AN ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PRACTICES FOR NCAA DIVISION I-FBS STUDENT-ATHLETE EXIT INTERVIEWS

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ABSTRACT

Stephen Iannotta: An Analysis of Current Practices for NCAA Division I-FBS Student-Athlete
Exit Interviews
(Under the direction of Erianne Weight)

On January 10, 1991, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

adopted a bylaw (6.3.2) to its constitution, making it mandatory for member institutions to

conduct exit interviews with their student-athletes. The wording of the bylaw allows schools a

great deal of freedom to choose how they conduct their interviews, who is a part of the interview

process, and what topics are being discussed in the interview itself. This lack of guidance and

direction in the bylaw has led to a wide array of methods used by schools to conduct exit

interviews. This study analyzes the current methods being used by NCAA Division I-FBS

athletic programs to conduct student-athlete exit interviews. A survey of twenty-six Division I-

FBS athletic administrators responsible for exit interview oversight revealed that while methods

for conducting student-athlete exit interviews, the content being discussed is very similar. The

results of the survey serve as a bridge to literature regarding the student-athlete experience and

exit interview practices in professional settings.

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I would like to thank my committee, my classmates, colleagues in the Football Offices, and family for their continued encouragement throughout this entire process. I could not have completed this entire process without their love and support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Richard A. Baddour served as the Director of Athletics for the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill from 1997-2011. In his fourteen years as the Tar Heels Athletic Director,

Mr. Baddour was responsible for overseeing over the well-being of all UNC student-athletes. In

the late 1980's, while Baddour served as an associate athletic director for the Tar Heels, there

became an increased focus on studying the student environment for Carolina athletes. Originally,

graduating student-athletes completed written surveys to a faculty committee and members of the

athletic department. Baddour wanted to add a personal element to the process though, and so an

exit interview was created. The exit interviews, which were conducted in the spring, consisted of

five to six student-athletes meeting with UNC's Faculty Athletics Rep and a representative from

the athletic department. While this was a great stepping stone for beginning to understand the

experience of student-athletes, Baddour claims that approximately only 50 student-athletes

completed surveys each year, and only 20-30 were personally interviewed.

Significance of Study

On January 10, 1991, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) adopted a

bylaw to its constitution that made it mandatory for institutions to conduct exit interviews with

their student-athletes. Bylaw 6.3.2, effective on August 8, 1991, is under the "Self-Study and

Evaluation" section of Article 6 of the NCAA Constitution, Institutional Control. The bylaw states:

> "The institution's director of athletics, senior woman administrator or designated representatives (excluding coaching staff members) shall conduct exit interviews in each sport with a sample of student-athletes (as determined by the institution) whose eligibility has expired. Interviews shall include questions regarding the value of the students' athletic experiences, the extent of the athletics time demands encountered by the student-athletes, proposed changes in intercollegiate athletics and concerns related to the administration of the student athletes' specific sports."

While this bylaw is important for schools to evaluate the student-athletes' experiences, the ambiguous nature of the bylaw's wording deemphasizes the importance of student-athlete exit interviews. By allowing the institutions to determine the sample size, schools may opt to conduct a minimal number of exit interviews to simply fulfill a requirement. The true purpose of the exit interviews, which is for schools to study and evaluate their current operations, is thus diminished.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze the methods of conducting varsity student-athlete exit interviews utilized by NCAA Division I – FBS athletics programs. The study surveyed administrators responsible for conducting student-athlete exit interviews during the 2014-2015 academic year.

Research Questions

Based on the review of literature, the following research questions were formed for this study:

[RQ 1] What methods are Division I – FBS institutions currently using to conduct student-athlete exit interviews?

[RQ 2] Why do institutions use the current methods for conducting student-athlete exit interviews?

[RQ 3] Are athletic administrators satisfied with their current methods of conducting student-athlete exit interviews?

[RQ 4] What content is being discussed in current student-athlete exit interviews?

[RQ 5] How do athletic departments disseminate data collected from student-athlete exit interviews?

[RQ 6] Do differences in RQ1-RQ5 exist based on the following criteria?

     a. Geographic region

     b. Budget size

Definition of Terms

1) <u>NCAA</u> – The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a voluntary membership organization of higher education universities and institutions that participate in intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA is the general governing body that develops, monitors, and enforces rules and regulations for all member institutions.

