as being viewed as unfeminine or having their sexual orientation questioned (Fletcher et al. 2003; Biernat 2003).

The contemporary intersection of race, sexuality, gender, and sport helps reproduce the notion that black male athletes are necessarily heterosexual, and that gay athletes are exclusively white. (Anderson and McCormack 2010). It is important to note that whereas sport once provided a space for the black contestation of white supremacy, it has yet to serve as an arena where (black and white) men support the contestation of heterosexual supremacy (Anderson and McCormack 2010).

Studying heterosexual student-athletes' attitudes is critical in acquiring an in-depth understanding of the climate of collegiate sport for the gay and lesbian athlete. (Roper and Halloran 2007). The bifurcation of black and gay identities is strengthened by

cultural understandings of psychological models of homosexual development, which seem to maintain that homosexuality is “a problem” for whites only (Anderson and McCormack 2010).

Student Athlete Academic Persistence

Despite the many complex layers of a student athletes' experiences and issues which can cause serious stress and disruption in students' academic performance, there is still a strong desire to make sure athletes graduate with a degree. Although there are efforts to prepare student athletes for collegiate academic and athletic competition, Jolly discusses the athletic culture and time restraints on NCAA student athletes often make it difficult for them to succeed academically at a collegiate level. There is a focus on football players and admissions standards or exceptions for entrance and its effect on graduation rates/academic success (Sigelman 1995). One or two players do not make a team therefore, if exceptions are made for a few athletes, it cannot make a huge difference in academic outcomes of a team of 100. The other 90+ students on the team that met the standards for admissions and become academically ineligible do so because of other institutional or personal factors. One or two superior athletes in basketball can move a program to higher levels of success whereas in football it takes many. The tendency to risk the academically unqualified but superior athlete would appear to be far greater in basketball than any other intercollegiate sport (Curtis 1995). Athletes in some sports may rarely struggle, while some may be notorious for their academic

shortcomings. Recognizing areas of potential struggle might be valuable in helping facilitate academic services for student athletes (Dilley-Knoles et al. 2011).

Athletic participation has long been viewed by faculty members and critics as a hindrance to students' success in the classroom and associated with a decreased graduation rate (Duderstadt 2002; Shulman and Bowen 2001; Horton 2009). The perception is that student athletes are overly concerned and preoccupied with activities associated with sport, such that they devote minimal attention and focus to their academic studies and development (Horton 2009). It is assumed, particularly at large institutions, that an athlete is socially inept and does not do well in the classroom (Engstrom et al. 1995). Individual athletes are glamorized for their athletic performance in their given sport; but as students, they are vilified for their substandard academic abilities and their lack of focus and attention devoted to their academic studies (Horton 2011; Simons et al. 2007). An athlete's sport, race/ethnicity, gender and level of competition all contribute to the academic success of the student (Comeaux and Harrison 2011).

For student athletes, success is described as meeting academic requirements necessary to continue athletic participation at their institution and being productive enough in the classroom and in their sport to keep their athlete status (Horton 2009). Student athletes must abide by the NCAA academic standards to participate in intercollegiate athletics, regardless of their school's admission standard (Price 2010). Academic success has to be determined in order to reveal any potential problems with negative stigmas towards student athletes. The NCAA defines minimum academic success as completing 12 semester units towards a degree while maintaining a 2.0 grade

point average (Bauman 1986). I would suggest expanding the NCAA definition of academic success by also measuring the opinion of student athletes and whether they are achieving the academic scores they hoped to receive before entering college. Pressure from athletics or from academics can cause a student athlete to cut corners in areas of their lives, which can cause a negative impact on playing time or grade point averages. Division II level student athletes have a tendency to diminish their work in the academic realm before diminishing their athletic abilities (Bauman 1986).

The NCAA seems to believe that the threat of severe penalties (such as the loss of scholarship funds) will bolster an institution's efforts to improve academic performance of student athlete recruits (Gurney and Weber 2007). "It appears that the relationships that student athletes establish with faculty and peers other than their teammates are directly related to academic success" (Comeaux and Harrison 2011:241). However, if students are striving for excellence, the campus community will undoubtedly take notice (Horton 2011). It should also be the desire of the athletic department to make sure the positive stories of their student athletes are in the public eye as much as their athletic performances are.

In an effort to make more stringent academic standards for students participating in intercollegiate sports, the NCAA instituted Proposition 48, which held higher standards for Division I student athletes to be eligible to compete. This measurement was a combination of courses taken and a sliding scale of SAT scores and GPA. NCAA found that test criteria alone would have excluded 54% of Black males and 49% of Black

females and on the other hand would have only excluded 9% of White males and females respectively (Baumann and Henschen 1986).

“Proposition 48 in the early 1980s by the NCAA - The purpose of the rule was to compel student athletes to put more emphasis upon academic preparation as a condition of receiving grants-in-aid and of freshman collegiate sports participation. Proposition 48 was provoked largely by the disparate academic outcomes of black collegiate athletics as their numbers increased over the 1960s and 1970s in mainstream collegiate basketball and football” (Edwards 2009:70).

Officials believed that increasing the academic standards for athletes to participate in higher education sports would also increase graduation rates and relieve some of the criticism directed at institutions (Heck and Takahashi 2006). Did not it just widen the gap for students that had access to resources and better college preparation than those who come from large public schools? The counter argument is that the NCAA divisions provide a variation of academic standards and athletic competition to accommodate all types of student athletes (Heck and Takahashi 2006).

With a developmental focus, athletic advisement programs are essential in providing services and guidance related to academics. Tracking NCAA eligibility is one small component; it is more important to provide an environment that encourages college student athletes to compete well and that promotes student learning first (Broughton and Neyer, 2001). The support of well-trained staff, coaches, athletic department personnel, and the campus community is necessary for a successful and comprehensive athletic advising and counseling program. (Broughton and Neyer 2001) It takes more than just a coach to make a successful student athlete. Every person involved with student athletes from faculty to administrators need to recognize the role they play in the academic

success of student athletes (Horton 2009). Additionally, they must all provide support for the student athlete population.

Student Athlete Measurements and Graduation Rates

College campuses are prioritizing the use of more data driven decision-making methods and require valid and reliable data. “All colleges are under more pressure than ever from the NCAA to graduate more athletes, and not just drop them after their eligibility expires” (Holsendolph 2006:22). Graduation rates of student athletes have become useful for three reasons: they provide a measure of student athlete success or failure for NCAA member institutions; participating in a sport can help some athletes persist toward graduation; both student athletes and non-athletes at Div. III schools are graduating at higher rates than their peers in Div. I and II institutions. Many student athletes choose to play at the lower levels because they hold their academic life in high regard and want to avoid the distractions associated with intercollegiate athletics in Division I. (Watt and Moore 2001). Institutions routinely assess persistence by evaluating student athlete graduation rates. Annually, the NCAA requires all member institutions to report the graduation rates of student athletes. Although the data is conservative since it only encapsulates students who enter institutions as freshmen and who receive athletic aid, it is useful to demonstrate the significance of the problem in black student athletes (Hyatt 2003).

Caution should be used when using only a graduation rate as a measure of NCAA or institutional policy success. When only graduation rates are examined, many other

aspects of the educational process, which play an integral role in evaluating the effectiveness of policies, may be overlooked (Price 2010). The simple definition of Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) is the percent of students that initially enroll in fall of year N and who graduated by fall of year N+6 (LaForge and Hodge 2011). FGR is very useful for intra-institutional analyses that yield insight into how student athletes compare in relation to all students at the school (LaForge and Hodge, 2011). The NCAA Graduation Success Rate (GSR) is useful for assessing the academic performance of athletic teams at an institution. However, the NCAA Academic Persistence Rate should be examined on a regular basis and used as a diagnostic tool for improvement in recruiting and retention efforts. It is important to note that good ratings in any of the aforementioned measurements do not establish that an athletic program has academic integrity. Academic integrity is a much broader construct that addresses how the results are achieved (LaForge and Horton 2011). Schools have found ways in which to keep their rates high enough to not receive penalties from the NCAA, but do not necessarily serve their student athlete population well.

Generally, the descriptive data of an athletic department reveals the average graduation rate for student athletes exceeds that for all other undergraduates (Rishe 2003). One reason for high athlete graduation rates is that student athletes face institutional controls (like minimum academic standards to maintain athletic eligibility, mandatory study halls, and specialized academic advising) that other non-athlete students do not (Rishe 2003). Athletic success is not sensitive to the graduation rate of the student athlete population, nor the non-athlete population of an institution. However, the

graduation gap between the two groups is sensitive to various measures of the school's athletic success (Rishe 2003). The graduation gap in favor of athletes would be greater if not for the increasing phenomenon of college athletes in football and basketball leaving school early to play professionally (Rishe 2003). "The myth of 'dumb jock' exists primarily because the most visible college sports of football and men's basketball consistently yield lower graduation rates than any other sports teams" (Rishe 2003). It's important to point out that most first generation college students and underrepresented minority students fall into these two sports and therefore the group as a whole is at risk of struggling as compared to their other athletic counterparts. In football and Men's basketball, where the pressure to perform is the most extreme due to the fact that they are the highest revenue generating college sports, graduation rates lag well behind those of the general student population (Holsendolph 2003).

