

STUDENT-ATHLETE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES: A RETROSPECTIVE
EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

Carly Dressler: Student-Athlete Educational Outcomes: A Retrospective Evaluation
(Under the direction of Erianne Weight)

The debate of athletics versus academics has been at the forefront of intercollegiate athletics for many years (Sack, 2009). Many wonder if the two are innately mutually exclusive, or whether a balance can exist (Ridpath, 2008). Guided by resiliency theory, former baseball, men's basketball, and football student-athletes who graduated or left the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill between 2004 and 2012 were surveyed to gain insight into how athletics and academic interact in the education, personal growth, and professional futures of student-athletes. Overall, participants indicated having an overwhelmingly positive experience that enhanced their quality of life. The results of this study add valuable research that is needed to gain a greater understanding of how participation in intercollegiate athletics affects the overall well-being of former student-athletes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	vi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Significance of Study	3
Purpose of Study.....	4
Research Questions	4
Definition of Terms	5
Assumptions	5
Limitations	6
Delimitations.....	6
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
The NCAA's Role in Higher Education.....	7
Benefits of Athletic Participation.....	13
Special Admissions	18
Resiliency Theory	23
CHAPTER III: METHODS.....	27
Subjects.....	27
Instrumentation	27
Procedures	29
Analysis.....	29
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	31

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	49
Further Research	53
REFERENCES.....	55

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Demographic information of former student-athletes.....	32
2. Feelings associated with former student-athletes intercollegiate athletic participation.....	34
3. How would you characterize the way your overall experience at UNC impacted your quality of life if at all	36
4. Value of athletic and academic experiences	38
5. Changes in athletic and academic perspectives of former student-athletes	40
6. Athletic and academic items viewed differently by year since graduating or leaving the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.....	42
7. Career Satisfaction and Compensation	44
8. Most valuable parts of the student-athlete academic experience.....	45
9. Most valuable parts of the student-athlete academic experience by high school GPA.....	46
10. Most valuable parts of the student-athlete athletic experience	47
11. Most valuable parts of the student-athlete athletic experience by high school GPA	48

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Sports have always played an impactful role in American culture. In times of trouble, Americans have leaned on sports for entertainment and stress relief from their daily problems (McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002). Jackie Robinson and baseball helped break down racial barriers back in the late 40's (Rothschild, 2012) while Magic Johnson leveraged basketball for AIDS awareness and dismissing stereotypes when he announced his infection with the disease in 1991 (Pollock, 1994). Sport has become so engrained in American culture that it can be an unstoppable driving force.

Collegiate athletics and its exponential rise in popularity has proven to be one of these forces (Ridpath, 2008). The demand by Americans to see the best teams around the country has been the driving force behind record high media deals and conference realignment. Although operating as an amateur model, as a university begins to perform on a national platform, the pressure to win and to win on a big stage increases. The need to recruit the best players has allowed some individuals an opportunity to pursue higher education that may not have been possible in other circumstances (Sack, 1987). Universities may make exceptions to their admissions rules and provide scholarships for players that can help them win.

The situation appears to be mutually beneficial for both parties; however, often times the team demands and practice time constraints placed on these young athletes exceed that of a full-time job and academics becomes a secondary priority. While this shuffle of

priorities might be rationalized, an individual may not have the time or resources to obtain a meaningful education that will be beneficial to their lives and future goals – particularly when they are underprepared academically for the rigors of higher education. In these circumstances, athletic performance often takes precedence over the scholastic quality of the student-athlete in order to meet the minimum NCAA eligibility standards (Saffici and Pellagrino, 2012). Some argue it is not fair to potentially harm an athlete’s future when a university knows they have a low chance at obtaining a meaningful education (Saffici and Pellagrino, 2012)

Multiple times a year throughout the country, researchers, administrators, students, sport fans, and coaches gather at sport-related conferences to hear panels debate the most predominant issues and how they will affect the future landscape of collegiate athletics. Athletics versus academics has been at the forefront of colligate athletics for many years and serves as the underlying question for other issues as well (Sack, 2009). For example, the debate on amateurism and “pay for play” does not exist without a mention of academics versus athletics. Many wonder if the two are innately mutually exclusive, or whether a balance can exist between the two (Ridpath, 2008).

Many arguments exist in opposition to intercollegiate athletics. Some critics state that due to revenue producing sports as well as fanatical supporters, the problems that currently exist will never be important enough to create meaningful change throughout higher education as it is related to collegiate athletics (Ridpath, 2008). One of the problems critics have is the preferential admissions treatment of some academically under-prepared student-athletes (Bowen and Levin, 2003). Others argue that due to the immense time commitments of athletics participation, student-athletes do not have the same opportunities and experiences

as non-athletes, which creates isolation from the rest of the student population (Bowen and Levin, 2003). Regardless of the specific problem, the overall commonality of critics is the lack of balance between athletics and academics.

Supporters of intercollegiate athletics counter that the time commitments create structure and routine that often support academic success and can help overcome risk factors (Cohu, 2005). Athletics participation itself provides non-traditional education that aids in the overall development of young people, contributes to increased academic performance and upward occupational mobility, and can help increase a school's enrollment and revenue (Brand, 2006)..

Significance of Study

When it comes to the education of student-athletes, most research focuses on GPA and traditional educational views. The broad goal of higher education, however, is to prepare individuals for the rest of their lives and develop productive members of society. There are many different theories on how to best accomplish this task, but most scholars agree that a broad-based, holistic education is tremendously valuable (Haynes, 1990). Intercollegiate athletics provides an opportunity for holistic education; yet little research has been done to understand the overall impact of athletics through investigating the wellbeing of student-athletes after they complete their collegiate experience. A gap in the literature will be addressed by discovering how student-athletes feel about how their experiences participating in high level Division I athletics, as well as how competitive academics has affected their overall well-being. The study will also provide insight into underprepared student-athletes admitted into an academically rigorous with seemingly detrimental odds and how their participation in athletics affected their educational goals.

Purpose of Study

Major criticisms exist regarding the quality of education intercollegiate student-athletes are receiving. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences, perspectives, and outcomes of former student-athletes across varying stages of post-collegiate life. This study aims to gain knowledge about the intersection of athletics and academics with the overall education, personal growth, and professional futures of student-athletes. Additionally, this study is significant in assessing holistic educational gains for high-risk student athletes.

Research Questions

Based on the review of related literature, the following research questions provided the guidelines in which this study was conducted.

1. To what degree do former student-athletes feel their athletic experiences positively enhanced their post-collegiate quality of life?
2. How does the value of athletic and academic experiences differ by:
 - a. Year since leaving or graduating?
 - b. High school GPA?
 - c. Scholarship status?
3. How does career satisfaction of former student-athletes differ by:
 - a. Year since leaving or graduating?
 - b. High school GPA?
 - c. Scholarship status?

4. What do student-athletes value most about their athletic and academic experiences?

Definition of Terms

- 1) **Athletically Related Activities:** Any and all mandatory activities associated with participation on a varsity team such as practice, competition, weight lifting, team meetings, film review, travel, training room hours, and other similar activities.
- 2) **Former Student-Athlete:** An individual who participated on any varsity athletic team for a minimum of one academic year at the University of North Carolina and who left the institution for any reason between 2004 and 2012.
- 3) **High Risk or At-Risk (Student-Athlete):** An individual whose cumulative high school GPA met only the minimum threshold of initial eligibility standards set by the NCAA. A sliding scale found in the NCAA manual provides the minimum GPA and test score requirements.
- 4) **National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA]:** A national governing association that develops and enforces rules and policies associated with participation in intercollegiate athletics. NCAA membership of an institution is voluntary.
- 5) **Student-Athlete:** An individual who is an active member of an institutionally sponsored varsity sport while enrolled full-time at a college or university.

Assumptions

- 1) Respondents completed all surveys voluntarily and understood all questions in a similar manner.
- 2) All surveys were answered truthfully and accurately.
- 3) The surveys that are completed and returned by the sample are representative of the population indicated.