2) <u>Division I – FBS</u> – Division I Football Bowl Subdivision, formerly known as Division I-A, is the top level of college football. In the 2014-2015 academic year, there were 125 full-time institutions and 3 transitional institutions in Division I – FBS.

3) <u>Student-Athlete</u> – A student enrolled full-time at a college or university who is participating in intercollegiate athletics, either as a scholarship or non-scholarship athlete.

4) <u>Exit Interview</u> – An interview conducted by an institutions' director of athletics, senior woman administrator or designated representatives with a student-athlete who has exhausted his or her athletic eligibility.

5) <u>Power Five</u> – Five Athletic conferences in NCAA Division I FBS. The Power Five conferences consist of the Atlantic Coast Conference, Big 12 Conference, Big Ten Conference, Pacific-12 Conference, and Southeastern Conference.

Assumptions

1) The research methods used in this study are valid and reliable

2) Survey participants will answer the survey questions truthfully, objectively, and completely.

3) Respondents completed the survey voluntarily and understood all questions in a similar manner.

Limitations

1) There may be a non-response bias as institutions may elect not to share their methods of

   conducting student-athlete exit interviews.

Delimitations

1) The sample of the study will be focused on Division I – FBS institutions. Thus it cannot

   be applied to all student-athlete exit interviews for the rest of Division I schools.

2) The study only focuses on what methods institutions are currently using for conducting

   student-athlete exit interviews.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Role of Intercollegiate Athletics

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).

The origins of intercollegiate athletics can be traced back to 1850s rowing regattas between Harvard and Yale Crew teams. 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 and Staurowsky, 1998). In 1906, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was formed in response to violence in the sport of football. 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 and Staurowsky, 1998). The IAAUS was renamed the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1908.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association was originally, strictly a rules-making and discussion group, comprised of member institutions until it held its first National Championship

in 1921, the National Collegiate Track and Field Championships. Although the NCAA remains a rules-making and governing body for member institutions, the current stated mission of the organization is "to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes" (Office of the, 2010, ¶5).

Current advocates for intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of a collegiate educational experience, argue that athletics helps to define the spirit of the American college. And in addition, it allows colleges and universities to address their broader public purpose (Gerdy, 2002; Toma, 1999). Athletics aids in the overall development of young people, contributes to increased academic performance and upward occupational mobility, and can help increase a school's enrollment and revenue (Brand, 2006; Miller, 2003). Many opportunities are granted to students that participate in intercollegiate athletics that other students do not have the chance to experience. Through participation, values such as dedication, sacrifice, team-work, integrity, and leadership are developed. Each of these character-building values can be acquired through participation and are beneficial throughout life (Duderstadt, 2000; Olivia, 1989). These advocates assert that intercollegiate athletics provides opportunities for student-athletes to develop into individuals possessing desirable character qualities that will succeed in a life after competition has ended.

Critiques of intercollegiate athletics include the argument that student-athletes do not have the same campus life experiences and opportunities available to non-athletes – that student-athletes have their own subculture that is isolated from the rest of the student population (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006). In addition to creating their own subculture in the campus community, student- athletes often do not engage with their peers inside or outside of the classroom (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen,

2001) and are not engaged in effective educational practices at the same level as non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006). The over-arching criticism of intercollegiate athletics is that, in the context of higher education, the interests of academics and athletics are out of balance (Suggs, 2003).

One contributing factor to this lack of balance is that the student-athletes are not well represented in decision-making procedures by the NCAA. There is a lack of student-athlete input in the current reform of intercollegiate athletics. Strides have been made by the NCAA in the last twenty-five years to increase student-athlete involvement in new legislation, but there is still a ways to go until the student-athlete is properly represented.

Student-Athletes' Voice

Some of the first research done on the "voice of the student-athlete" comes from Jobyann Renick's (1974) article, *The Use and Misuse of College Athletics* from The Journal of Higher Education. Renick discusses how colleges are reflecting a more liberal attitude towards a student's ability to direct his or her own destiny. After citing numerous examples of such ability, Renick poses the following question:

> If athletics are to be an "integral part" of college, and if students
> are actively involved in the decision-making process of other
> aspects of college life, would it not be reasonable for the student-
> athlete to be an active participant in the making of decisions in
> athletics?