According to research done by Price (2010), graduation rates for student athletes at Division I schools are higher than student athletes at Division II schools. Compared to the general student body population, student athletes in both Division I and Division II schools experience higher graduation rates and continue to do so (Price 2010).

Graduation rates declined for black student athletes at Division II schools after Prop 16 (increased admissions requirements for Division 1 freshmen), which may have been driven by students transferring to Division 1 schools (Price 2010). They may spend enough time at a Division II school to meet the requirements to transfer to a Division 1 school, in which they would then be counted as a dropout, and graduation rates would decrease at the Division II schools (Price 2010). Student athletes that were deemed

unprepared to succeed at Division I schools, as a result of their test score and GPA, were also unprepared to succeed academically at a Division II school. Thus, once the student athlete completed an academic year of college, they were no longer subject to initial eligibility requirements and could transfer into a Division I school based on college performance and not high school standardized test scores. These transfer students would then count as non-graduates and, as a result, the graduation rate would decrease at Division II schools (Price 2010). Often, the students who transfer this way end up back at a Division II school due to their poor college preparedness. College persistence and graduation rates among these transfer athletes is particularly the hardest and most visible in athletic departments.

Statistics can be misleading when incorrectly being compared to numbers that do not have the same parameters.

“There is no comparable measure to APR (*Academic Progress Rate*) for college students who are not athletes, and GSR (*Graduation Success Rate*) takes an alternate approach to measuring graduation success than the FGR (*Federal Graduation Rate*) methodology” (LaForge and Hodge 2011:217).

The federally mandated graduation rate is a good first step for measuring academic success, but there is a need to continually analyze and improve the understanding of what the graduation rate tells us, which, to be done effectively, will require the use of far more sophisticated analysis than the current data permits (Ferris et al. 2004:573). The simple definition of FGR is the percent of students that initially enroll in fall of year N and who graduated by fall of year N+6 (LaForge and Hodge 2011). The lag time in measuring graduation rates with FGR and GSR is problematic in that it does not provide timely

feedback about academic success of student athletes. The NCAA APR metric is intended to provide more real time feedback on the progress of student athletes towards graduation (LaForge and Hodge 2011).

“Whatever their merits, however, due to several significant limitations, the federally mandated graduation statistics offer misleading assessments of academic attainment among athletes. One major limitation of the measure is that it does not measure all athletes. Only those student athletes who have enrolled full time and receive athletically related financial aid (athletic scholarship) in their first year of enrollment are counted in the measure. The statistic does not include non-scholarship athletes, or ‘walk-ons’, nor does it count ‘recruited walk-ons’ who might eventually receive an athletic scholarship after their first year of enrollment” (Ferris et al. 2004:558).

Undoubtedly, the NCAA data reporting system is flawed and should continue to be improved to more accurately describe the academic efforts of its population.

Additionally, the small size of the cohort reported is problematic and can often show radical swings in graduation rates from year to year. For this reason, it is best to use a 3-5 year cohort for reporting purposes to ensure a better picture of the ability of student athletes. There is a lag in the information reported as the graduation rates being published reflect a class of athletes from 4-6 years prior and not that of the current athlete population (Ferris et al. 2004). Typically the graduation rate statistic only includes students who graduate from the same institution they started from and does not take into account transfers.

The federally mandated graduation rate is a good first step to uncover the academic persistence of student athletes, but there is a need to continually analyze and improve our understanding of what the graduation rate tells us, which, to be done

effectively, will require the use of far more sophisticated analysis than the current data permits (Ferris et al. 2004). Until a better method is developed, the student athlete population will continue to be misrepresented in the numbers being published.

The new NCAA progress towards degree rule demands that student athletes take real, matriculating classes, not unnecessary electives that earn no credit toward their degree attainment (Holsendolph 2006). Overall, the number of teams receiving penalties for not achieving satisfactory APR marks is down, which NCAA officials say is due to a willingness among most athletic departments to make athletes' academic performance a priority (Sander 2011). Although the number of penalties is lowering annually, there is still major concern for the prevalence of historically Black colleges continually scoring low on APR marks (Sander 2011).

It is easy to pick apart the ways in which the NCAA needs to improve its reporting but taking a step back, it good to remember what the main reason for creating such measurements is for. "When he graduates, he said, it will change his family's history, raising the bar and making real the challenge of college to his children, nephews, and cousins" (Sacken 2008: 61). Despite the issues that may be evident in the reporting structure of the NCAA, it is important to remember the life changing effect athletics has on students who might not have any other encouragement to attend college. For some, the opportunity to obtain a degree only comes from their ability to compete and contribute in their given sport.

Academic Support and Student Athlete Advising

According to Jolly (2008), the athletic culture and time restraints on NCAA student athletes often make it difficult for them to succeed academically at a collegiate level. If athletes are treated the same as all other students, then many of their needs are not going to be addressed (Kirk & Kirk, 1993). Therefore, academic athletic advisors will be critical to the success of academic reform within athletics (Meyer 2005). It is not so much about which students get into school but which students stay in school.

Universities that play big time football, regardless of their status, with special academic programs for athletes are able to retain excellent players better, regardless of their test scores (Butler 1995). The development of academic advisor positions within athletic departments is critical to the success of student athletes, especially those that are admitted with special exceptions to admissions standards.

Over the past decade, the NCAA has become increasingly concerned about the education experiences of student athletes, beyond the mere enforcement of athletic eligibility rules and regulations (Gatson Gayles and Hu 2009). For underprepared student athletes, those needing remedial coursework, the NCAA academic standards can be difficult to achieve while trying to improve their basic skills and meeting degree-percentage requirements. Student athletes that are required to take remedial coursework are also the ones who generally cannot successfully take more than fourteen or fifteen units a semester (Meyer 2005). While mandating academic counseling and tutoring services for all Division I student athletes, the NCAA has also over the years instituted abundant academic legislation to help ensure the academic success of student athletes (Meyer 2005). However, this is not the case for Division II and Division III institutions

because the legislation is not consistent among all three divisions. It can seem that the primary focus on academic success is for the athletes that typically have the best chances as competing professionally from a Div. I institution.

Coaches are not academic counselors, and for good reason should not be allowed to provide academic advising. A coach's primary concern is the team; a counselor's primary concern must be the individual student athlete (Kirk and Kirk 1993). Student athletes must be allowed the freedom to choose without fear of either retribution by the counselor or the breaking of confidentiality to a coach the class schedule they prefer. The academic counselor is in the precarious position of having to maintain credibility with both the athletes and the coaches despite scheduling conflicts between courses, practice and travel time. The academic counselor's job is to help a student athlete develop as a multi dimensional human being. The counselor can help explore ways to balance the dual roles of athlete and student. Time management skills are a significant item to improve academic performance for student athletes who are managing the time commitments for both sport and classes (Kirk and Kirk 1993).

Athletic academic advisors have one of the most challenging jobs in higher education. Their primary concern is the integrity of their institutions and the welfare of student athletes (Meyer 2005). They provide student athletes with successful student behavioral strategies to succeed in the classroom but also need to know the parameters of the NCAA regulations to compete. Academic counselors can serve as advocates and can assist student athletes to cope with rules, policies, and procedures that are part of the overall collegiate athletic system (Fletcher et al. 2003). "With academic importance and

expectations increasing, universities across the country have launched a variety of academic services for their athletes” (Dilley-Knoles et al. 2010). A great deal of importance has been placed on academic services and there has been a strong demand for quality student athlete support services in terms of tutorial services, academic advising, and teaching study skills. The negative reaction to the situation in which the tutorial and advising services for student athletes are expanded suggests a lack of awareness and understanding of the special needs and developmental challenges unique to this population. There would be value in educating the campus community about these issues so that feelings of understanding, rather than resentment, would be fostered about instituting these types of programs for student athletes (Engstrom and Sedlacek 1991).