Limitations

- 1) Access to former student-athletes' current contact information is limited to the information in the General Alumni Association (GAA) Directory.
- 2) Due to GAA records, the survey may be disproportionately limited to exclude current professional athletes or other former student-athletes who do not want contact information available to other alumni.
- 3) The sample population only includes former student-athletes from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and may not be representative of all former student-athletes' experiences.

Delimitations

- 1) This study only examines student-athletes who left the University of North Carolina during a nine-year span (2004-2012).
- 2) This study is only a representation of former student-athletes of one major Division I institution and results cannot be generalized to other Division I, II, or III institutions.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following pages contain a review of literature as it relates to the perceived benefits and challenges for student-athletes and their participation in intercollegiate athletics. First an exploration of the history of the NCAA's academic policies will show how higher education and athletics became intertwined as well as the importance that academics plays in the intercollegiate athletics landscape. In addition, this section highlights some of the academic challenges student-athletes face and critics' arguments regarding the shortcomings of the NCAA's academic polices. The second section outlines the numerous benefits that only participation in sport can provide. These two sections together show two sides of the academics versus athletics argument and why the topic is so important to the daily lives and futures of student-athletes. The next section discusses the unique challenges of special admissions student-athletes as compared to other student-athletes. An exploration of resiliency theory provides the lens in which this study is conducted as well as a conceptual framework to explain those student-athletes who succeed despite overwhelming obstacles. The four sections of this literature review provide an overview of the foundation that guided this study.

The NCAA's Role in Higher Education

Integration of higher education and athletic programs began as a positive form of entertainment for students that helped build character and promoted both school and community spirit (Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). Within the first fifty years of competition,

intercollegiate athletics began to influence the academic component of institutions of higher learning with growing dominance as the extracurricular activity of choice (Smith, 2011).

Intercollegiate athletics can be traced back to the 1850s rowing regattas between Harvard and Yale crews. At its inception, students created, governed, and controlled all aspects of competition, but as intercollegiate athletics grew, the need for fair and safe competition grew as well (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). In 1906, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was formed in response to football violence. Although safety was the catalyst that brought the IAAUS into existence, “problems relating to amateurism and eligibility rules received as much, if not more attention at the first annual meeting” (Sack, 1988). A governing body was needed to standardize rules for competition, eligibility, and recruiting (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). The IAAUS was renamed the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1908.

In 1906, the IAAUS/NCAA said that scholarships for higher education were allowed to be given to student-athletes but only on the basis of academic ability. Athletic ability could not be a factor (Sack, 1988). Many scholars, presidents, and coaches believed that athletes should not be recruited but rather should come from students already on campus (Sack, 2009). In 1927, a committee of sixty individuals from various institutions reinforced the NCAA’s opinions and policies on athletic scholarships stating not only that scholarships should be solely based on academic ability but also that no financial aid should be given to promote athletic success in any way (Sack, 1988). The committee felt that if a student-athlete were faced with conflicting academic and athletic demands, the student-athlete would feel compelled to meet the demands of the coaches who handled their scholarship money (Sack, 1988).

While the leaders within the NCAA still wanted to maintain amateurism throughout college sport, the rapid growth of collegiate athletics across the country intensified the importance of athletics and winning. As a result, rules and governing bylaws surrounding athletic scholarships began to be manipulated which caused academic standards to be compromised (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). In 1950, major concerns had arisen over equal and fair competition (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). In response, the NCAA developed the athletic scholarship as a way to pay prospective student-athletes (Sack, 2009). With the implementation of a true athletic scholarship, rules for minimum academic criteria needed to be established by the NCAA to maintain standardization, fairness, and their mission statement (Sack, 1988).

Although always connected, the athletic scholarship became the first true integration of athletics into the mission of higher education, since students could now be awarded with higher education based on athletic talents in addition to academic talents. While the athletic scholarship renewed the concept of fair competition, the public's confidence in athletics in institutions of higher education continued to erode due to scholarships given strictly on the basis of athletic talent even if a student-athlete was grossly unprepared for collegiate academics (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). The NCAA's response to growing criticism was the implementation of the "1.6 rule" in 1965 wherein high school rank, high school grade point average and standardized test scores were all used as prediction variables. The "1.6 rule" stated that eligibility and athletic scholarships were dependent on those "predicted as capable of earning a 1.6 GPA or C- average" during their freshman year and being able to maintain that average throughout their collegiate career (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).

While the “1.6 rule” was the first attempt to standardize initial academic eligibility, the NCAA received unexpected backlash. Many felt the “1.6 rule” relied too heavily on standardized test scores and in doing so unfairly disadvantaged minorities especially since the validity and reliability of SAT’s as a predictor of success was in question (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Ivy League universities expressed the opposite concern for the “1.6 rule”. Ivy League Schools felt integration of student-athletes into the general student body was integral and was dependent on maintaining the same standards for institutional aid (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). In an attempt to raise academic standards, the NCAA raised the minimum eligibility grade point average for eligibility to 2.0 in 1973 before completely rescinding the “1.6 rule” in response to growing disapproval (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).

A decade later, proposition 48 was proposed and adopted by the NCAA. Under this new initial eligibility rule the minimum grade point average was raised from the previous “1.6 rule” to a 2.0. In addition, a student needed to score at least a 700 on the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) or a 15 on the American College Test (ACT) in order to participate their freshman year. Proposition 48 also required prospective athletes to have completed eleven core high school courses (Sellers, 1992).

The implementation of Proposition 48 also produced three new terms to classify prospective student-athletes. If all standards were fulfilled a student would be deemed a qualifier and eligible participate and receive athletic aid. Under Proposition 48, if either the GPA or test score requirement was fulfilled but not both, a student would then be deemed a partial qualifier, which meant they could receive athletic aid, but could not participate in athletics during their first year in college (Sellers, 1992). A non-qualifier, who meets neither requirement, could be admitted but would not eligible to participate nor receive any financial

aid during the first year. While some applauded the NCAA's efforts, academic critics were still apprehensive stating that the minimum requirements were too low (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Others were still concerned over the weight placed on standardized testing in determining eligibility. While Prop 48 led to an increase in the black male graduation rate since those admitted were more academically prepared, it disproportionately disqualified a high percentage of black student-athletes limiting opportunities for intercollegiate athletics to serve as an avenue for education (Reynolds, Fisher, & Cavill, 2012).

Academic reform continued in an attempt to increase the chances of student-athlete academic success while participating in athletics as well as provide more opportunities and diversity across all sports and institutions. In 1996, Proposition 16 (Prop 16) was adopted as a new eligibility standard (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Under Prop 16, the number of core courses for calculating GPA increased from eleven to thirteen. The biggest change was the adoption of the sliding GPA and standardized test scale. This meant a prospective student-athlete with the minimum 2.0 GPA would need a 1010 on the SAT (significantly higher than under Prop 48), but would allow more flexibility for an individual with a lower test score provided that they had a high GPA (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2009).

Today, a similar eligibility structure exists. Current prospective student-athletes GPAs are calculated from 16 core courses in subjects such as English, Math, Natural and Social Sciences, and Foreign Language (NCAA, 2013a). Beginning August 1, 2016, the minimum academic standards will once again be revised. While the sliding scale will stay, the minimum GPA to be a qualifier will be raised to a 2.3 GPA with 10 of the 16 core courses completed before the student's senior year. According to the NCAA's Eligibility

Center, the bylaw was revised with the understanding that the current changes already adopted “have improved and are likely to continue to improve the academic performance and gradation of student-athletes” (NCAA, 2013b).

The biggest change implemented in the 2016 standards is the implementation of the “Academic Redshirt”. Under the new legislation, students with high school GPA’s between 2.0 and 2.29 (and qualifying sliding scale test scores) will be classified as an “Academic Redshirt” (NCAA, 202). An “Academic Redshirt” will be allowed to receive athletics aid upon enrollment but will not be able to compete during their first year of enrollment. Practice eligibility will be determined based on GPA and progress toward degree on a semester-to-semester basis (NCAA, 2011). A first-year “Academic Redshirt” will be eligible to practice immediately, but will have to pass a total of nine semester hours in the first term in order to be able to practice and participate the following semester. (NCAA, 2011).