Renick states that there is an obvious exclusion of student-athletes throughout the various systems of athletic control. The role of the student-athlete

is belittled to nothing more than a performer "who must comply with eligibility standards and other regulations to gain the privilege of playing" (Renick, 1974). Renick concludes by discrediting the NCAA's claim that intercollegiate athletics support the development of educational leadership among student-athletes (Renick, 1974).

In the 2006 Vanderbilt Law Review article, *Student-Athlete Contract Rights in the Aftermath of Bloom v. NCAA*, Joel Eckert discusses the lack of legal voice student-athletes have as well. Citing court rulings from *Gulf South Conference v. Boyd,* Eckert states that student-athletes have little choice but to join the association [NCAA]. The specific court ruling stated that "the athlete himself has no voice or bargaining power concerning the rules and regulations…because he is not a member, yet he stands to be substantially affected, and even damaged, by an association ruling declaring him to be ineligible to participate in intercollegiate athletics." Eckert also cites Congressman Spencer Bacchus' (R-AL) questioning of the validity of the NCAA as a "voluntary association." He claims this to be inaccurate due to the fact that student-athletes are most affected by NCAA decisions, yet they have no voice in the rulemaking process.

John Allison's 1995 article in the Kansas Law Review titled, *Rule-Making Accuracy in the NCAA and its Member Institutions: Do Their Decision Structures and Processes Promote Educational Primacy for the Student-Athlete*, further analyzes the degree to which the perspective of the student-athlete is adequately incorporated into NCAA and institutional decision-making. Allison discusses that the NCAA has created a vehicle for the student-athlete input into its decision-making, the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (Allison, 1995).

The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) was formed at the 1989 NCAA Convention. The primary purpose of this committee was to review and offer student-athlete input on NCAA activities and proposed legislation that affected student-athlete welfare (NCAA SAAC, 2002). Its mission statement reads: "The mission of the National Collegiate Athletic Association Student-Athlete Advisory Committee is to enhance the total student-athlete experience by promoting opportunity, protecting student-athlete welfare, and fostering a positive student-athlete image" (NCAA SAAC, 2002). SAAC is comprised of current student-athletes, both male and female, with separate national committees forming for each division of the NCAA in 1997. NCAA legislation mandates that all member institutions have SAACs on their respective campuses (NCAA SAAC, 2002).

Allison is critical of the structure of the national SAACs. He claims that if the committee hopes to continue to operate that it should be divided into two separate bodies – one of which represents Division 1-A (FBS) football and Division I men's basketball, and the other representing all other collegiate sports. Division I-A football and men's basketball encounter an entirely different mix of competing interests and pressures than others with respect to the furtherance of educational primacy (Allison, 1995).

Despite the presence of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, Allison (1995) claims that it is probably not feasible to design a structure that would guarantee meaningful input from currently enrolled student-athletes directly to institutional or NCAA decision making because they do not have the independence nor the maturity and experience judgment to perform the function adequately. Rather, Allison (1995) postulates that the student-athlete perspective should be factored into an institution's decision making by means of an advisory board whose membership would be drawn from former-student athletes. The advisory board's existence

should be publicized to current student-athletes and student-athletes should be given every opportunity to contact the advisory board directly.

Knorr (2004) explains that Student-Athlete Advisory Committees have progressed better than Allison expected. Through NCAA sponsorship and resources, the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee has emerged as a powerful representative for the student-athlete (Knorr, 2004). Each division of the NCAA has its own National SAAC, which reports directly to that division's respective Management Council (NCAA SAAC, 2002). Further NCAA legislation has created conference and campus-mandated SAACs, the purpose of which are to better represent the views of all student-athletes.

Along with the creation of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, the NCAA mandated another way for student-athletes to have a voice and institutions to gather student-athlete input: student-athlete exit interviews.