Unfortunately, many people view athletic academic advisors as NCAA eligibility brokers, those who keep student athletes eligible to play. In reality, the only ones who can keep the student athletes eligible are student athletes themselves (Meyer 2005). A practical approach to advising and counseling college student athletes is to classify their needs into four areas: academic advising, life skills development, clinical counseling, and performance enhancement (Broughton and Neyer 2001). The athletic counselor can draw upon many resources within the institution to provide better assistance to student athletes. Many student personnel offices, such as the dean of students, residence life, international programs, career centers, campus ministry, and the counseling center, are staffed by trained professionals who can be of assistance in specific situations associated with student athletes. The effective professional counselor within an athletic department will be aware of the support upon which he or she can draw in order to provide the best

services to student athletes (Kirk and Kirk 1993). “Although many athletic advising and counseling programs concentrate on academic eligibility and graduation success, the developmental tasks student athletes face also need consideration” (Howard-Hamilton 2001:36).

Collaborative efforts of the college and university community to assist student athletes could lead to the development of an early warning plan that alerts faculty, administrators, and coaches of any impending academic or psychological problems (Howard-Hamilton and Sina 2001). “If people really value the balance of academics and athletics, we can do it” (Chung et al. 2011:159). The use of data from the Chung, et al. study prompted a university to develop a policy that could support both athletics and academics. Budget will not be an issue because the policy simply utilizes existing campus resources to administer academic support for athletes (Chung et al. 2011).

Unfortunately, in some institutions there has been an environment created by both academic and athletic staff to funnel athletes into athlete friendly majors and classes, ultimately keeping them eligible for play (Schneider et al. 2010). Academic clustering, as it is commonly referred to, is an issue of debate between athletics and academics. There are theories that this exists for the comfort of the student athlete, that former college athletes recommend their major as a path, advisors may tend to sway student athletes toward programs they work well with, academic schedule of courses work with practice and travel times and the lack of college preparation of incoming student athletes (Schneider et al. 2010).

The institutional responsibility with student athletes goes way beyond merely enabling them to survive with the goal of staying athletically eligible, but rather teaching them to thrive as members of the campus community. It's important to remember that advisors are educators, not rule enforcers (Meyer 2005). "It is our responsibility as faculty and administrators to seize every opportunity possible to challenge and support student athletes on their developmental journey" (Howard-Hamilton and Sino 2001:43). Programs need to be developed for athletes that help them get a realistic view of their future and then teach them the skills necessary to confidently make the career decisions that face them (Kirk and Kirk 1993).

Encouragement for faculty to be actively involved in the lives of student athletes as tutors, advocates, and faculty representatives to the athletic department might increase the academic outcomes of student athletes (Horton 2009). If faculty were able to connect with student athletes through informal social interactions then the academic relationships and performance of student athletes could possibly improve. Professors engaged in joint teaching with coaches affirm the insight that sports arenas may be "life laboratories" and that the coach may be a strong resource. (Banks 1983)

Continuing Research on Student Athletes

It is imperative that the mission, purpose and goals of athletic departments be congruent with those of the college or University (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001:41). If the emphasis of reporting is on underrepresented minorities, first generation college students or particular academic majors, then the athletic department should be looking at

its population with the same filters. Additionally, graduation rates would tell us more if we were able to aggregate the data by race, gender, etc. (Rishe 2003) and show institutions how the student athlete population really compares to the general student body. A more in depth look at Humboldt State University graduation rates would provide more information on the given population but for the purposes of this project we have chosen to not go that far with the data.

Despite all of the studies on student athletes, there is still a great deal to learn about the process of interaction that leads a student to commit to play intercollegiate athletics (Comeaux and Harrison 2011). This suggests that there is much more to be studied on why an incoming college student decides to pursue an intercollegiate career despite the apparent negative stigma they'll receive. Does the celebrity status of a student athlete label outweigh the potential discrimination experienced by athletes in the classroom setting? Digging deeper into the social structure of athletics, outside of collegiate athletics, would be particularly useful in understanding the behavior of student athletes.

There is a need for a conceptual theoretical model to analyze the behavior of student athletes, the stigma they face, and their persistence to obtain college degrees. "Although a substantial amount of attention has been given to the relationship between student athletes and their levels of academic success, there remain critical theoretical and analytical gaps" (Comeaux and Harrison 2011: 235). Through the review of literature on this topic, there was no apparent theoretical theme that emerged as a lens with which to view student athlete experiences. Stigma was the most appropriate theory for the

purposes of this project, but a more in depth theory in regards to student athletes still remains to be developed.

Based on prior research, it is clear that campuses across the country must create a more sensitive way of academically supporting their student athlete population. It seems that through faculty and peer interactions, the negative stigma that most athletes experience on their campuses needs to and can dissolve. As a result this will increase student athlete academic success. This would also raise the overall positive experience of all campus members in regards to student athletes. The only path to breaking down the negative experiences of student athletes and faculty is to have the entire administration and student body in agreement about the constraints student athletes face. There has to be full understanding and participation among the campus community in order to truly breakdown the negative stereotypes of student athletes and increase their quality of learning outcomes and campus integration.

It was suggested by Gurney and Weber (2007) that the development of a Coach's Graduation Rate might help the recruitment practices of coaches that simply discard student athletes as soon as they become academically ineligible so the student will not continue to effect their NCAA APR. Instead, a coach's graduation rate would still count every student the coach recruited, failed to support and ultimately which of the players graduated or not (Gurney and Weber 2007). It would help keep coaches accountable to their athletes as students and not just as players who contribute to their overall winning percentage.

Prior research focuses on the athletic and academic achievements of NCAA Division I schools. This is a disservice to the athletes competing at lower division schools because the rules are different at each level. It was not an easy task to review a Division II school as much of the literature available refers to higher-level institutions. It is my desire to analyze the experiences at an NCAA Division II school and compare them to the findings of Division I schools to identify if the same problems exist for all student athletes or if they are problems that exist only at a Division I level.

I found the research by Jolly (2008) and Sacken (2008) to be most helpful in determining the way Humboldt State can improve its academic services and procedures for all athletes to ensure student athlete success in the classroom. The changes Jolly (2008) reports of in his article and the commitment to student graduation achievement from Sacken (2008) help establish that the relationship between student athlete and academic culture is one that can improve with a few key changes to existing campus social structure.

Building upon the research provided by Peach (2007) it might be worth exploring faculty, coach, administrator and student athlete opinions about the NCAA. Is the NCAA necessary? The general understanding is that athletes who compete at Division II and III colleges and universities do so for the love of the sport rather than for external rewards (Watt and Moore 2001) as these students rarely are afforded the opportunity to play professionally. Most professional athletes are funneled into their careers from Division I institutions.

Some research has examined the experiences of gay and lesbian athletes (Roper and Halloran 2007). However, no research has specifically examined heterosexual student athletes' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Roper and Halloran 2007). Specifically, future research needs to look at the relationship between sport type and attitudes of heterosexual student athletes' towards gay men and lesbians. Applying and extending the existing scholarship of intersectionality and critical race theory in sport, the impact of intersecting categories of oppression should be recognized, analyzed and compared (Anderson and McCormack 2010).

While FGR, APR, and GSR are important to the discussion of academic integrity in college athletics, little has been written in the academic literature to guide administrators and faculty leaders in using these metrics to establish institutional policy for student athletes (LaForge and Hodge 2011). Faculty advisors can contribute strategies for coaches and faculty to work together for the educational goals of the athletes. Future qualitative studies that explore student athletes' experiences with faculty inside and outside the classroom might be successful in answering such uncertainties (Comeaux and Harrison 2006).

Athletic departments may wish to educate some faculty as to the policies regarding student athlete recruitment, academic eligibility and related issues. In addition, support services that are offered to athletes should be justified to the greater academic community as complementary to the university's academic mission. Institutions should be aware that a distinct group of the student body may be faced with circumstances that

will provide unique challenges throughout their academic careers (Baucom & Lantz 2001).

In order to suggest changes specifically to Humboldt State University, a Division II athletic level school, in regards to academic procedures and success for student athletes it is important to see if negative stigmas exists on the campus. Examining the racial and gender make up of the campus, student athlete group and faculty group, insight as to the academic success of their students may be evident. After this is established it is necessary to make suggestions of how to breakdown those negative conceptions of student athletes and work towards improving the campus environment for academic success. The information found in the references used helps to show that there is indeed a negative stigma towards collegiate athletes at Division I athletic level schools, which can cause athletes to experience discrimination and perform poorly academically. As I explore the academic retention and graduation rates of athletes on the Humboldt State campus, a Division II level, it will be beneficial to refer to the information found in previous studies to determine if the same discrimination is present on this campus.

Ultimately, I want to draw out awareness for student athletes of the professional staff on their campuses that can act as advocates for them. Since a negative stigma exists between their faculty and peers, perhaps instead collegiate staff members might be a critical part of the academic success of student athletes by simply acting as mentors. This research will provide a better understanding of whether or not student athletes have similar collegiate experiences despite not having the same resources due to their divisional status.