Initial eligibility standards are not the only legislative attempts the NCAA has made to ensure academic success for student-athletes. Athletes must make significant progress toward their degree each academic year to remain eligible to compete. Student-athletes must be enrolled in a minimum of twelve credit hours each semester, pass a total of six (6) hours, and maintain the minimum GPA requirements to remain eligible (NCAA, 2013a). Institutions, programs, and coaches must meet Graduation Success Rate (GSR) and Academic Progress Rate (APR) requirements as well or face punishment such as the loss of scholarships (NCAA, 2014a) The team-wide implications place some academic responsibility with coaches aimed to reduce the conflict of interest many student-athletes face balancing the demands of academics and athletics (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).

The NCAA has stated:

The Division I standards currently in place (both percentage-of-degree requirements and the minimum grade-point average standards) are supported by data that show student-athletes who are most likely to graduate will in fact meet these standards. Because intercollegiate athletics is part of the fabric of the university, student-athletes must be committed to academic achievement and the pursuit of a degree (NCAA, 2014a).

The NCAA remains a rules-making and governing body for member institutions. Academics play a major role in the formation of competition, practice, and eligibility standards and bylaws. The mission statement of the NCAA is “to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes” (NCAA, 2014b). The history of the NCAA as well as the evolution of rules provide an insight into the role of academics within the industry of intercollegiate athletics. This evolution of adaptation and growth in balancing academic standards and athletic pursuits throughout a diverse landscape of institutions has brought us to the current era in which the NCAA has adopted the most strict initial eligibility rules in the history of intercollegiate athletic existence. According to a survey conducted by the NCAA, 40% of all Division I freshman football players who enrolled in the fall of 2012 would have failed to meet the 2016 requirements, would have been academic redshirts, or would have been ineligible for competition during their first year (Achoff, 2012).

Benefits of Athletic Participation

As discussed above, education of student-athletes is currently one of the biggest debates in collegiate athletics. “This issue is particularly important as the public becomes

increasingly skeptical about the quality of education for college athletes and distrustful about the role of athletics in American higher education" (Bowen & Levin, 2003). This study is less concerned about a student-athlete's academic performance while in college, but whether or not the experiences and education gained from academics and athletics adequately prepare student-athletes, whether at-risk or not, for their futures and to be productive citizens in society.

Critics claim that student-athletes are not learning during their years spent in college (Saffici & Pellagrino, 2012). The commercialization of collegiate sport invariably creates pressures to win that can easily compromise academic standards (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Chris Saffici and Ed Pellagrino believe the tragic flaw of student-athletes' education is due to the focus on maintaining a strong athletic program, which has taken precedence over the scholastic quality of the student-athlete that is accepted into the institution (2012). In turn, students are underprepared for the real world. However, more information is needed concerning the overall experience of student-athletes and the kinds of activities that foster learning and personal development for this population (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Making comparisons on learning and growth that occurs in college based on grades between institutions, academic majors, or even between student-athletes and non-athletes can be unreliable and do not accurately portray the true reality (Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, & Hagedorn, 1999). Blindly comparing grade point averages of students between institutions can produce deceptive results in many instances (Warren, 1984). In the classroom, student-athletes accomplish their education in the traditional sense. Their educational experience is supplemented, however, with valuable lessons that can be learned on the field. Extracurricular activities are an extension of the educational experience, which

is why the scholastic model of sport has been embraced in the United States. Within the athletics classroom, athletes can learn skills such as discipline and teamwork that may arguably be equally or more valuable to long-term quality of life than the education that transpires in the typical classroom (Warren, 1984). Collegiate athletes spend a large amount of time being both students and athletes. The question remains: do athletes, who have major time-requirements and other priorities that may at times take precedence over education, learn skills through sport that adequately supplement and ultimately add value to the overall quality of education?

Some employers feel the answer to this question is yes and the intangible skills and “greater-than-I mentality” athletes learn from being on a team are the “most coveted” characteristic a new hire could have (Soshnick, 2013). The mentality a student-athlete is able to develop over years of training, practice, and high competition is unique to this specific student group (McCann, 2012). As mentioned earlier, comparison of GPA and standardized test scores may unfairly disadvantage certain economic groups and races (Sellers, 1992). The increased skepticism of the success prediction rate of these two indicators have allowed for an emphasis in higher education research to focus on other factors that may be better indicators of academic success such as affective impact and outcomes (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont & Stephens, 2003; Gayles & Hu, 2009). The practical application of affective outcomes, such as working and collaborating productively and effectively with peers, shows an individual’s ability to work with people of different backgrounds (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

One Equity Partners, a private investment division of JP Morgan Chase & Company has eight Olympians who work for the company, and the company continues to target former college athletes (Soshnick, 2013). It is important to consider as well that JP Morgan is one of

the most successful companies in the world and has been deemed the best financial services employer in the United States for five consecutive years according to the Ideal Employers Survey conducted by Universum (Soshnick, 2013). Those former student athletes who are targeted possess some of the same characteristics and traits that have made JP Morgan so effective and respected year after year.

One Equity Partners is not alone in their hiring decisions. Fishbowl, a leading provider of online Guest Relationship Marketing Software and services to the restaurant industry, targets athletes because of their “athlete traits” which Fishbowl finds are “akin to leadership traits”. Specifically, Fishbowl’s CEO David Williams finds that athletes achieve their goals by adapting and learning to become more effective and more efficient even in the absence of resources. “If one avenue is blocked, they find another way” (Williams, 2013). Rather than be discouraged, Williams finds athletes are tenacious with a strong work ethic. They also have difficulty accepting failure, which allows them to practice tasks rigorously until they succeed (Williams, 2013).

One Equity Partners, Fishbowl, TEKsystems, and CitiBank all agree that an athletes’ ability to work well with a diverse group of individuals and in teams is a tremendous assets since they can “leverage the unique and complementary strengths of each member of their team” (Williams, 2013). As mentioned earlier, student-athletes often learn these skills under immense pressure to win (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). A high profile student-athlete’s failures and successes are publically documented through the media, which creates a completely unique experience unlike any other activity in the United States. Because of these factors, the intangible traits mentioned by various companies can only be found in the student-athlete, which make them an exceptional hire for many companies (McCann, 2012).

These employer preferences suggest that education through athletics is a tremendously valuable supplement to traditional education methods.

The opinions and preferences of certain employers are not the only instances in which these unique benefits of athletics are noted. Dr. Will Barratt and Dr. Mark Frederick of Indiana State University's Center for Measuring College Behaviors and Academics conducted a study of University Learning Outcomes Assessment (UniLOA). The first annual report published in October 2011 collected data between 2006-2011. The UniLOA instrument was designed to look at seven intangible skills (self-awareness, critical thinking, communication, diversity, citizenship, relationships, and leadership) that are more indicative of future success in the real world according to employers, academicians, managers, and researchers. Barratt and Frederick admittedly were just out to discover more about college students in general, but discovered that by their final semester, student-athletes perform at a higher level in almost every area than their non-athlete counterpart (2011).

The UniLOA study also shows that the growth of athletes in these seven areas is almost double that of non-athletes. Student-athletes enter college scoring lower frequencies of the seven traits that non-athletes, but those that finish out their collegiate careers end up scoring higher showing tremendous growth. In every area but citizenship, student-athletes close to double the total net gain of non-student athletes. The study shows that the benefits and gains of being a student-athlete is more about the athlete's college environment and structure of being a student-athlete rather than a specific academic path (Barratt & Frederick, 2011).

The differences between student-athletes and non-athletes are a function of differences in their academic experiences (Pascarella et al., 1999). Many experts look to

reexamine the way the public views quality of education and what adds value to the collegiate experience (Warren, 1984). It is less about where students start and end and more about the changes that occur as a result (Banta & Pike, 2007).

