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Academic Support and Retention at Division I Universities

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Michelle Aaland

HHP 815 Research Methods

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Chapter I

Introduction to the Problem

One of the most prominent issues facing American universities is the number of students that fail to graduate. Furthermore, student-athletes, also termed “athlete-students” by some, have been and will be a very controversial group of students within higher education. Political issues surround college athletics and its role within higher education. The controversies spread from athletes that graduate without learning to read to scandals with recruiting and agents paying athletes still enrolled in college. There is much debate concerning the professionalism and commercialism of sport. As a primary gateway between high school and the professional world of the National Football League and National Basketball Association, some question the role of the revenue sports of football and men’s basketball in college athletics (Hewitt, 2002). The men’s basketball post season tournament has the potential of bringing the National Collegiate Athletic Association over \$2 billion from Columbia Broadcast System (CBS) in a multi-year contract (Asher, 1999). The criticism of athletics and the low graduation rates resulted in research about student-athletes and their academic performance

For a large population in this country, the most important and first page that is read in their newspaper is the sports section. However, there is another side of the story. Low graduation rates cost universities valuable resources, weaken the ability to meet educational expectations, and are perceived to reflect the university’s ability to meet the

educational, social and emotional needs of students. Moreover, retention and graduation rates are a major component of national ranking schemes, such as US News Annual Ranking of US Colleges and Universities. State legislatures take into account these results and link freshmen retention and graduation rates to university budgets as a component of performance based funding (Mangold, Bean, & Adams, 2003).

With that said, the NCAA faces a conflict between its sometimes contradictory roles as promoter and governor of intercollegiate athletics (Splitt, 2007). Every year, more and more student-athletes are leaving college early to enter into the professional ranks. Based on a study polling opinions on recruiting blue-chip athletes, one responded,

“It all depends on how a program plans when it signs a player it knows won’t be around for four years. As long as the coach and player do their research and assess the possibilities in the draft when the player makes the decision to leave, it is something programs have to live with. There will always be surprise early-entrants, but I believe most coaches know when they recruit a player that will only be around their program for a year or two” (Centor, 2008, 3rd para.).

There exists another side of the argument exemplified in the following statement that was the idea behind the NCAA’s newest initiative to make changes.

“While there are many cases in which a blue-chipper attends college with the intent of staying and then is convinced otherwise by an outstanding freshman-year performance, those prospects who have absolutely no intention of engaging in the college structure do in fact damage the integrity of a program. The NCAA’s harshest critics feed

off the 'NCAA as a minor league' mentality to begin with. Premeditated one-year wonders only support that argument" (Centor, 2008, 4th para.).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study is to investigate the level and commitment of academic support and the differences the types of academic support have on retention of Division I student-athletes in the Big 12 and Big 10 conferences.

Sub-problems

Within the problem of the study, the following sub-problems will be explored:

1. The differences in academic performance based upon the number of academic services provided to the student-athlete.
2. The difference in academic performance between women's volleyball and men's basketball.
3. The differences in academic performance between male and female sports.
4. The difference of retention based on geographic location in the country.
5. The difference in retention based upon high school academic performance.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are operationally defined:

Eligibility- This term is defined as being able to participate in NCAA Division I athletics based upon the correct number of credits per academic year while maintaining a grade point average that is showing progress towards graduation while meeting the minimum

overall requirement. A generic definition of this term is the validity for participation (Wikipedia).

Retention- For the purposes of this investigation, retention is defined as the decision to remain enrolled in the original institution, from one year to the next. A generic definition of retention is a student who decides not to drop out of school (Hewitt, 2002).

Student-Athlete- Student-Athlete is defined as a college student who is eligible to compete in athletics. This person has met all the requirements for participation from the university and the NCAA.

Limitations

The study will have the following limitations:

1. The study will be limited to Division I student-athletes in the Big 12 conference and Big 10 conference.
2. The study will be limited to women's volleyball and men's basketball in the Big 12 and Big 10 conferences.
3. The subjects will be self-reporting their actions in terms of the activities asked in the questionnaire.

Delimitations

The study will be delimited to the following:

1. The subjects will be taken from Division I universities in the Big 12 and Big 10 conferences.
2. The results will be based upon the questionnaire completed by the participants.

Assumptions

The following assumptions will be made for this study:

1. The answers that will be given on the questionnaires are accurate and honest.
2. The anonymity of the participants will be honored as the questionnaires are completed and sent back to the tester.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

1. The difference in retention rates between teams that used two or more academic programs compared to teams that used less than two academic programs will not be statistically significant.
2. The difference in retention between women's volleyball and men's basketball will not be statistically significant.
3. The difference of retention between upperclassmen and lowerclassmen will not be statistically significant.