In summary, the information found in these articles helps to show that there is indeed a negative stigma towards collegiate athletes, which can cause athletes to experience discrimination and perform poorly academically. Through the creation of a report which can clearly compare facts, help discourage negative athletic stigma and highlight the good work of the athletes, the collegiate academic experiences and as a result the social experiences of student athletes should improve. The next chapter will describe the process in creating such a report and conclude with an in depth discussion of the recommendations for future research as mentioned previously in this review.

METHODS

Study Overview and Design

Based on my experience with my placement in HSU Institutional Research and Planning, I created a descriptive statistical report that focused on comparing Division II student athletes to the general HSU student body. The final report can be found in the appendix of this paper. A major motivating factor in creating such a report came from the following quote:

“In order to combat the athletic stigma the university administration needs to correct the misfortune based on the ‘dumb jock’ stereotype and provide the campus with more accurate information about athletes. The campus administration should prepare a document to be widely distributed to the campus community providing some facts about athletes, highlighting their academic qualifications and performance showing that the dumb jock stereotype is a wild exaggeration. More importantly, this document should include the rationale and justification for the existence of intercollegiate sports on campus, celebrating the contributions which intercollegiate athletics and the athletes themselves make to university life.” (Simons et al, 2007: 271)

Although my report did not exactly follow the suggestion of Simons et al (2007), I was extremely grateful to find a set of researchers who found a report of this nature to be important in reducing student athlete stereotypes. This project was one that was designed to be fairly simple in construction so that other groups on campus, despite resources, might be able to use this as a model for their specific population. The Institutional Review Board at Humboldt State University approved the research and they found that there was no immediate risk or benefit

to the subjects being analyzed. Since the data used was already in existence and anonymous, there was no need to collect further data. I used SPSS, statistical software, to examine the data for statistical relevance.

I was concerned that the report may be viewed as less academic if it did not involve a complex statistical analysis and collection process, but the intention of this report is to be read and understood by a non-academic audience. Most likely, institutional administrators and educators will be able to infer more from the data than a sports fan, but since my focus was one of public sociology I needed to make sure it could speak to a general audience. If an individual can pick up the report, make a comparison between athletes and the student body that helps reshape the way they think about athletes, then the report will have been useful. If an individual in academia can read the report, make a comparison between athletes and the student body, then desire to know more or understand the athlete population better, then the report will have succeeded. Remembering to stay focused on the intent of the project and not succumb to the pressure of complex and confusing methods made this report really make an impact for the population it's trying to help.

Sample

The sample used for this study was all NCAA registered student athletes participating in Division II athletics at Humboldt State University for the 2011-2012 academic year. The sport teams included men's basketball, football, track &

field, cross-country and soccer; and women's basketball, volleyball, track & field, cross-country soccer, softball and crew. This is a total of 12 intercollegiate NCAA teams and a total of 427 student athletes.

The second set of data was a convenience sample from the general student body population at Humboldt State University, consisting of every student enrolled in courses for the 2011-2012 academic year. There were 8,046 enrolled students during the 2011-2012 academic year, including student athletes. Only existing student census data obtained from the office of Institutional Research & Planning was used to create the comparison of student athletes and the student body. This ensured that the data was the same for each group so the comparison would be consistent.

The unit of measure for the report was individual student. Each sample, student athlete and HSU student body, were represented on frequency charts and labeled throughout the report in specific colors. The student athletes were represented in yellow and the general student body was represented in green. This was done to allow the reader to easily compare the information regarding each group. More details on the demographics of the population will be included further on in the results section.

Data Collection

To obtain the data used in the report, I relied on my connections within the Institutional Research and Planning. I was given access to an "On Demand Data"

report (ODD report) from the university database consisting of all student athletes. This report is automatically generated and emailed to the athletic administration on a weekly basis. It contains every student who is coded as an athlete in the HSU data system regardless of his or her athletic eligibility status. The NCAA often has inquiries about and requires reports on an institution's student athlete population, which is why the ODD report was originally created and is still in existence. ODD reports are generated in a Microsoft Excel format, which makes the data very easy to work with.

The general HSU student body data was all retrieved from the public website for the Institutional Research and Planning office, <http://www2.humboldt.edu/irp/index.html>. Through the link "Data Dashboards" and then the report for "University Enrollment Dashboard," I was able to access the census data for the student body. Through various filters, graphs and tables, I was able to collect the necessary data points needed for my report. The only information not on the data dashboard website was that of the HSU student body average unit load and average GPA. These two data points were given to me directly by the Institutional Research and Planning office. However, they were not able to provide me with the raw data, so the aggregate information is simply a footnote in the report.

Data Analysis

Once I obtained the ODD report from the IRP office, I uploaded the Excel

file into SPSS. SPSS is a software package for conducting statistical analysis. Since the ODD report includes some duplicates of student athletes that were on athletic rosters both in the Fall and the Spring, I had to go through the rows of data and delete any repeats. I chose to delete the duplicate record for the students who were out of season in a particular semester. For example, Soccer, Football and Volleyball players had their spring record deleted and their Fall record kept since their season of competition is the Fall. Any athlete that is in season in the Spring, but who was on the roster in the Fall, had their fall term record deleted too. This is to keep the most consistent statistics possible.

I determined the data points I wanted to use for the report were: class standing, student type, gender, ethnicity, athletic participation, origin by region, first generation student status, underrepresented minority (URM) student, degree major, average unit load, GPA, retention rate, and graduation rate. All of the data was provided from the census data at HSU which comes from information provided on a student's admission application and through course registration.

Class standing measures if a student is a freshman, sophomore, junior or senior and is based on the amount of units completed. Average unit load is determined by the amount of units a student registers for and then an average is calculated for the entire sample. GPA provides a measure of a student's accumulative grade point average in their enrolled coursework. Class standing, average unit load and GPA are all ordinal level measures. Retention rate measures the amount of time in years a student remains at HSU. Graduation rate measures

the how long it takes for a student to complete their degree and it typically reported as a four year rate and a six year rate. Retention and graduation rates are both scale level measures.

Nominal data points included student type, gender, ethnicity, athletic participation, origin by region, first generation student status, underrepresented minority and degree major. Student type is the name given to a student depending on their admission type. These types include new freshmen student, new transfer student, continuing student and international student. Gender represents the self-reported sex, if given, of a student. Athletic participation provides the sport in which a student participates. Origin by region represents the area from which a student is coming to school. Most of the regions are within California; local, Northern California, San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, Coast, Central California, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Others include those students from WUE¹ states, other states, other countries and unknown. First generation student status is self-reported by students whose parents did not attend college. Underrepresented minority are students who identify as a minority racial group. Degree major describes the degree program a student is in while seeking a their degree.

The data points I chose to look at were strategically chosen to align with

¹ Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) – this is a tuition discount provided to students who are from the 15 Western United States. These states include: Alaska, Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, California, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota.

the goals of the university. Specifically, HSU is very interested in retaining students that are underrepresented minorities (URM) and first generation college student. It is especially important for the athletics department to be able to show that their student population is assisting in the efforts of the campus by presenting the data on those two sub groups of the student athlete population specifically. Additionally, budgets are always tight in higher education so I purposely chose to show the student origin by region to show the high percentage of out-of-state students in athletics, which represents a high percentage of out-of-state tuition dollars coming to the university budget.

Graduation and retention rates have long been an important focus for the NCAA and the university but not until recent years have URM and first generation college student been heavily looked at. It was important to include these data points to show that some student athletes come from economic and academically disadvantaged backgrounds and therefore academic support for these students should remain a priority.

In order to see the information clearly and be able to compare it, I created a series of tables to input the student athlete data. I created an additional column in each table for the student body data so I could easily compare the two samples. I ran descriptive data reports in SPSS to get the figures needed for the student athlete data. I converted all of the totals to percentages, which would be easier for readers to see major differences. Once all of the numbers and percentages were gathered and organized into charts, I then made suggestions on what type of visual

chart or graph should be used to display the data when it got to the design part of the project.

I believe it is extremely important that published data be vetted by groups that may have an interest in the data to ensure the numbers are analyzed correctly. I made an effort to have multiple people and departments look at my data before I finalized the report. Key people starting with the IRP office, then the office of Diversity and Inclusion, the athletic department and finally my committee chair, reviewed the numbers. A few questions were addressed and a couple of suggestions were made to improve the report.

One suggestion came from the IRP office. They pointed out that the number of student athletes reported for retention and graduation rates was fairly small from year to year which made the percentages drastically change as compared to the general student body. As a result, it was not representing the student athlete population accurately. It was suggested I compute a 3-year average of the retention and graduation rates to help increase the number of student athletes included in the analysis and portray a more accurate picture of the population. I recalculated the percentages by adding the three years for each category and reporting the averages. This helped to reduce the large discrepancies that were previously reported.