Exit Interviews

The concept of the exit interview originated in business and the majority of research comes from that industry. The exit interview is a discussion between a representative of an organization and a person whose employment with that organization has been ended (Giacalone & Duhon, 1991). Exit interviews have been used by companies since the 1950's (Brooks, 2007). The exit interview enables an improved understanding of the reasons why employees leave and they provide opportunities for effective communication (Neal, 1989). Exit interviews have been found to be usefulness as a means of creating better public relations, checking on the soundness of initial selection procedures, and uncovering poor personnel practices, specific sources of job dissatisfaction, unsatisfactory supervisors, etc. (Habbe, 1952; Lefkowitz & Katz, 1969).

The two major elements of the exit interview are (1) discovery and (2) communication (Neal, 1989). Discovery is in the form of an employee's motivation for vacating a certain position. Communication consists of the sharing of this information with management personnel; neither element is easy to deal with (Neal, 1989). Critical to the success of an exit interview is the structure and content of the contact with the departing employee. Key elements are the clear assignment of responsibility for conducting the interviews, effective scheduling procedures, the creation of the proper climate for the interview and a productive format (Neal, 1989). A commitment of sufficient time and appropriate staff for dialogue, analysis, and feedback is also essential (Neal, 1989). Topics covered during exit interviews are varied and may be different for every company. These topics may include, but are not limited to, reason for departure, rating of the job, supervision, working conditions, advancement opportunities, training, pay, and things employees like best (and least) about the job (Giacalone & Duhon, 1991). Some organizations have even found it effective to distribute a pre-interview questionnaire or survey, and use the information as a guide for the interview discussion (Neal, 1989). Regardless of the structure of the exit interview, it should always include four basic elements:

(1) A diagnosis function

(2) A therapy/improvement function

(3) A separation assistance function

(4) A determination of reasons for leaving function (Neal, 1989).

Numerous studies have analyzed the importance of who is conducting the exit interview. According to Neal (1989), exit interviews should be conducted by an individual, preferably a personnel or human resources professional, who is knowledgeable about the work of the company. The interviewer must be someone who is effective in private, face-to-face

interviewing, and who is trusted by the employees. Credibility and approachability are essential qualities (Neal, 1989). Giacalone and Duhon (1991) further this point by stating that the exit interview should be conducted by someone who is perceived as neutral. A staff member from the personnel department is generally a better choice than a supervisor or manager. Previous studies have showed that employees are likely to be more open in their comments when speaking on a confidential basis with someone with whom they have had previous contact with, such as a member of the personnel staff (Goodale, 1982; Giacalone & Duhon, 1991). More recently, Branham (2005) found that exit interviews are most successful when conducted by a third-party vendor. A third-party vendor provides a confidential, nonbiased, skilled approach to obtaining exit interview data (Branaham, 2005). Regardless, it is clear that there is a necessity for extensive training in interviewing techniques for those whose responsibility it is to conduct exit interviews (Lefkowitz & Katz, 1969).

Perhaps the single most important concept relevant to all aspects of the exit interview survey (EIS) process is the level of accuracy or honesty of the answers provided by those participating in the interview. A consistent concern with the EIS process has focused on the likelihood of obtaining truthful, comprehensive information from the interviewee (Knouse & Beard, 1996). A major threat to the value of exit information has always been the omnipresent threat of interviewee lying and distortion (Giacalone & Duhon, 1991).

Working from earlier research from Hinrichs (1975) and Zarandona & Camuso (1985), Giacalone and Knouse (1989) identified five areas that may lead to interviewee distortion:

      (1) Interviewees often make personal considerations a priority.

      (2) Interviewees who are forced to exit may resent the organization.

      (3) Interviewees may make distortions to protect co-workers and friends.

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(4) Interviewees may attempt to protect long-term interests.

(5) Interviewees may provide erroneous information because they do not

have time or incentive to think through how they feel.

In a 1991 study with ninety-nine graduate students seeking a Master's degree in business administration who were also working full-time in the Rhode Island-Massachusetts area, Giacalone and Duhon found that when meeting with a personnel manager for an exit interview at the end of their job tenure, employees may choose not to express their honest appraisal of certain topics. The likelihood of answer distortion decreased in managerial ranks, compared with nonmanagerial positions (Giacalone & Duhon, 1991). In 1997, Giacalone and Knouse completed a follow-up study focused on motivation for and prevention of honest responding in exit interviews. The study identified three factors that motivate honest responding in EIS: (1) positive equity, (2) capricious and self-oriented reasons, (3) negative equity (Giacalone & Knouse, 1997). The results of the study suggest that different types of EIS may be appropriate for different types of organizations. For a company with a strong, positive work climate, a direct interview at the time of separation may deliver honest responses. For a company with a negative climate, however, an interview given by a neutral third party may be more effective (Giacalone & Knouse, 1997). Finally, their study suggests the implementation of a long-term project, wherein the company conducts random follow-up interviews with previous employees. Comparing those answers to responses given at exit time, would allow companies to quantify the degree of bias (Giacalone & Knouse, 1997).