Significance of the Study

Coaches, administrators, parents, student-athletes and researchers will better understand the constraints and challenges of the Division I athlete and what is involved in order to graduate from a Division I institution. This study will increase the awareness of the implications of the NCAA Academic Performance Rating because it exemplifies an outside institution's standards on each Division I school.

Now, there is a greater emphasis placed upon each word in 'student-athlete.' Coaches will benefit from this study by learning which types of academic services are effective in keeping their student-athletes eligible to retain and graduate them.

Administrators will benefit from this study from learning the importance of funding academic services not only to student-athletes, but to the general population of the university. It will give credence to the idea that they are effective in keeping students in school. Current and future student-athletes will come away with the knowledge of what it takes to be a Division I athlete and if that is the path they wish to pursue.

Higher education is a necessary tool for this society to maintain and further our expertise in the world's economy. Being a student-athlete has the ability to add much more to the overall experience while providing the structure to encourage success and completion of the course of study. The knowledge other researchers may gain includes additional research into a topic that has become necessary as the performance and retention of college athletes continues to be sub-par. Further research may include Division II and III student-athletes, more athletic sports, and more questions pertaining to the life of a student-athlete.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature will focus on the issues of retention of college students at Division I institutions. The sections of importance are student-athletes as a group, legislation put forth by the NCAA to encourage efforts of retention and graduation rates, the response to this legislation, and studies that have been done to increase retention and graduation.

STUDENT-ATHLETES

Attending college and being away from family and friends can be an exciting yet scary time in a young person's life. It is an opportunity to leave home and spread the wings towards adulthood (Davidson & Peyton, 2007). However, getting to college may be the difficult part of the process if you are a student-athlete. Unlike the recruiting process for traditional students, the glamorous recruiting tactics illustrate the competitive and business-like approach of college athletics (Comeaux, 2007). In an annual study done by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 74.8% of the 270,000 participants rated themselves above average or highest 10 percent in the category 'drive to achieve' (Snapshot of 270,000 College Freshmen). It has become clear that getting into college, and the right college at that, has become a major component for in-coming freshmen.

Furthermore, student-athletes immediately comprise an at-risk group on university campuses because they have special needs and problems that make them a

unique group compared to the general population. They must cope with public scrutiny, tackle large time commitments, endure physically grueling workouts, and juggle academic responsibilities as well as maintaining NCAA requirements (Davidson & Peyton, 2007). Male student-athletes in major athletic programs are six times more likely to receive special treatment in the 'objective' admission process and sometimes admitted below the standard requirements for their universities. They are being admitted on their athletic prowess, not their academic potential (Comeaux, 2007). Myles Brand, the NCAA president has commented on college life. He said, "Intercollegiate athletics in America is a unique experience, linked both by tradition and value of higher education" (Davidson & Peyton, 2007, p. 64). The question, however, remains; Are these student-athletes truly ready to excel off the court as well as on?

NCAA Legislation

The pressures of Division I universities were becoming more and more apparent as they are asked to not only become self-sustaining departments, but also to supplement other departments on their campus (Frohnmayr, 2007). The NCAA was also coming under the heat in terms of allowing institutions to become factories for the professional ranks. In order to remain consistent with its mission on the balance of athletics and academics, the NCAA responded to the greater consistency of low graduation rates along with low retention rates by passing an academic reform known as Academic Performance Rating (APR) for Division I athletics in late 2004. The APR was developed as a more realistic assessment of teams' academic performance than the six-year graduation rate calculation that was formerly used. The system awards two points each term to student-

athletes who meet academic eligibility standards and who remain at the university. A team's APR is the accumulation of points earned by the team and divided by the total points possible. 925 is currently the cut score the Division I Board of Directors approved for immediate penalties. If an APR score is 925 out of 1,000, it equates to a 60% graduation success rate (Defining Academic Reform, Academic Performance Program, Hosick, 2008).

The reform act was established to diminish the number of 0-2 student-athletes. These are student-athletes that are neither academically eligible nor remain at the university. This may be a student-athlete who transfers, leaves the university for personal reasons or leaves to turn professional and would not have been academically eligible had he or she returned. If a team does not meet the 925 minimum APR, immediate penalties are assessed. They include the inability to re-award grant-in-aid money to another player if the initial student-athlete was an 0-2 student-athlete with only a few exceptions (Defining Academic Reform).