Upon collecting all of the data, I found that there is limitation to the reporting of GPA and Unit load. All of the data points are measured on an annual basis and compared to the general student body, which is also reported as annual

data except for GPA. Also, there are many types of GPA to be measured. Should it be the cumulative GPA, which has academic performance prior to HSU? Should it just be for the Fall semester, which would not have the Spring only students included? Or should it be the Spring term GPA which has the potential to be skewed since a large portion of athletes are not in their traditional season resulting in potentially better grades since they are not traveling? The IRP office has similar concerns with reporting GPA as well. We were able to agree on using the HSU cumulative GPA after the Spring semester.

Results

The report included in the appendix provides summary statistics describing the sample of student athletes compared to the general student population. The discussion that follows relates to this report and is organized according to the data points.

Class Standing

A substantially greater proportion of student athletes were underclassmen. Approximately 57 percent of student athletes were either freshmen (35.4 percent) or sophomores (21.8 percent) as compared to about 47 percent of the general student body. Likewise, a smaller percentage of student athletes were seniors (18.3 percent) compared to other students (30.0 percent).

Student Type

A greater proportion of student athletes were freshmen (26.9 percent) or transfers (15.9 percent) than the general student body (15.3 percent and 11.6 percent respectively). The percentage of continuing students was much higher for the general student body (72.2 percent) whereas the athlete continuing students was smaller (56.7 percent). Both populations had similar percentages of international students with 0.5 percent for athletes and 0.9 percent for the student body.

Gender

The gender composition of the student athletes was almost identical to the general student body. Of the 427 student athletes, 46.6 percent (N=199) were female and 53.4 percent (N=228) were male. Of the total student body (N=8046), 4323 (53.7 percent) were female and 3723 (46.3 percent) were male.²

Ethnicity

There is an overrepresentation of African American/Black and Pacific Islander students within athletics. About 10 percent of student athletes were

² The NCAA mandates gender equity for athletics departments so every school must be within 5% of 50% of their students being male and female. HSU has a 3.4% discrepancy so they are within the NCAA allowable boundaries. If they were not in compliance, they would need to consider dropping sports teams or reducing roster sizes to make up the difference. Since NCAA has such strict rules regarding athletes and have different calculations based on those athletes that received scholarship, I was sure to include a note at the bottom of the first page indicating that the report was based on annual institutional data and that different parameters are used for NCAA gender equity purposes.

African American/Black as compared to about 4 percent within the general student population. The Pacific Islander ethnicity was 1.6 percent for the athlete population and the general population is only 0.3 percent. Asian American students were underrepresented, however, in athletics. The athlete population only had 0.7 percent Asian American whereas the general student population had 2.8 percent. Among other ethnic groups of student athletes there was general parity with their representation in the general student population. After running crosstabulations for first generation college student within ethnicities, it was noted that 69.0 percent of African American/Black athletes are first generation and that 64.9 percent of Hispanic/Latino athletes are first generation. These are noted as footnotes at the bottom of the bar chart. All other ethnicities did not produce high enough percentages to note.

First Generation College Students and Underrepresented Minorities (URM)

There was a fairly similar percentage of student athletes who are first generation college students (47.1 percent) as compared to the general student population (44 percent). However, the rate of student athletes who come from under represented minority (URM) groups (55.7 percent) was almost twice the rate for the general student population (28 percent). This is a big difference and helps to show that the athlete population contribute to the over all ethnic diversity of the student body. Interestingly, I found that 21 percent of student athletes are first generation and URM. Overall, athletes were found to have 69.6 percent of its

population to be first generation college student or URM. Again, these numbers help the university see that athletics plays a big role at recruiting, retaining and supporting a diverse population of students.

Sport Participation

There was variation in the type of sport participation by whether a student came from an URM group or was a first generation college student. Men's basketball, women's crew, men's football, men's track & field and women's track & field all indicated high percentages of their populations as first generation college students. Men's basketball, men's football and men's soccer had high percentages of URM students. All of the teams that produced a rate of 40 percent or higher were noted in the footnotes. Exact percentages can be found in the report.

Student Origin by Region

The student by origin chart was important because it was a way to show that student athletes come from a variety of different places. Most regions of California measured closely to the percentages of the general student body. However, there was a greater percentage of student athletes from the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) states (17.8 percent) than are represented in the general student body (8.8 percent). Athletes only had 2.8 percent true out-of-state students and the general student body had 5.2 percent. It is important to draw attention to the out-of-states students as they generate additional revenue for the

university given out-of-state tuition and fees are higher. Overall, with WUE and out-of-state combined, athletes had 6.6 percent more out-of-state students in their population than the general student body. When budgets are squeezed, it would be advantageous for the athletic administration to know this number and present it to their university administrators.

Top Majors

The top three majors for student athletes and the general student body were very similar. Athlete top majors were Kinesiology (20.1 percent), Business Administration (14.8 percent) and Biology (6.1 percent). The top majors for the general student body were Biology (8.3 percent), Business Administration (5.7 percent) and Psychology (5.5 percent). It makes sense that many athletes are interested in Kinesiology as it has a teaching/coaching emphasis, which many student athletes desire to do after completing their own athletic career.

Academic Unit Load

The unit load for athletes was normally distributed with 32.1 percent of athletes being registered for 15-16 units. As previously mentioned, due to a difference in data collection, the student body did not have the data to produce its own specific distribution but the IRP office provided me with the information on the average unit load. The average unit load for the student body was 14.07 and the average unit load for athletes was 15.79. This indicates that athletes are performing at or above the average student.

GPA

Performance in the classroom is extremely important to both athletes and the student body. Interestingly, both the athlete population and the general student body had an average GPA of 2.84. This shows that despite additional time constraints and missed class time due to travel to athletic competitions, student athletes are still able to perform academically at the same level as their peers. Any student falling below a 2.0 GPA is considered on academic probation by the university and is required to receive additional advising. Completing two semesters in a row with lower than a 2.0 GPA can be cause for a student to be academically disqualified. Additionally, student athletes who have lower than a 2.0 GPA risk their athletic eligibility and ability to participate in their sport. More importantly, becoming athletically ineligible due to GPA could result in the loss of athletic scholarship. Academic performance is necessary to earn a degree and maintain athletic participation.

Graduation Rate

Graduation and retention rates are the last line graphs on the report. There are three categories reported: Freshmen, Lower Division Transfer and Upper Division Transfer students. Among freshmen, student athletes had higher overall graduation rates. Athletes had a four-year graduation rate of 13.6 percent and a six-year graduation rate of 50.0 percent. The student body had a four-year graduation rate of 11.1 percent and a six-year graduation rate of 41.2 percent. The difference

in the percentages could be that some student athletes receive athletic scholarships to attend a particular university and often graduate from that same university and continue to receive their scholarship for the length of their degree.

Retention Rate

Retention can be similar to graduation rates due to student athletes choosing to stay at their school because of the commitment they have to their sport and athletic scholarship. However, due to injury or lack of playing time, some athletes choose to leave. For the same reasons, HSU may acquire students who only have one year of athletic eligibility and therefore do not stay beyond their playing season. For freshmen, athletes have a high retention rate of 67.5 percent but for upper division transfer students, those who only have one or two seasons left to play, they only have a 40 percent retention rate. The general student body has similar rates for all three categories averaging a 70 percent retention rate for first year and a 58 percent retention rate for second year.

Report Construction and Design

Jeff Jensen, a graphic designer in the HSU Marketing & Communications department, was assigned to assist me with the visual design of the report. I provided him with the raw data, guidelines on what type of graph or chart to use for each data point, and a general outline for how I wanted the report laid out. With his graphic design assistance, we were able to turn the numbers into visually

pleasing graphs, pie charts, line charts and bar charts. The data on the report is very easy to read and fits perfectly into a four-page booklet layout. To keep with the collegiate athletic theme, we chose to use the school athletic colors to represent the data. HSU Athletes were gold throughout the report and the HSU student body was green throughout the report.

We broke the report into two main sections for the reader. The first section was the descriptive statistics on the group which we labeled as “Who are HSU’s Student Athletes? The second part of the report was focused on academic information and labeled “Academic Performance.” So not to overwhelm the reader, we chose to include additional relevant facts from the cross tabulations as footnotes under each graph. This way the important observations from the data could be presented in a readable way without creating too much distraction throughout the report.

There were many drafts of the report that went through substantial edits. At the completion, both Jeff and I were very pleased with how the design turned out. Most importantly, we had created a template for this type of report to be used again. The first time creating something of this nature is overwhelming and consuming. However, once it’s complete, it should be something easy to update annually with new data. Without the help of a graphic designer like Jeff, I would not have been able to produce something that would be pleasing to all types of readers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This project benefited the Humboldt State University campus by educating its students, staff and faculty as well as the broader community about the student athlete population. However, there are certainly additional data points that can be added to enhance the report and longitudinal studies that could further provide insight into student athlete academic trends. All of these efforts could help inform the administrative decisions about student athlete support services. The specific purpose of this report was to help breakdown the stereotypes athletes face and allow the institution to focus on areas that can help athletes succeed on campus.