The practical application and importance of these new educational variables and cognitive outcomes lies in public perception. Society expects colleges and universities to prepare students for the world and be able to get things done as well as be engaged in productive citizenship (Keeling, et al., 2004). Recent and past incidences of low graduation rates, particularly for football and men's basketball, gross misconduct, academic scandals, and student athletes leaving higher education institutions in poor academic standing have eroded the public's confidence concerning the educational benefits for participation in sports at the college level" (Gayles & Hu, 2009). However, current university curricula and societal ideals about quality education are structured around conventional categories important to the academy, but not necessarily inclusive of the different backgrounds, learning needs, learning styles, and interests that are meaningful to students (Keeling, et al, 2004).

Special Admissions

The continually evolving minimum academic eligibility criteria set by the NCAA attempts to reduce the risk of academic failure amongst student-athletes. Colleges and universities are able to admit any student based on their own institutional policies and as long as the NCAA standards are met, a student may participate in intercollegiate athletics. The economic incentives provided by maintaining a successful intercollegiate sports program can allow for increased resources and notoriety, which has led many colleges and universities to admit student-athletes who are well under the institutional admissions policies (Kleiber & Malik, 1989). While the specific characteristics and measures of “special admissions” vary

across institutions, the general term in intercollegiate athletics refers to student-athletes who fail to meet institutional academic admission requirements and are still admitted based on their athletics ability (Hood, Craig, & Ferguson, 1992; Riggs, 1996). Special admits are often viewed as being grossly underprepared for an institutions academic rigor and considered “high risk” academically (Riggs, 1996). The “special admission” student-athlete is unique and at the center of the debate of higher education and its role in athletics.

As mentioned earlier, many institutions look to special admissions to add diversity to their student populations. In *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on The Student Experience*, the researchers explain that populations “more obviously diverse with regard to age, ethnic, and national origin, family configuration, socioeconomic status, reason for enrollment, level of pre-college preparation, and full part time student status” (2004). Considering the new diverse populations, the researchers argue that with the widening of educational opportunity as well as the new knowledge about learning we must re-examine the widely accepted conventional teaching and learning styles to accommodate the new diverse student populations.

While being academically under-prepared is a common characteristic amongst “special admissions” student-athletes, the level or degree to which these students fall short of standard admissions differ between each individual. Colleges and universities have intentionally and carefully worded their admissions review processes to allow the freedom to choose whom to admit. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill mentions in their admissions requirement summary that a candidate’s academic records are important but personal qualities and accomplishments outside of the classroom are considered as well (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [UNC], 2013). This sentiment is mirrored

through other Atlantic Coast Conference member institutions as well as other institutions with similar enrollment numbers, academic prestige, and athletic reputation to UNC. The University of Maryland lists a set of 26 factors that are holistically considered to make fine distinctions between each applicant. Some factors include special talents, leadership, life experiences, and progression of performance (The University of Maryland, 2013). Notre Dame, an institution known for its academic reputation specifically states, “no minimum grade point average or class rank is required” (The University of Notre Dame, 2013, para. 1). Considering endeavors outside of academic accomplishments as well as personal characteristics are also common practice at Ohio State University and Michigan State University as well (2013).

Colleges and universities admissions departments recognize that quality of an academic record can differ due to course difficulty, quality of school, and even socioeconomic background and does not guarantee success or failure of a student. Therefore they take a well-rounded approach to accessing candidates to promote diversity within classes (Gurney & Stuart, 1987). Student-athletes are not the only student groups who receive additional admissions consideration based on talents separate from academics (Phillips, 2009). Other students such as those with musical, dance, technical or artistic talents are often other student groups who are commonly considered under special admissions (Landenson, 2002). Recent studies suggest, however, that men’s basketball and football players were six times more likely to receive “special admission” over other students (Phillips, 2009). Men’s basketball and football are typically the two sports that have the most special admits per roster due to their high profile nature. It is estimated that around thirty percent of all football and men’s basketball players are admitted under “special

admissions” circumstances, which could be one reason to account for the large gap of special admissions between student-athletes and other students (Riggs, 1996).

The number of student-athletes admitted under a “special admission” status causes a number of concerns for the academy and critics of intercollegiate athletics. The combination of academic and athletic requirements can cause tremendous strain on even the most academically gifted student (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). These demands can cause an even greater burden in the case of a student who is academically underprepared. Student-athletes spend around 40 hours per week on athletics-related activity, which leaves very little time to devote to academics or other educationally purposeful activities (Wolverton, 2008). For a special admissions student who should be spending more time on academics than a regularly admitted individual, athletics participation results in significantly less time for academics than the average student (Saffici & Pellagrino, 2012). Student-athletes also must meet NCAA grade point average and progress toward degree requirements as well as institutional athletic academic policies which are often more rigorous than the NCAA’s standards in order to be eligible for competition and receive financial aid (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). These minimum standards place additional demands on student-athletes to remain eligible for competition.

Because of the challenges special admissions student-athletes must overcome in order to play on game day, coaches may suggest “easy” courses and majors for their student-athletes (Landenson, 2002). For this reason, many critics of the “special admission” process for student-athletes state that the purpose of higher education and the promise to provide an education is left unfulfilled (Riggs, 1996). In one study, student-athletes who were enrolled through special admissions policies did not perform as well academically as those admitted

through normal entrance policies (Gurney & Stuart, 1987). While critics acknowledge that any subject can be academically challenging, taking courses that avoid intellectual effort provide an inferior education marked with a college degree (Kleiber & Malik, 1989). With regards to underprepared student-athletes, the level of “success” can be relative. Sometimes a college degree from any institution and in any major is a success (Barker, 2012). Proponents see “special admissions” for student-athletes as providing higher education to many students who could not attend college without sport as their avenue (Landenson, 2002). These individuals benefit through receiving access to a quality of education as well as the life experience of attending a college or university (Eitzen, 2009). Some studies counter critic arguments of an inferior education by providing evidence that student-athletes, regardless of admissions status, are more likely to develop career plans and goals than non-athletes (Kleiber & Malik, 1989).

Pamela Jo Robenolt examined specially admitted football players at five Division I institutions and found that other factors besides high school GPA and SAT scores were more influential in promoting academic success (2012). Some factors included high school to college transition, overall athletic experience, and whether or not a student-athlete focused strictly the professional sport as the only career option (Robenolt, 2012). These results are mirrored in a National Longitudinal Study completed in 1972, which found that by the age of 32, former student-athletes were more economically stable than non-athletes (Lederman, 1990). Further study is still needed to determine how former “big time” student-athletes feel about the quality of their education and the difference it made in their lives and overall well-being afterward (Kleiber & Malik, 1989). This need provides the foundation for the purpose and significance of this study. No current literature exists examining both the positive and

negative perspectives regarding intercollegiate athletics according to student-athletes and how those views have changed over time. This information is needed to gain a greater understanding of how participation in intercollegiate athletics affects the overall lives and well-being of former student-athletes.

Resiliency Theory

The current landscape of intercollegiate competition continues to pressure coaches and institutions to admit the most athletically talented individuals. As a result, admissions standards may be drastically low for some student-athletes than the average admissions standard. The minimum standard for admission becomes that designated by the bylaws of the NCAA manual rather than individual institutions. Since universities and colleges' admissions standards are based on the perceived difficulty of the institutions, the NCAA standards may be significantly lower than the rest of the undergraduate population. At these institutions, underprepared student-athletes may be classified as “special admittance” or “high-risk” students. Even though these student-athletes may be grossly underprepared academically in the traditional sense, admissions personnel may be persuaded that they have other characteristics and qualities that allow them to overcome and succeed despite their academic disadvantages.

The idea that individuals can achieve despite an “at-risk” label is known as the resiliency theory. Since resilience can be developed, Resiliency Theory has been a foundational concept in a variety of academic and practical pursuits – particularly in application to facilitating optimal environments for at-risk youth to overcome obstacles (Lee, 2012). By definition, Resiliency Theory refers to the “paradigm shift in explanatory mechanisms being used today to foster adaptation, recovery, and growth through risk and

adversity” (Cohu, 2005). Studies on resilience development look to identify the reasons in which failures can lead to successes (Cohu, 2005). By identifying key reasons, at-risk youth can successfully alter insurmountable risk factors to create positive outcomes (Werner and Smith, 2001).