With a lack of research conducted regarding student-athlete exit interviews, athletic departments must utilize the data presented in the preceding studies. Regardless of employing a third party vendor or athletic department personnel, it is clear that education and training is

critical for those staff members who are conducting the student-athlete exit interviews. The coupling of face-to-face interviews and exit interview surveys appear to have the potential to yield the best results for athletic departments. This study builds upon the literature presented in this section, by examining the methods of conducting student-athlete exit interviews currently used by Division-I FBS institutions.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is based upon institutional theory. Institutional theory postulates that organizations, like individuals, seek approval or legitimacy from their peers (Cooper & Weight, 2011). Therefore, organizations tend to behave in ways that are consistent with the actions and orientations of the organizations within their institutional sphere. An important element of institutional theory proposes that organizations within the same social system are influenced by one another, and tend to imitate one another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Cooper & Weight, 2011). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) defined the process of organizations becoming similar to one another as "institutional isomorphism." The theory of institutional isomorphism further postulates that actors occasionally may forsake their own best interests in order to follow established institutional logic and mirror the actions of their peers. Rather than risk untested, potentially beneficial behavior, actors will behave in established ways as a means of exuding legitimacy and avoiding criticism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggested three potential, but not theoretically or empirically distinct, sources of isomorphism: (1) Coercive isomorphism, which stems from an actor's need to gain legitimacy; (2) Mimetic isomorphism, by which actors reduce perceived uncertainty; and (3) Normative isomorphism, a process that tends to occur as actors look to one

another in determining how best to structure complex, professionalized organizations. It appears conceivable, if not likely, that at least one of these processes could explain the logic behind current methods being used by athletics departments to conduct their student-athlete exit interviews.

The concept of isomorphism has been well researched within the sport management literature (Washington & Patterson, 2010). Slack and colleagues (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Danisman, Hinings, & Slack, 2006; Slack & Hinings, 1994) have published numerous studies examining the changes in a variety of National Sport Organizations (NSOs) that are a part of Sport Canada. Slack and Hinings (1994), for example, examined the impact on changes to 36 NSOs as a result of institutional pressure from Sport Canada. They found that as Sport Canada has created pressures for NSOs to adopt a more professional bureaucratic structure, there was a reduction in the variations of NSO structures. Similar to other institutional theory studies, Slack and Hinings (2006) provided a discussion of the impact of the three different types of institutional pressures and how they contributed to this reduction in NSO structures.

The isomorphism hypothesis in institutional theory has also been used to explain the relationship between US state political ideology and the distance between the women's golf tees and the men's tees (Arthur, Van Buren, & Del Campo, 2009), the increasing formalization within a Canadian amateur ice hockey organization (Stevens & Slack, 1998), the low percentage of black coaches in the NCAA (Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2001), the relationship between the status of soccer clubs in the English Premier League and their website design (Lamertz, Carney, & Bastien, 2008), the relationship between State sport Policy in Norway, and similarity of goals among sport clubs in Norway (Skille, 2009).

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Phelps and Dickson (2009) examined the naming choices of the New Zealand Men's and Women's Ice Hockey clubs. They found that both clubs drew upon the legitimacy of the All Black's Rugby club and the Fern as the national flower to name their club. They suggest this finding argues that isomorphism (in this case, naming conventions) leads to legitimacy (in this case, social support for women and men's ice hockey). Indeed, similar to the pronouncements made by Mizruchi and Fein (1999) and Dacin et al. (2002), the isomorphism hypothesis of institutional theory has been well researched in the sport management literature (Washington & Patterson, 2010).