Future Student Athlete Research

Future research in regards to student athletes at HSU would be enhanced with a mixed methods approach, which would include qualitative interviewing of student athletes. The information gathered could help reveal the full picture of the student athlete experience and highlight obstacles impeding academic persistence. Discussing such topics as experiences in the classroom, special admission exceptions and tracking of academic and graduation persistence could help bring a better understanding of how to provide better resources to help athletes succeed. It would be important to know if student athletes were performing at the academic level they predicted for themselves upon entering college.

Additional Data Needs

Underrepresented minorities and first generation college students are two areas that are priorities for the university and data on those two groups was readily available for analysis. However, it would greatly enhance this report if data on gender and ethnicity were as easily available. Crosstabulations by gender on academic outcomes such as GPA and unit load would be extremely important areas to investigate. Do women carry more units than men? Are the GPA's of one ethnic group lower than another? The reason these crosstabulations were left out of this report was due to a lack of filters available in the HSU Data Dashboards which provide information about the general student body. I could have gathered the information on student athletes but I would not have been able to compare it to the general student body so I left it out of the report. If the Data Dashboards could have a more sophisticated system that provided access to all census data rather than a few key data points, it would provide richer information with which the university could use to assess programming. Another way to gain access to this information would be to obtain the raw census data of the general student body and upload it into SPSS as I did with the athlete data. However, since census data is not typically made available, any such requests would have to be approved by the IRB and the HSU Office of Institutional Research and Planning would need to agree to provide access.

Public Education About Student Athletes

Administrators of athletic programs are concerned with the academic development of their students, but often do not know how to best educate their campus community about their policies (Kirk & Kirk, 1993). “The world of athletics was alien to me, as it has been to most of my faculty colleagues over the years...Few of us feel responsible for young men and women athletes except for the occasional exceptional scholar-athlete” (Sacken, 2008: 58). Working together with faculty to help inform the campus about athletic constraints, athletic administration can help reduce the gap between faculty and athletes. Athletic departments should attempt to educate faculty as to the policies regarding student athlete recruitment, academic eligibility and other related issues (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Watt & Moore, 2001). Encouraging mentorship and communication between faculty and athletes is most likely the best way for positive change on any university campus (Jolly, 2008). Additionally, it would be positive to help provide coaches and faculty opportunities to communicate openly about their students. Creating opportunities to bridge the gap from academia to athletics will have an extremely positive effect for everyone involved.

Campus Policy and Reporting

Having a report with concrete facts about the student athlete population can help administrators make informed decisions when it comes to cutting or enhancing academic support. Just like a budget accurately informs the reader about monetary information, so does this report help to accurately portray the

student athlete experience. It is my highest recommendation that university policy is developed to require a report of this nature, or one in more detail, be produced and disseminated each academic year to staff and faculty on campus. If funds are available, I would also suggest it be given to athletic boosters and fans. The more people can be informed about the population they support, the more likely they are to continue to support it.

Non-Intercollegiate Athlete Reporting

Another population on university campuses that could greatly benefit from future research is that of the non-intercollegiate athletes. This would consist of recreation and club sport athletes. These students still compete, wear uniforms in school colors and with the school mascot, but are not fully funded by the university. They share the same athletic facilities, have similar training methods but have less athletic oversight. The distinction between club or recreation athletes and intercollegiate athletes is not obvious to the general population. However, providing data on these two groups and comparing them to each other or comparing them to the general student body could certainly help bring education and attention to the group. Since the recreational and club sports are often self funded, creating a report similar to the one discussed in this paper would be affordable for them especially since the template is already created.

Additional Student Athlete Analysis

Lastly, it would be good for the HSU athletic department to create this report annually specifically for its students who are required to be in study hall. These students are required to participate in study hall up to six hours a week if their GPA is 2.5 or lower or it is a student's first semester at HSU. It would help justify the need and show the success of an athletic advisor to show the data points on this group compared to all student athletes and the general student body. Again, the template is already created so all that would need to be done is to compile the data for the given semester or academic year. Continued research into the academic experiences of athletes and their persistence to graduation can be overwhelming. Starting with this report and generating interest in the athlete population is the first step in changing the athlete culture on campus.

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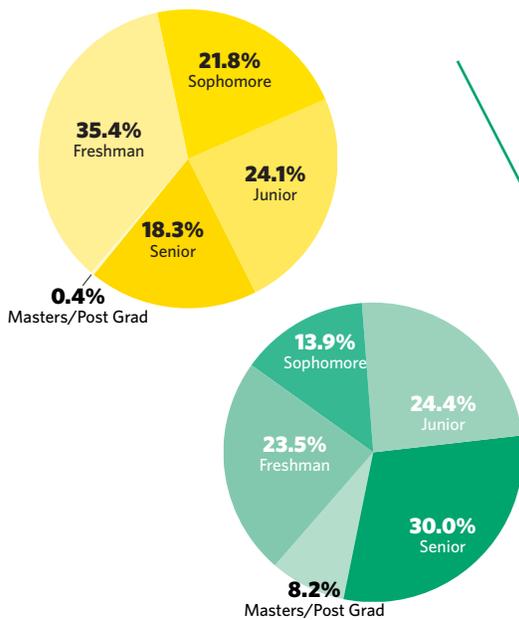
APPENDICES

2011-2012 HSU Student Athlete Report

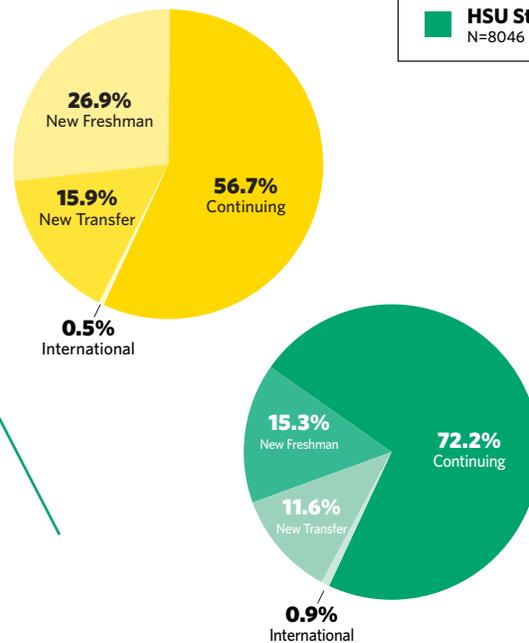
2011-2012 HSU STUDENT ATHLETE REPORT

Who are HSU's student athletes?