Resiliency Theory is particularly important when examining collegiate athletics since sport involvement can reduce at-risk behavior (Agnew and Peterson, 1989). Advocates of sport involvement view athletic success as a major driving force for disadvantaged students to attain both higher education and better overall educational opportunities (Lucas & Lovaglia, 2002). Although little-to-no research has been done to examine collegiate sport involvement specifically as an independent variable in relation to resilience, results of similar resiliency studies can be applied to underprepared student-athletes.

In 1982, Nicolas Hobbs led one of the first and most influential studies whose founding principles act as a guide for all resiliency development studies. Hobbs developed a project to promote resiliency in at-risk youth that led to the development of the American Re-Education Association also known as AREA (Lee, 2012; Foltz, 2011). The project involved at-risk youth living on “campus” during the week and returning to their homes on the weekends. Hobbs felt the youth’s behaviors that deemed them “at-risk” were based on traumatic experiences and thus being placed in a rehabilitation program would provide reinforcement to their negative experiences. Hobbs’ project provided positive reinforcement for these at-risk youth through counseling and education which changed the “ecology of the child” to create positive internal change (Lee, 2012). Hobbs operated under 12 principles including a few that closely apply to at-risk intercollegiate athletes.

One-education program principle was the idea that intelligence is not static, but rather dynamic and ever-evolving, and can be taught (Hobbs, 1982). Research has shown that positive school experiences and involvement in an activity increase academic success in high-risk students (Cohu, 2005). For many students, athletics is that activity that fosters successful educational outcomes.

Another important principle was that routine provides order, stability, and confidence to at-risk youth (Hobbs, 1982). This principle is particularly interesting since one of the greatest criticisms of intercollegiate athletics is the time commitment involved in participation and how these commitments eliminate the extra time needed for special admissions student-athletes to spend on their academic work. However, this principle suggests intercollegiate athletics may be a highly successful environment for special admissions student-athletes for the structure and strict routine it provides.

While Hobbs's study on the Resiliency Theory focused on academic resilience in at-risk youth, Braddock, Royster, Winfield, and Hawkins examined resilience traits directly related to athletic success among eighth grade African-American males (1991). Educational plans, peer status, and academic investments were used as predictors of resilience. Braddock and his cohorts found a correlation between athletic participation and academic resilience and that athletes were more likely to have higher educational aspirations than non-athletes (1991). While resiliency does not guarantee academic success, it is a strong indicator of counteracting risk factor outcomes and overcoming failures throughout life (Cohu, 2005).

Athletes experience multiple successes and failures during just one competition and have to constantly refocus while still in the middle of competition. Athletics participation challenges individuals mentally, physically, and emotionally and to thrive in sports is perfect

example of resilience” (Cohu, 2005). “Participation in athletics can build positive protective factors such as perseverance and unity (Braddock, Royster, Winfield, & Hawkins, 1991). The ability to adjust and endure successfully during pressure-filled situations is a rare characteristic highly sought after by employers and athletics is one of the best ways to develop these skills (Williams, 2013).

The concepts and ideas of the resiliency theory serve as the conceptual framework for this study, which looks to assess the value that former student-athletes place on their participation in intercollegiate athletics in relation to their successes and overall quality of life. A better understanding on specifically which ways and how education is enhanced or hindered by participation in collegiate athletics can help foster changes to maximize the positives of participation.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The aim of this study is to explore the educational and athletic opinions and experiences of former student-athletes at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Responses to questions regarding the level of priority, importance, preparedness, and value of educational achievement and athletic commitments were gathered via online survey.

Subjects

The population for this study is former student-athletes at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. All subjects that will be asked to participate were student-athletes who graduated or left the University between 2004 and 2012. In order to qualify for the study, each former student-athlete must have attended the University for one full academic year while participating on a varsity athletic team. All student-athletes who fit the above criteria and who left the University of North Carolina for any reason between the years of 2004 through 2012 will be selected. The years were chosen in order to examine former student-athletes at different stages in their post-collegiate lives. This study will focus on former student-athletes who participated in the sports of men's basketball, baseball, and football.

Instrumentation

Due to the difficult-to-reach population and desire for respondent anonymity, an online survey was selected as the ideal method to approach this research. A committee of

research experts was consulted throughout the instrument development process including the type, wording, and number of questions in order to produce a quality survey and enhance validity of the study. Members of the panel active in the formation of the instrument included three sport administration professors and one Associate Director of Academic Support. In addition, the survey design experts at the Odum Institute of Social Science Research reviewed the instrument.

Questions for this instrument were developed and designed to obtain a data set of responses that would accurately capture the perspective and experiences of the subjects in the sample. In addition, the questions were carefully worded and devised to be clear so that the subjects could consistently comprehend the questions in the same manner so that responses were reflective of the research questions as well as the purpose of the study.

The survey asked simple demographic characteristic questions such as gender, age, sport participation, and years attended at the University for the purpose of data organization. The online survey contains a variety of questions including those that could be answered using a simple yes or no, open-ended response questions, “check all that apply”, and Likert Scale. The survey is divided into three sections containing questions about demographics, views on athletic and academic participation, and changing athletics and academic perspectives. No personal identifying information questions were used in this study in order to protect the identity of all participating subjects and in order to obtain the most honest and unfiltered responses possible.

Procedures

Email addresses for former student-athletes who graduated or left the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill between the years of 2004 through 2012 will be gathered using the General Alumni Association Directory (GAA).

After the survey is completed and approved, an email invitation and anonymous survey link will be sent to the sample population through Qualtrics software. All individuals whose email addresses do not appear in the GAA will be contacted via private message on Facebook provided a ‘friend request’ was accepted.

The survey link will remain open for seven days. Subjects will be sent a follow-up email forty-eight hours before the survey closed as a means to improve response rate. Only one follow-up email will be sent.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics for each response will be reported when applicable. A between-subjects ANOVA will be run between subjects who left the University with and without a degree over a number of different dependent variables in order to observe any statistical differences. Another between-subjects ANOVA will be run between subjects from different years in order to allow for comparisons to be made between subjects who are at different stages in their post-collegiate lives. Interaction effects will be examined as well. Former student-athletes who identify their final average high school grade point averages (GPA) as 2.5 or below (for the purposes of this study, these individuals will be deemed “high risk”)

and those former student-athletes who completed high school with a range of higher final GPAs will be compared separately against all factors. Depending on the response rate, those former student-athletes who left the University to pursue professional athletic careers before completing their degree will be compared against others who graduated before entering into professional athletics.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

A total of 66 former student-athletes participated in some or all of this survey. Thirty-nine of those who completed the survey participated in the sport of football (62%), Thirteen were former basketball student-athletes (21%), and eleven were former baseball student-athletes (17%). The largest percentage (40%) of former student-athlete participants graduated or the left the university between 2007-2009 ($n = 26$). 34% ($n = 22$) reported graduating or leaving between 2004-2006 and 26% ($n = 17$) of respondents graduated or left between 2010-2012. The survey-takers were close in scholarship numbers with 48% ($n = 31$) having received an athletics scholarship and 52% ($n = 33$) identified as not receiving any athletics aid. Only two participants (3%) had a high school GPA of 2.5 or under with twelve (18%) reporting high school GPA averages between 2.6-3.2. The survey-takers largely fell into the two highest high school GPA categories. Twenty-five (38%) had a high school GPA between 3.3-3.8 and twenty-six (40%) had a high school GPA of 3.9 or above. See Table 1 for all demographic information.