In 2011, Cooper and Weight tested the theory of institutional isomorphism in an attempt to explain the actions of athletic administrators in regards to the value of and cutting of Olympic sports. Cooper and Weight (2011) specifically looked at normative isomorphism and its idea that all organizations act similarly due to the values and processes adopted by decision makers. College athletic administrators, or "decision makers," most likely have been trained and educated within organizations and universities who use and promote analogous methods and strategies (Cooper & Weight, 2011). The values and beliefs that have been engrained in them as a result of this will be reflected in the structures and processes these administrators institute within their respective organizations (Cooper & Weight, 2011). After surveying a sample of administrators from the Division I, II, and II level, Cooper and Weight found that the small standard deviations and clear agreement the athletic directors demonstrated in highly valuing Olympic sport academics supports the theory of institutional isomorphism (Cooper & Weight, 2011).

When Bylaw 6.3.2 was adopted in 1991, the NCAA did not stipulate proper policies and procedures for conducting student-athlete exit interviews. Without standard procedures, institutions may imitate another school's process for conducting interviews because of the belief

that the structure the other school is using is beneficial; especially schools that simply conduct exit interviews to comply with NCAA Bylaws. Mimetic isomorphism can explain this phenomenon. Mimetic isomorphism occurs most often when an organizations goals or means of achieving such goals are unclear (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Coercive isomorphism may also have an effect on the policies and procedures schools use to conduct student-athlete exit interviews. Administrators may feel pressure from the other members of their conference or geographic region to implement certain procedures when conducting exit interviews. According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983), organizations are increasingly homogenous within given domains and increasingly organized around rituals of conformity to wider institutions. Therefore, schools tend to conform how they handle situations, student-athlete exit interviews being an example of said situations, within the domain of an athletic conference or geographic region.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The population for this study was athletic administrators who are responsible for administering student-athlete exit interviews at the one hundred twenty-eight Division I Football Bowl Subdivision schools (125 full-time member institutions and 3 transitional institutions). There were no sampling methods used for this study.

Instrumentation & Data Collection

Due to the nature of this study, it was necessary to develop an instrument specific to the research questions addressed. The survey instrument utilized in this study was compiled based on a thorough, foundational review of literature. A panel of experts was assembled to consult in the creation of the survey and compile relevant questions to address the study's specific research questions. This panel included two University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Sport Administration professors, both of whom are former intercollegiate student-athletes, and a former Division I Director of Athletics. In addition, a specialist in survey methodology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Odom Institute for Research in Social Science was consulted to facilitate additional validity of the survey instrument. Prior to releasing the survey, a pilot study was conducted to verify that the survey instrument was clear and easy to comprehend.

Each subject received a link to the survey via e-mail. E-mails were sent to the Athletic

Directors at each Division I FBS institutions with instructions to forward on the survey to the

administrator most responsible for conducting student-athlete exit interviews. E-mail addresses

for the Athletic Directors were retrieved from the institutions' athletic websites. Subjects

completed the survey online using a program called Qualtrics. Each question on the survey

pertains to at least one of the five stated research questions. Likert scale questions, multiple

choice, "check all that apply" and open-ended questions were used for the survey.

Data Analysis

Due to a relatively small *N,* the quantitative data collected from the completed surveys

was simply entered into frequency tables and analyzed using descriptive statistics. No statistical

tests were run on the qualitative data because results would have been inconclusive. The

qualitative responses to the surveys were analyzed using a coding system.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Demographics

The 26 survey respondents (20% of the population) represented nine athletic conferences

from 19 different states, which stretched across 5 distinct geographic regions. The number of

intercollegiate sports offered at the institutions represented by the survey respondents had a mean

of 16.48 ranging from 12 to 27. Athletic department total budgets for survey respondents had a

mean of M = $52,080,053 and ranged from slightly over $16,000,000 to over $110,000,000.

Overall, the demographics reflected a representative sample of the population.

Current method of conducting student-athlete exit interviews

Table 1 below displays the responses to the first survey question, which asked

respondents to select which method(s) they are currently using to conduct student-athlete exit

interviews. The question offered an option to select all that applied, in the event that the

institution used more than one method to conduct their student-athlete exit interviews. All 26

respondents answered the question, and at 77%, face-to-face interview was the most commonly

selected answer (n = 20). Over half of the respondents (54%, n = 14) also indicated they use

online surveys to conduct exit interviews and 27% (n = 7) use paper surveys. Focus groups are

the least used method at 8% (n = 2). The survey offered an "Other, please list" option, and one

respondent selected that and indicated their institution used both paper surveys and face-to-face

interviews. Instead of reporting that as "Other," an additional tally was added to each of the respective categories.