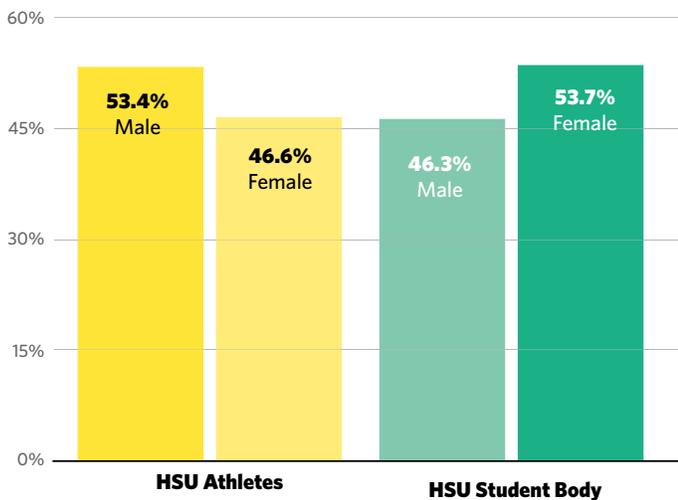
Class Standing



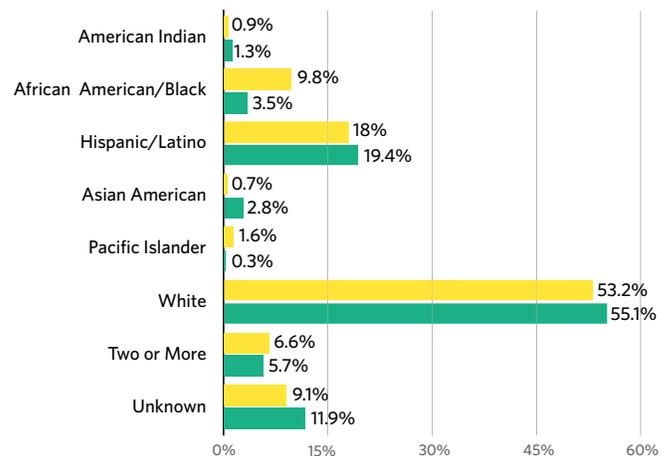
Student Type



Gender



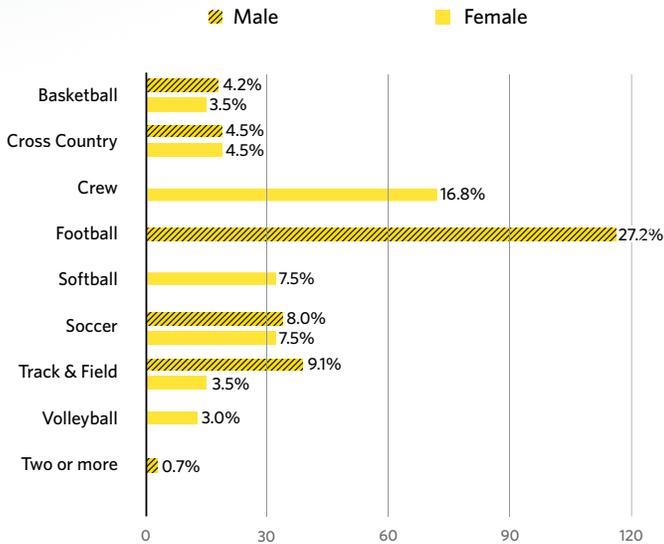
Ethnicity



* 69.0% of African American/Black athletes are first generation college students.
 * 64.9% of Hispanic/Latino athletes are first generation college students.

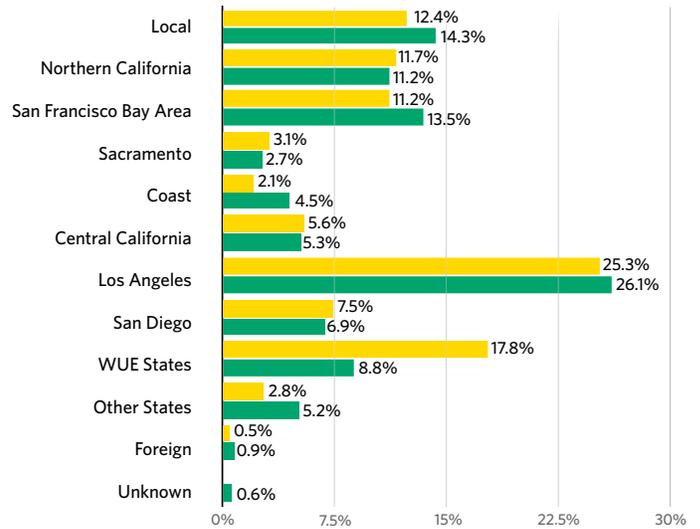
* This report is based on annual institutional data. Different parameters are used for NCAA gender equity purposes.

Athletic Participation



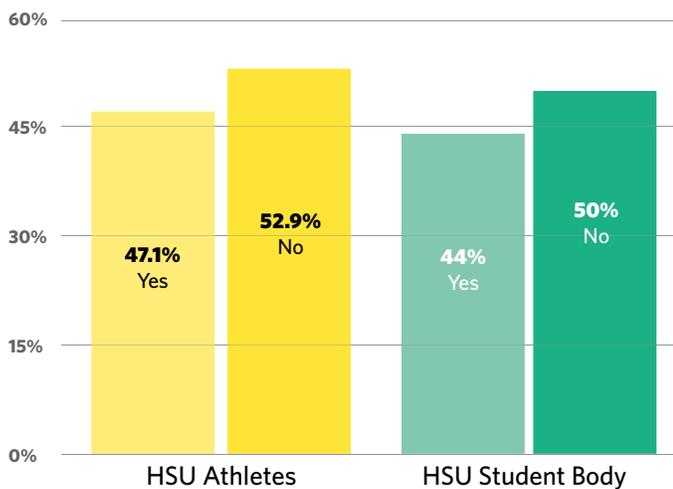
- * **61.1%** of Men's Basketball are first generation college students.
- * **77.8%** of Men's Basketball are URM.
- * **48.6%** of Crew are first generation college students.
- * **47.4%** of Football are fist generation college students.
- * **40.5%** of Football are URM.
- * **41.2%** of Men's Soccer are URM.
- * **61.5%** of Men's Track & Field are first generation college students.
- * **60.0%** of Women's Track & Field are first generation college students.

Student Origin by Region



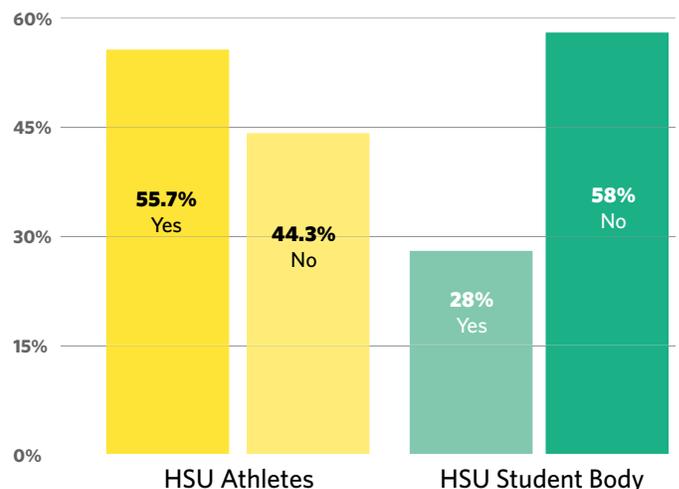
- * Student athletes have **6.6%** more out of state students than the general HSU student body.
- * **46.2%** of Los Angeles region student athletes are URM.
- * **56.3%** of San Diego region student athletes are URM.
- * **53.8%** of Sacramento region student athletes are URM.

First Generation College Students



* Due to non-responses, there is an unknown percentage for HSU student body.

Underrepresented Minority (URM) Students

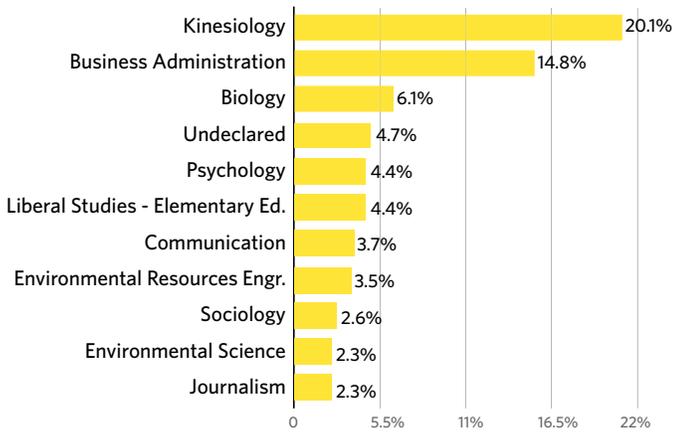


* Due to non-responses, there is an unknown percentage for HSU student body.

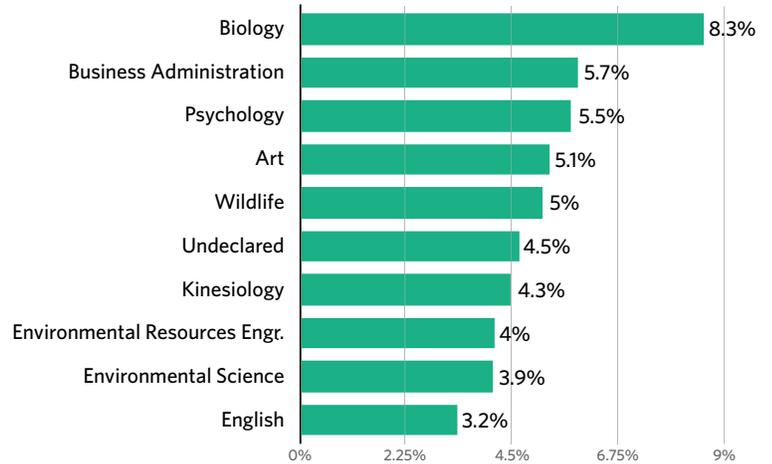
- * **21.8%** of student athletes are first generation college students AND URM.
- * **69.6%** of student athletes are first generation college students OR URM.