Yet another aspect of the Academic Performance Rating is the accountability of the campuses. College presidents mandated the development of a system of campus accountability in academic reform, which takes into account the various missions of NCAA colleges and universities (NCAA Backgrounder on Academic Reform). It is apparent to the college presidents that a way they can ensure consistently higher APR's is to put the focus back into the classroom as well as the court or field. Studies began to emerge looking at student persistence and what elements were necessary to maintain it.

Almost all colleges in the United States offer individual content tutoring, and more than half offer group tutoring (Maxwell, 1990).

RESPONSE TO LEGISLATION

The results of this legislation are very mixed in terms of how people interpreted student-athlete's graduation rates. While some declare that scholarship athletes at Division I universities continue to graduate at a higher rate than the general student body, 63 percent compared to 62 percent in the general student body, (Sander, 2007), others do not hold such a positive outlook. One study conducted by the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport looked at the graduation success rate for the teams that qualified for the Division I men's basketball post-season tournament in 2008. Based on the GSR, 41 teams or 64% of the total graduated at least 50% of it basketball student-athletes (matching 64% in 2007), 31 teams (48%, down from 52% in 2007) graduated at least 60%, and 22 teams (34%, down from 37% in 2007) graduated at least 70%. Only 14 teams (22%, up from 19% in 2007) graduated less than 40%. Furthermore, 58 of the institutions (91%, up from 86% in 2007) had GSRs for all student-athletes that were higher than those of the basketball student-athletes. (Grad Rates: Men's DI Basketball Tournament Teams, 2008).

As with most circumstances, there are exceptions. The researchers concluded that there were schools that won big enough to go to the tournament in March and were able to graduate their student-athletes. If they were to choose a Top Ten for GSRs, the following schools would be there: Butler, Davidson, Marquette, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Purdue, San Diego, Villanova, Western Kentucky, and Xavier (Grad Rates: Men's DI Basketball Tournament Teams, 2008).

Many find the legislation passed by the NCAA to be but a cosmetic change (Comeaux, 2007) that has pulled the wool over many people's eyes. In his commentary, Bob Gilbert comments, "The NCAA for the past three years has been playing a convoluted numbers game which make it appear that big-time football programs are performing better academically than they actually are" (Gilbert). He continued on by observing if the penalties that the NCAA currently imposes for low graduation rates were in place in 2003, there would have been only four bowl-eligible teams for the 28 bowl games. Oklahoma and LSU, which played for the title game, wouldn't have been eligible because LSU only graduated 40 percent of its players and Oklahoma only 33 percent (Gilbert).

Another aspect of the APR which has its own opponents is the requirements it possesses which have the potential to trap student-athletes into a major they choose as a freshman. The challengers of this piece of the legislation contend the benchmarks for timely progress are too burdensome. To establish eligibility, athletes must complete a minimum of 40 percent of the required units for a degree by the beginning of the third year of college enrollment, 60 percent by the beginning of the fourth year, and 80 percent by the beginning of the fifth year. As a result, as students arrive to campus as freshmen, they must have a fair amount of certainty of what they wish to do with the rest of their lives (Cusack, 2007). They are unable to explore various classes in order to make up their minds on a course of study. If they have any doubts later on, in some cases, they are unable to change their major without risking their eligibility to compete.

On the other side of the argument are those who support the NCAA's implementation of the academic reform by recording its success. In April, 2008, the NCAA issued a press release with the news that 712 Division I sport teams would receive public recognition awards for their latest multi-year APR scores. High performing teams posted APR scores ranging from 925 to a perfect 1,000. The press release also noted that two of the 2008 Men's Final Four teams- University of North Carolina and the eventual champions, University of Kansas were among the teams being honored with public recognition awards. By sport, women's tennis featured the most teams (46), followed by women's volleyball (41) and women's golf (39). Men's sports with the highest number of teams were basketball and cross country (both had 33) and golf (32). This is the first year that basketball led men's sports (Christianson, 2008).

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

These results could have benefited from the 30-member Division I Men's Basketball Academic Enhancement Group created in August of 2007. Their charge was to understand perspectives, share information and identify factors and characteristics that may contribute to basketball's three-year average APR being the lowest among NCAA sports. This group focused on the following areas; the effect of transfers on APR and academic performance, the lure of professional careers in basketball that contribute to the student-athletes departing college early as an "0-2" in the APR, the academic preparation for student-athletes entering college and the academic support from institutions once they are enrolled, coaches/ player access- countering the non scholastic influence that affect

prospects and their educational commitments at the high school level, and a review of the player and practice season (Brown, 2007).