Table 1
Demographic information of former student-athletes

	%	<i>n</i>
Sport		
Baseball	17%	11
Basketball, Men's	13%	13
Football	39%	39
Year Graduated/Left UNC		
2004-2006	34%	22
2007-2009	40%	26
2010-2012	26%	17
Scholarship (partial or full)		
Yes	48%	31
No	52%	33
High School GPA		
2.5 or under	2%	2
2.6 - 3.2	12%	12
3.3 - 3.8	25%	25
3.9 or above	26%	26

To determine the degree to which former student-athletes felt their athletic experiences positively enhanced their post-collegiate quality of life (RQ1), participants were asked to indicate their feelings on thirteen statements about their experience as a student-athlete. Responses were measured using the following five-point Likert Scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) somewhat agree, and (5) strongly agree. The two statements with the highest means indicated that because of both their academic experiences ($M = 4.43$; $SD = 0.81$) and athletic experiences ($M = 4.37$; $SD = 0.901$) at UNC, the participants quality of life has been enhanced. Two other statements had means above four (“somewhat agree”) signifying participants felt to some degree their

participation in athletics had helped them in their career ($M = 4.35$; $SD = 1.039$) as well as prepared them for life after leaving UNC ($M = 4.33$; $SD = 0.837$).

Means for statements less than 2.0 were statements that participants on average did not agree with. The statement participants disagreed with most was “my quality of life would be better had he attended a different institution” ($M = 1.38$; $SD = 0.804$). Participants also did not feel that their participation in athletics prevented them from reaching their career goals ($M = 1.68$; $SD = 1.049$) or that their academics were too difficult to achieve their educational goals ($M = 1.88$; $SD = 0.922$). Means and standard deviations of all thirteen statements can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Feelings associated with former student-athletes intercollegiate athletic participation

	Overall	
	Mean	SD
Because of my academic experience at UNC, my quality of life has been enhanced	4.43	0.81
Because of my athletic experience at UNC, my quality of life has been enhanced	4.37	0.901
My participation in athletics has helped me in my career	4.35	1.039
My athletic experience adequately prepared me for life after UNC	4.33	0.837
My academics adequately prepared me for life after UNC	3.93	1.163
I sacrificed my academic career for my athletic career	2.73	1.219
My participation in athletics prevented me from taking courses I was interested in	2.6	1.405
My academic and athletic related activity were to demanding for me to succeed in both	2.47	1.359
I sacrificed my athletic career for my academic career	2.4	1.317
My participation in athletics prevented me from pursuing a major I was interested in	2.3	1.43
My academics were too difficult to achieve my educational goals	1.88	0.922
My participation in athletics prevented me from reached my career goals	1.68	1.049
My quality of life would be better had I attended a different institution	1.38	0.804

Note: Scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree

In addition to the thirteen statements regarding feelings associated with their intercollegiate athletic participation, the participants of the study were asked to characterize the way their overall experience at UNC has impacted their quality of life, if at all. Of the 61 participants who answered the question, 60 said their overall experiences at UNC have had a positive impact on their quality of life. 53 (87%) of the total respondents indicated a “very positive impact” while 7 (11%) characterized the impact as “somewhat positive”. Only 1 participant (2%) felt their experience has led to a “somewhat negative impact” (See Table 3).

Table 3

How would you characterize the way your overall experience at UNC impacted your quality of life if at all

	Overall	
	n	%
Very positive impact	53	87%
Somewhat positive impact	7	11%
No impact	0	0%
Somewhat negative impact	1	2%
Very negative impact	0	0%

The purpose of research question two was to discover if any differences in the degree to which participants valued their athletics and academic experiences differed based on the time that has elapsed since leaving or graduating, their high school GPA, or their scholarship status. A one-way between subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on all thirteen questions in Table 2 to uncover any statistical differences.

Only two of the thirteen questions yielded significant p-values revealing differences between the variables utilizing an alpha level of $p < .05$. The question “My quality of life would be better had I attended a different institution” indicated a significant difference between those who graduated or left the University between 2010-2012 against both those who left between 2004-2006 ($F(2, 57) = 5.46; p = 0.009$) and 2007-2009 ($F(2, 57) = 5.46 p = 0.017$). The mean differences, while statistically different, are still relatively small. The mean difference of 2010-2012 versus 2004-2006 is 0.783 and versus 2007-2009 is 0.693.

The other significant differences were found between reported high school GPAs. When participants were asked if their quality of life has been enhanced as a result of their academic experience at UNC, the lowest reported GPA “2.5 or below” had statistical differences compared with all other GPA levels. “2.6-3.2” ($F(3, 56) = 4.76; p = 0.009$), “3.3-3.8” ($F(3, 56) = 4.76; p = 0.003$), and “3.9 and above” ($F(3, 56) = 4.76; p = 0.002$) all had means that were 1.9 or above more than the “2.5 or below” mean. Only two former student-athletes reported high school GPAs of “2.5 or below”.

There were no significant differences between means for any of the other thirteen questions asked regarding the value of academic and athletic experiences. There were no statistical differences in scholarship status for any of the thirteen questions. All statistical differences discussed above can be found in Table 4.

Table 4
Value of athletic and academic experiences

	Mean	SD	F	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>
My quality of life would be better had I attended a different institution	1.38	0.804	5.461		
"2010-2012" v "2004-2006"				0.783	0.009
"2010-2012" v "2007-2009"				0.693	0.017
Because of my academic experience at UNC, my quality of life has been enhanced	4.43	0.81	4.761		
"2.6-3.2" v "2.5 or below"				1.900	0.009
"3.3-3.8" v "2.5 or below"				2.000	0.003
"3.9 or above" v "2.5 or below"				2.038	0.002

**p* < .05

Note: Scale from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. Tested for significant differences based on independent variables of final high school GPA, year graduated or left the University; and scholarship status

In addition to asking participants how their academic, athletic, and combined experiences have affected their lives today, if at all, participants were asked to express how their views and perspectives on academics and athletics have changed over time in order to gather an in-depth view on the value of intercollegiate athletics and the associated academic experience.

The open-ended questions were coded according to 8 categories. Since participants were able to provide their own unique perspectives, some responses fell into more than one of the 8 categories ($N = 80$). 43.75% ($n = 35$) of respondents said their perspectives on their academic and athletics experiences have not changed nor would they change anything about their overall experience. There was a large gap between the most coded category and the other seven. The next highest response was given by 15 participants (18.75%) who said they would have made an effort to more fully use of the resources provided at UNC followed by 10 participants (12.50%) who said they would have taken academics more seriously. No other category had over ten responses. 7 (8.75%) individuals said their experience as a student-athlete was not what they had expected, 5 (6.25%) of the respondents would have tried to create a better academic/athletic balance, 4 (5.00%) individuals indicated they would have chosen a different major or taken different classes, and 3 (3.75%) would have taken athletics more seriously. All categories and response percentages can be found in Table 5

Table 5

Changes in athletic and academic perspectives of former student-athletes

	n	%
Nothing/wouldn't change	35	43.75%
Taken academics more seriously	10	12.50%
Taken athletics more seriously	3	3.75%
Made better use of resources provided	15	18.75%
Taken different classes or major	4	5.00%
Balanced academics/athletics better	5	6.25%
Experience was not what I expected	7	8.75%
Other	1	1.25%

N=80

A chi-square test of association was performed on the open-ended responses from Table 5 and the year in which the student-athlete graduated or left UNC for the purpose of determining if there are differences in personal athletic and academic perspectives of those who recently graduated versus those who have been further removed from their intercollegiate athletics experience. Adjusted residual values greater than 1.96 were considered statistically different.

Those who graduated between 2004-2006 had 14 individuals who responded that they would not change their academic or athletic experience, which is 2.7 standard deviations above the expected mean. In addition, there were no participants who graduated or left UNC between 2004-2006 that indicated they would have made better use of the resources provided, which is 2.5 less than expected. While there were less than anticipated responses from 2004-2006 regarding resources, the 2007-2009 participant group had 3.1 more individuals ($n = 14$) than projected express that looking back at their time in college, they

would have made better use of the resources provided. 2010-2012 had the largest differential in projected response. From the 2010-2012 group, 5 individuals stated their experience is not what they expected, which is 3.9 standard deviations more than what would be considered normal distribution. Table 6 contains a complete list of responses per year range and adjusted residual value for each.