Academic Performance

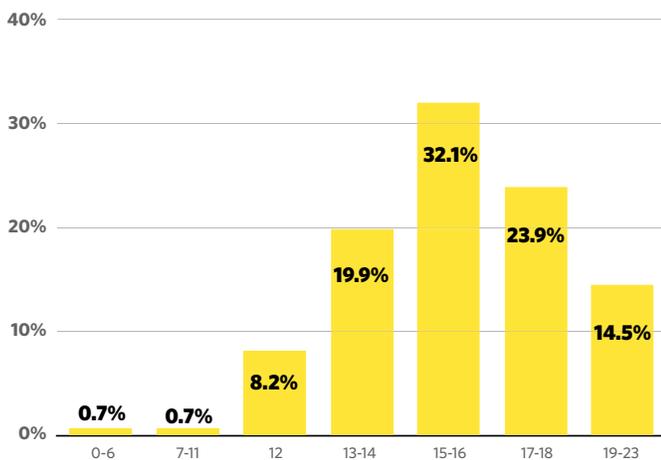
Top Majors of HSU Athletes



Top Majors of HSU Student Body

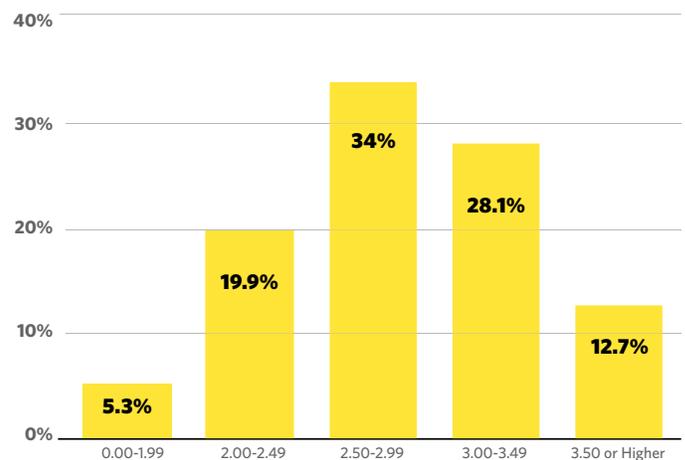


Unit Load of HSU Athletes

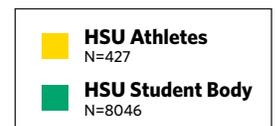


* The average student athlete unit load is **15.79** units.
 * The average HSU student unit load is **14.07** units.

GPA of HSU Athletes

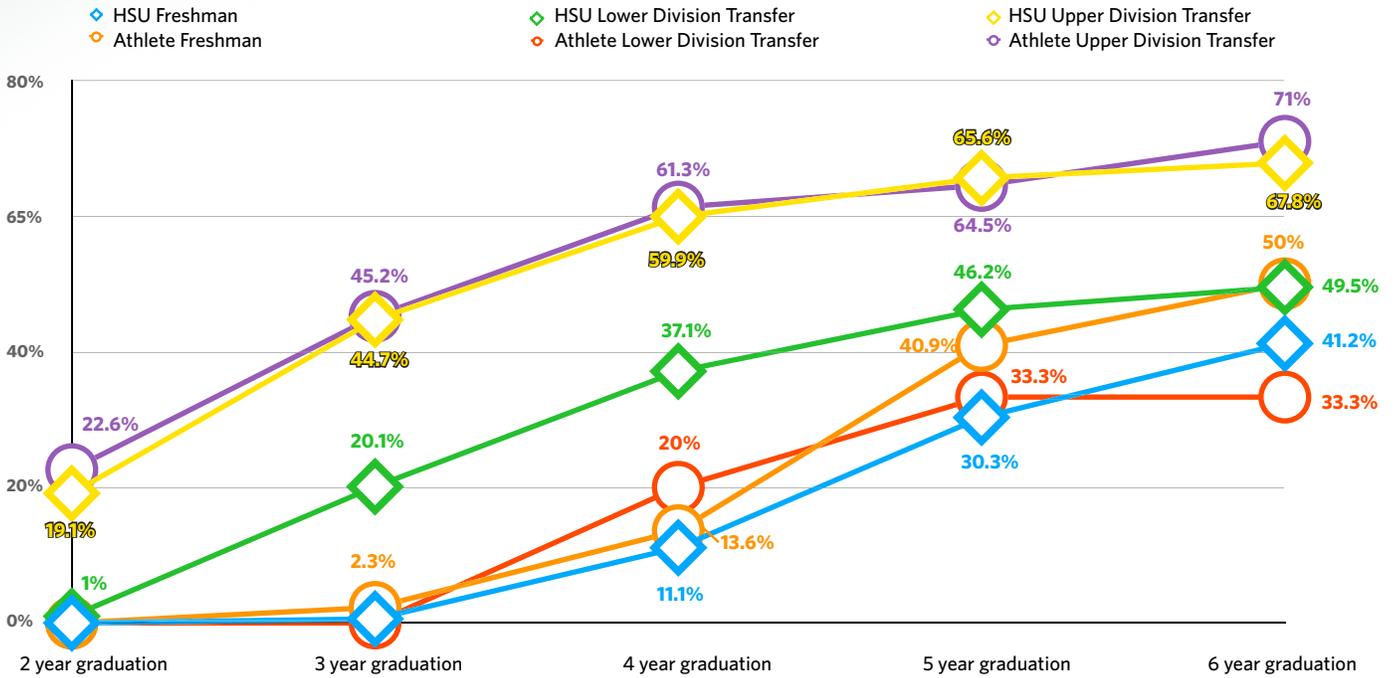


* The average student athlete GPA is **2.84**.
 * The average HSU student GPA is **2.84**.



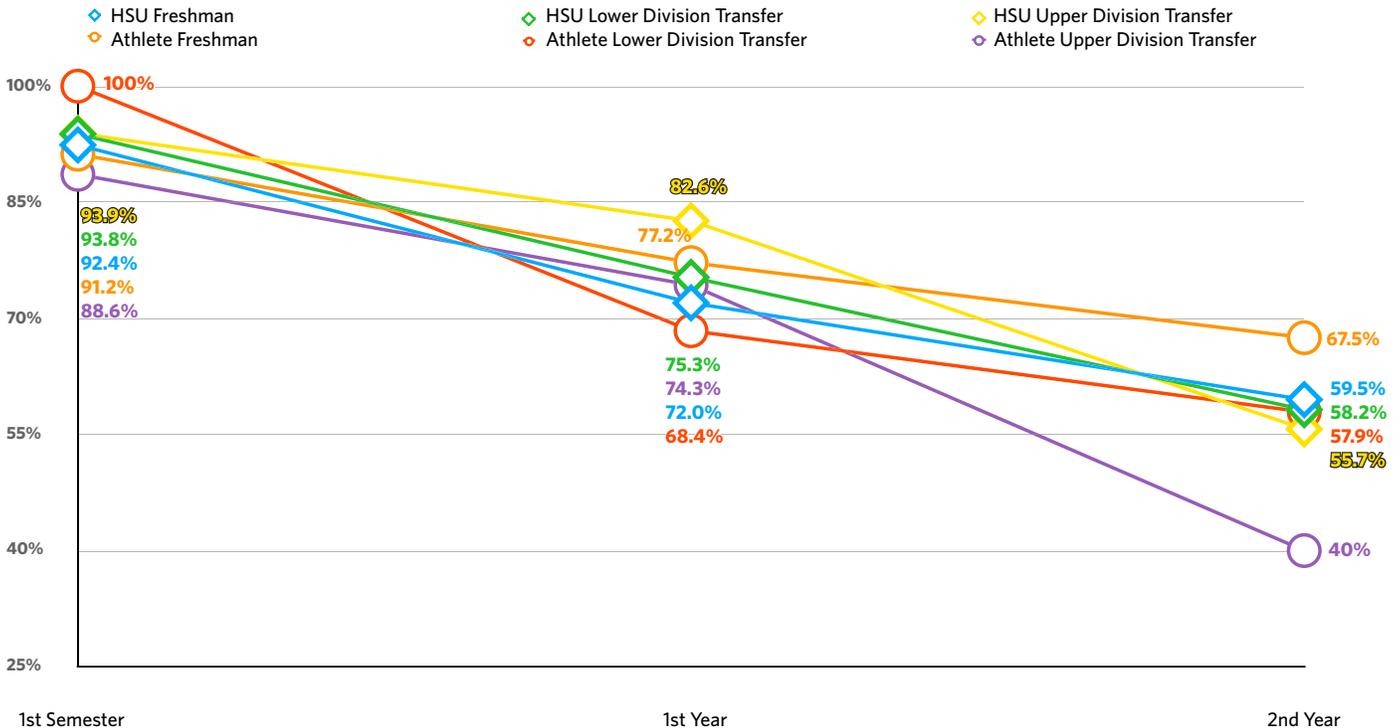
Graduation Rate

(Based on Fall 2007 Cohort)



Retention Rate

(Based on Fall 2011 Cohort)



*The low rate for upper division transfer student athletes is due to the high percentage of athletes choosing to attend HSU for their last year of NCAA eligibility. Since they only have one year left to play and graduate, they often have left by their second year.