Other schools have taken on the task of creating academic support systems to keep up with the NCAA mandate as well as their own expectations. The NCAA requires all DI schools to make tutoring services available, and it distributed \$19.8 million (\$60K per school) from its Academic Enhancement Fund to its members in 2007 (More than tutoring?). Many successful programs have been established with the intention of giving the student-athlete tools in which to be academically successful. Kutztown University in Pennsylvania started the Student Support Services Freshman Year program to help at risk freshmen acclimate to the campus environment and succeed in college (Colton, Connor Jr, Shultz, Easter, 1999). Other universities that have committed to the academic achievement of their student-athletes and created successful programs include Mississippi State, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Michigan State University, Penn State, Valdosta State University and University of Iowa (Davidson & Peyton, 2007). Most of the programs focus upon freshmen, getting them acquainted with various aspects of college. However, there are some that look at the overall picture of keeping and graduating their student-athletes.

One interesting approach is the Scholar Baller concept which connects student-athletes to relevant issues in different social contexts and promotes new academic literacies. Accordingly, SB in part uses everyday language and literacy practices of student-athletes as an attempt to connect the dominant institutional culture, processes, and practices. This approach affords student-athletes from various backgrounds

opportunities to accept and affirm their own cultural identities, and ultimately foster notions of ownership in their learning process (Comeaux, 2007). SB appears to be an effective mechanism for creating more inclusive environments toward the full participation of all student-athletes.

Tutoring has been often reported as an essential ingredient of a successful developmental skills course. However, the findings on the matter of GPA gain affected by tutoring are mixed. Studies have shown that disadvantaged students have benefited tremendously from tutoring while those who have a decent baseline of academic success do not reap as many benefits. Furthermore, studies have shown that those who are tutored have a higher rate of retention than those who are not (Maxwell, 1990).

Overall, student-athlete retention and graduation at the Division I level have a ways to go. Several factors decrease the number of student-athletes persisting from year to year and as many that discourage graduation. As the NCAA continues to force the issue along with the universities themselves, they will be continually up against a strong force of professional sports and the attitude that athletics are more important than academics.

Chapter III

Methodology

This study will examine the academic services provided to student-athletes at Division I Universities across the country and how they impact retention from year to year. The goal is to identify if increased levels of academic services have any impact on retention. The following research questions are brought forth to test this idea. One, which pre-college characteristics related to retention along with freshman year experiences have the most impact on academic performance? Two, what types of academic services aid in retention? Third, does being involved with an athletic team have a positive affect upon academic performance and retention? These questions create a foundation in which to build a research design.

The section of methodology is broken up into the following subheadings: participants, instrumentation, procedures, and design and analysis.

Participants

All of the participants in this study were admitted to the Big 12 and Big 10 conference school by the individual university's academic requirements. They are also eligible for athletic participation as set by the NCAA. The sample of participants will include members of women's volleyball and men's basketball teams from the Big 12 and Big 10 conferences. A minimum of 20 student-athletes will be selected from each sport.

The researcher will contact Division I institutions' academic representative from the schools in the Big 12 and Big 10 conferences to ask if there is interest from the women's volleyball and men's basketball teams to be a part of this study. Next, a letter will be sent to the head coach of each interested team detailing the intent of the study, procedures to protect anonymity of the student-athletes, and a list of data that would be requested from their athletic department. The participants will be volunteers in the study.

Folders will then be prepared for each member institution involved in the study including an overview of the investigation, a cover letter, data collection material, consent forms, and questionnaires for each of the student-athletes on the team's roster. The packets will be sent to the head coach of each team participating. The consent form to be filled out by each student-athlete will detail the procedure of the questionnaire as well as how the data will be used in the study. The researcher will follow up by email to each of the coaches who were sent a packet roughly two to three weeks after they are sent. Once the questionnaires are filled out, the head coach will send them and the consent forms back to the researcher.

Once all the consent forms and questionnaires are returned, the researcher will make copies of the consent forms and send them to the participating university's athletic compliance director to obtain academic data on the individual team members to assist with the data collected in the questionnaires. Information that will be requested is high school GPA, overall college GPA, breakdown of academic performance for each semester attended, and breakdown of credits earned by semester.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire will consist of several series of questions related to the following topics: academic integration, social integration, athletic integration, initial academic starting point, institutional academic support systems, athletic involvement and faculty involvement. The participants will be asked to rate their thoughts on a five point Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, the researcher will be able to quantify the results based on the topics mentioned above to come to a conclusion upon the effectiveness of academic programs and retention.

Design and Analysis

The statistical data analysis tool used for this study will be the Chi Square and will test with a 0.05 level of significance. O = the observed frequency of the overall college GPA; E = the expected frequency of the high school GPA scores + the overall college GPA / 2. The statistical program that will be used to assist with this study will be SPSS.

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