Table 6

Athletic and academic items viewed differently by year since graduating or leaving the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Items	YEAR			χ^2
	2004-2006	2007-2009	2010-2012	
Nothing/wouldn't change	14 (2.7)*	16 (-1.9)	5 (-.7)	33.572
Taken academics more seriously	2 (-.4)	6 (.2)	2 (.2)	
Taken athletics more seriously	0 (-1.0)	3 (1.5)	0 (-.8)	
Made better use of resources provided	0 (-2.5)*	14 (3.1)*	1 (-1.2)	
Taken different classes or major	1 (.0)	2 (-.3)	1 (.4)	
Balanced academics/athletics better	2 (.8)	3 (.1)	0 (-1.1)	
Experience was not what I expected	0 (-1.6)	2 (-1.6)	5 (3.9)*	
Other	1 (1.7)	0 (-1.2)	0 (-.5)	

Note. Adjusted standardized residuals in parentheses below frequencies.

*Adjusted standardized residual values >1.96

u<.01

Research question three aimed to discover whether career satisfaction and compensation differ between scholarship/non-scholarship student-athletes; years between when the athlete left or graduated UNC; and the athlete's high school GPAs. On a five-point Likert Scale, participants were asked to indicate their total before-tax 2013 income, and overall satisfaction with their current.

The Likert Scale for career satisfaction is as follows: (1) Very Satisfied; (2) Somewhat Satisfied; (3) Neutral; (4) Somewhat Dissatisfied; (5) Very Dissatisfied. Of the three groups of athletes who left or graduated UNC (2004-2006; 2007-2009; 2010-2012), those who had been out of college longer reported significantly higher employment satisfaction ($M = 1.59, SD = 1.01, p = .036$) as well as higher overall incomes ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.89, p = .004$) than employment satisfaction ($M = 2.94, SD = 2.59, p = .036$) and overall incomes ($M = 3.06, SD = 2.08, p = .004$) of those who were the most recent graduates.

Reported annual income was statistically significant between 2004-2006 and 2007-2009 ($MD = 1.405; p = 0.048$) as well as between 2010-2012 ($MD = 0.771; p = 0.004$). Both mean differentials showed higher average annual income for those who left between 2004-2006.

A complete listing of these statistics as well as a scale for total annual income can be found in Table 7. There were no statistical differences found in employment satisfaction or annual compensation between scholarship status and high school GPA

Table 7
Career Satisfaction and Compensation

	Mean	SD	F	Mean Difference	p
Satisfaction					
"2010-2012" v "2004-2006"*	2.03	1.68	3.524	1.347	0.036
Annual Income					
"2004-2006" v "2007-2009"*	4.11	2.1	6.132	1.405	0.048
"2004-2006" v "2010-2012"*				0.771	0.004

* $p < .05$

*Note: Satisfaction scale from (1) Very Satisfied to (5) Very Dissatisfied. Tested for significant differences based on independent variables of final high school GPA, year graduated or left the University; and scholarship status. Total Annual Income scale from (1) Less than \$25,000; (2) \$25,001-\$35,000; (3) \$35,001-\$50,000; (4) \$50,001-\$75,000; (5) \$75,001-\$100,000; (6) \$100,001-\$150,000; (7) \$150,001-\$200,000; (8) More than \$200,000. Tested for significant differences based on independent variables of final high school GPA, year graduated or left the University; and scholarship status.

In an open-ended question, participants were asked retrospectively “what were the most valuable parts of the student-athlete academic experience?” Responses were coded according to 7 overarching categories that emerged ($N = 64$). The experiences and values deemed most beneficial were “exposure to new ideas” ($n = 15$; 23.44%) and “academic reputation” ($n = 14$; 21.8%) which included prestige of the University, the professors, quality of degree, and challenge from other classmates. “Relationships” ($n = 10$) and “real world preparation” ($n = 10$) were equal in percentage at 15.63%, and the next most common answers were the “overall experience” ($n = 9$; 14.06%), “other” ($n = 4$; 6.25%), and “nothing” ($n = 2$; 3.13%).

Table 8

Most valuable parts of the student-athlete academic experience

	n	%
Relationships	10	15.63%
Academic Reputation	14	21.88%
Exposure to new ideas	15	23.44%
Real world preparation	10	15.63%
Overall experience	9	14.06%
Nothing	2	3.13%
Other	4	6.25%

N = 64

A chi-square test of association was performed on the open-ended responses from Table 8 and the participants’ high school GPA. Academic experiences of underprepared student-athletes are the most scrutinized; therefore the chi-square was performed on the high school GPA independent variable only to determine if there were any differences in value of academic experiences. Adjusted residual values greater than 1.96 were considered statistically different. Since there were only two participants who originally indicated their GPA to be 2.5 or below and all questions were voluntary, for the purpose of the chi-square

the “2.5 or below” category was combined with the “2.6-3.2” category. The chi-square shows no statistically significant differences between reported high school GPAs and more valuable aspects of the student-athlete academic experience. All categories, responses by GPA, and adjusted residual values can be found in Table 9.

Table 9

Most valuable parts of the student-athlete academic experience by high school GPA

Value	GPA			χ^2
	3.2 or below	3.3-3.8	3.9 and above	
				12.102
Relationships	1 (-.4)	7 (1.8)	2 (-1.5)	
Academic Reputation	2 0	8 (1.1)	4 (-1.2)	
Exposure to new ideas	1 (-.9)	4 (-1.5)	10 (2.2)*	
Real world preparation	1 (-.4)	5 (.4)	4 (-.2)	
Overall experience	2 -0.8	3 (-.7)	4 (.1)	
Nothing	1 (1.5)	0 (-1.3)	1 (.2)	
Other	1 (.6)	1 (-.8)	2 (.3)	

Note. Adjusted standardized residuals in parentheses below frequencies.

Participants were asked the same open-ended question regarding the most valuable aspects of their *athletic* experience. Responses were coded into seven categories and $N = 71$. Two categories were each mentioned over twice as much as any other category.

“Camaraderie” ($n = 24$; 33.80%) and “personal values/growth” ($n = 20$; 28.17%) were the two most valuable parts of the student-athlete athletic experience according to those who participated in the study. The next most mentioned category was “competing at the highest level” ($n = 9$; 12.68%) followed by “honor/respect of the UNC jersey” ($n = 7$; 9.86%), and

“opportunities – during and post-college” ($n = 6$; 8.45%), “great/best experience” ($n = 3$; 4.23%). Table 10 contains a full listing of categories, number of responses, and percentages.

Table 10

Most valuable parts of the student-athlete athletic experience

	n	%
Camaraderie	24	33.80%
Personal growth/values	20	28.17%
Competing at the highest level	9	12.68%
Honor/respect of the UNC jersey	7	9.86%
Great/best experience	3	4.23%
Opportunities (during & post-college)	6	8.45%
Other	2	2.82%

N = 71

As mentioned in the literature review, one of the biggest critiques of intercollegiate athletics is that the athletic time demands on student-athletes prevent them from learning and achieving an overall education. In contrast, supporters believe sport allows for upward mobility through opportunities provided through sport. In order to determine any differences between high school GPA and the most valuable aspects of the student-athlete athletic experience, a chi-square test of association was performed on the open-ended responses from Table 10. Only one category was significantly different than the expected value for the given GPA grouping. Participants with a high school GPA between 3.3-3.8 did not have anyone respond that “honor/respect of the UNC jersey” was one of the most valuable parts of their athletic experience ($\chi^2(2, N = 71) = 10.99, arv = -2.0$). There were no other significant differences between category frequencies between various levels of high school GPA. A complete record of frequencies and adjusted standardized residuals for each code category can be found in Table 11.

Table 11

Most valuable parts of the student-athlete athletic experience by high school GPA

Value	GPA			χ^2
	3.2 or below	3.3-3.8	3.9 and above	
Camaraderie	5 (.0)	8 (-.1)	11 (.1)	10.997
Personal growth/values	5 (.5)	6 (-.4)	9 (.0)	
Competing at the highest level	1 (-.8)	5 (1.5)	3 (-.8)	
Honor/respect of the UNC jersey	2 (.5)	0 (-2.0)*	5 (1.5)	
Great/best experience	1 (.5)	0 (-1.3)	2 (.8)	
Opportunities (during & post-college)	1 (-.3)	4 (1.8)	1 (-1.5)	
Other	0 (-.7)	1 (.5)	1 (.1)	

Note. Adjusted standardized residuals in parentheses below frequencies.

*Adjusted standardized residuals >1.96

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a valuable addition to the literature on the educational outcomes of intercollegiate athletics by asking former student-athletes throughout different places in their post-collegiate lives to identify the overall impact of their collegiate academic and athletic experiences. While rooted in solid theory and reasoning, many arguments of critics do not take in account an individual's ability to overcome seemingly detrimental odds such as an underprepared student-athlete with intense time demands at an academically rigorous institution. However, these factors do not predetermine the future of an individual as hypothesized through resiliency theory. For this reason, former student-athletes across a span of nine years were asked to share their views and perspectives first hand on the influence of their intercollegiate athletic participation.

One of the most important aspects of this study was the intentional sample of athletes both somewhat far removed and well into their careers (with nine-years since departing the university) as well as those who had just recently graduated from the university. Since life and career paths evolve at different rates, it was important to gather responses from a range of years. The findings of this study suggest that the combination of academic and athletic experiences seemingly becomes more valuable to an individual the longer he or she is removed from their college experience. In addition, career satisfaction and annual income

also steadily increase and stabilize the longer one is removed from college, which supports the initial thought behind this study. The most critical finding however was that high school GPA and scholarship status had no impact on future annual income or career satisfaction. In fact, through all the tests run, there were no differences in those who were recruited and received some form of athletic scholarship and non-scholarship student-athletes. The importance of examining these two groups lies in the principle argued by many critics that scholarship student-athletes suffer from a severe conflict of interest since their financial support for their education is based on their athletic performance (Sack and Staurowsky, 1998).

In regards to high school GPA, even those with lower GPA's and those who would be considered underprepared to attend an academically rigorous college institution, the findings of this study directly refute critics who feel that institutions fail student-athletes by not adequately preparing them for the real world (Etzen, 2000). While high risk student-athletes tend to need routine and consistency and all student-athletes have extreme time demands that only allow a certain amount of time for academics, these views fail to acknowledge the nontraditional types of learning that occur through the combination of academic and athletic experiences which may actually be better preparation for the real world. The findings of this study support the ideas presented in the UniLOA study which found participation in intercollegiate athletics to be a better indicator of seven intangible attributes indicative of success in the "real world" than the courses students chose to take, cumulative GPA, and test scores (2011). As mentioned in the literature review, student-athletes score significantly higher in six out of the seven intangibles than their non-athletic counterparts which support this study's results which indicated no differences in reported satisfaction and outcomes

based on high school GPA and scholarship status. The findings of this study also support advocates who cite intercollegiate athletics to be a driver for upward mobility (Haynes, 1990). The results of this study combined with the results of the UniLOA (2011) study as well as Gayles and Hu (2009) support the idea that a large number of student-athletes “benefit from the university because it provides them with a quality and aspect of life that they normally would not be able to experience” (Haynes, 1990).

The participants echoed the sentiments of non-traditional learning throughout the open-ended responses as well. Very few responses expounded on life-long benefits of coursework, but instead focused on the intangibles they learned through completed and excelling at difficult courses. One respondent commented that the most valuable aspect of his academic experience was the ability to think critically and effectively articulate thoughts by taking a wide range of courses exposing [him] to different disciplines (Respondent 24). Another individual noted, “The rigorous course load taught me to budget my time with athletics and it taught me how to be able to work and do activities that I like doing outside of work once I got to the real world” (Respondent 26). These sentiments are not unique to these two participants. As seen in Table 8, former student-athletes expressed a variety of benefits and valuable skills from their academic experiences furthering the need to understand what factors contribute to making an activity “educationally purposeful” to produce desirable outcomes for the student-athlete population (Gayles and Hu, 2009).

According to the data, athletic experiences of former student-athletes may have even had a greater contribution overall to their preparation for life after college. On a scale of (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, participants indicated that their athletic experiences were more helpful in their careers ($M = 4.35$) and in preparation for life after UNC ($M =$

4.33) than their academic experiences ($M = 3.93$). “Athletes can learn skills such as discipline and teamwork that may arguably be equally or more valuable to long-term quality of life than the education that transpires in the typical classroom” (Warren, 1984). In an open-ended question, one individual stated “the values and work ethic that it provided for me have helped tremendously in my professional career” (Respondent 12). In addition, over half of the participants who responded to the open-ended questions said that camaraderie and personal growth ($n = 44$; 61.97%) were the most valuable aspects of their athletic participation. Respondent 2 commented that his coach “focused on making [them] better people and not just football players. A large majority of the guys [he] played with were not the most model citizens and [coach] forced us to push ourselves and quit being content with just being a football player”.

There were also staggering positively significant statistics. 98% of respondents stated that their overall experience at UNC positively impacted their quality of life with 87% having a “very positive impact” Only one individual felt their quality of life was somewhat negatively impacted by their experiences. Regarding this one individual, it is important to note and understand this respondent was a football student-athlete who graduated or left the University between 2010-2012, which is when the beginning of the accusations and academic scandal surrounding the UNC football team began. As to not impose a reason as to why this individual would feel that way, the background is essential to understanding the results of this question. Considering the circumstances, it is surprising there were not more during this time period who voiced discontent. It is also interesting that there were no statistical differences between years graduated or left the university and how the overall experience at UNC impacted one’s quality of life. These findings can be explained through,

and consequently support, the foundation of the resiliency theory. Despite the turmoil surrounding the program and the associated effects, the student-athletes were able to recover, adapt, and grow through the adversity to create successes (Cohu, 2005).

Although the findings of this study cannot be applied to every former student-athlete, this representative sample of one NCAA division I institution provides insight into the true value, throughout the course of one's life and career, of participation in competitive athletics and university academics. The first person perspective captures the reality of the impact of intercollegiate athletic participation. Respondent 1 captured the unique experience by recognizing the importance of the combination of athletics and academics by stating, "UNC represents the best possible combination of quality academics with superior athletics". By continuing to follow-up with former student-athletes longitudinally, academic and athletic administrators can determine the best method to structure the overall athletic experience to provide maximum benefit and opportunities for growth to student-athletes.

Further Research

The study sought to gain insight and perspectives from former student-athletes who were at various stages throughout their post-collegiate life. While some very powerful data was added to the academics versus athletics literature, further research is needed to enhance and support the findings of this study. One of the main groups discussed in the literature review was the special talent and "high-risk" student-athletes who remain at the root of the academics versus athletics issue. Due to the confidentiality of special admissions data and as to not reveal type of admission status to the former student-athletes, it was impossible to limit the sample population to those classified as special admissions. This study aimed to combat those issues by asking for high school GPA, however, the number of respondents with a high

school GPA low enough to safely define as “high-risk” was too low to gather sufficient data that would allow findings to be applicable for this entire population. Further research is needed to follow-up with the former student-athletes considered to be “high-risk” during their time in college and study their current quality of life and how their intercollegiate athletic and academic experiences influenced their lives. The same survey could be used with that population to gather consistent and comparable data with that uncovered within this study.

In addition to gathering additional data from “at-risk” athletes, the sample and generalizability of the findings could greatly be enhanced by expanding to a broader population including institutions and sports. The particular sample targeted in this study included three traditionally revenue sports since baseball, men’s basketball, and football are often the marquee sports where student-athletes most often leave early to play professional, and are most often targeted by critics, as sports with the least educational benefits to the “athlete-workers” (Riggs, 1996) due to high time demands, underprepared student-athletes, and demanding athletic expectations (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Although this sample was carefully and purposefully chosen, it predicated the exclusion of women from the sample. Further research examining the other NCAA sponsored sports would combat this limitation and add additional insight to the literature.

A final suggestion for future research would be to compare former student-athletes with former non-athletes. A study of this nature would allow for participation in a varsity sport to be an isolated variable allowing results to truly be attributed to sport participation. Adding research with similar conclusions will help support the life benefits specifically gained through participation in intercollegiate sport.

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