Fifteen institutions selected multiple options, meaning their athletic departments use multiple methods to conduct exit interviews with student-athletes. The 3rd and 4th columns of Table 1 indicate the schools that only selected one option. Six of 26 schools (23%) use face-to-face interviews, only three schools (12%) use online surveys only, and nearly 10% of schools (n = 2) use paper surveys online. No institutions use only focus groups to conduct their exit interviews.

Table 1

S-A Exit Interview Method	Total Usage		Stand Alone Usage	
	%	n	%	n
Face-to-Face Interview	77%	20	23%	6
Online Survey	54%	14	12%	3
Paper Survey	27%	7	8%	2
Focus Group	8%	2	0%	0

N = 26

The following four tables display the data from follow up questions to the responses listed from Question 1, "What methods does your academic institution currently use to conduct student-athlete exit interviews?" For every method that a respondent selected, a drop down question appeared, asking them who is responsible for the oversight and carrying out of that specific method. Table 2 displays the data for those respondents who selected that their athletic department uses face-to-face interviews to conduct exit interviews. Similar to the previous question regarding their methods, this question gave respondents the opportunity to check all answers that applied.

Face-to-Face Interviews was the most common method to conduct student-athlete exit interviews ($N = 20$). Table 5 below displays the data for who oversees the interviews at those schools that use the face-to-face interview method (Table 5 shows $N = 19$ because, similar to Table 2, one institution did not receive a follow-up Question 5 because of the way they answered Question 1 with "Other" rather than checking multiple methods). Sport Supervisor/Athletics Senior Staff oversaw the majority of the face-to-face interviews (68%). Both Athletic Director and FARs were the next most-selected, each representing 42% of respondents ($n = 8$). Student-Athlete Services administrator had the next highest percentage, just over one-fourth of respondents (26%). Two institutions selected "Other," one indicating that their Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) has oversight of the face-to-face interview, and the other indicating that the university's Intercollegiate Athletic Committee handles the face-to-face exit interviews. The 4th column in Table 5 shows that 8 institutions have only one person, who is given individual oversight of the face-to-face interviews. Sport Supervisors are again the highest percentage ($n = 5$, 26%). The three other institutions with one person or group conducting face-to-face interviews use the FAR ($n = 1$), Student-Athlete Services administrator ($n = 1$), and Other, which they later listed as Intercollegiate Athletic Committee ($n = 1$).

Table 2

Face-to-Face Interview Oversight	*Total Oversight*		*Individual Oversight*	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Athletic Director	42%	8	0%	0
Sport Supervisor/Athletics Senior Staff	68%	13	26%	5
Faculty Athletics Rep (FAR)	42%	8	5%	1
Faculty Athletic Committee (FAC) member	0%	0	0%	0
Institutional Research	0%	0	0%	0
Faculty member (not on FAC)	0%	0	0%	0
Student-Athlete Services administrator	26%	5	5%	1
Human Resources	5%	1	0%	0
Independent research organization	0%	0	0%	0
Other	11%	2	5%	1

N = 19

Table 3 below displays the data for institutions currently using online surveys, the second most popular method for conducting exit interviews, according to the survey. Thirteen people (*N = 13*) responded to Question 2 about online survey oversight, which is one less than Table 1 indicates use online surveys (This disparity comes from a survey respondent manually writing in two choices, rather than checking all that apply, and thus not receiving any of the follow-up questions 2-5). Sport Supervisor/Athletics Senior Staff was the overwhelmingly most popular choice (69%, *n = 9*). Faculty Athletic Committee member and Student-Athlete Services administrator were selected by nearly one-fourth (23%) of respondents. Athletic Director, Faculty Athletics Rep (FAR), and Other were each selected twice (15%) and Institutional Research once (8%). The 3rd and 4th columns show that just under half of the schools use multiple people to oversee the distribution and analysis of the electronic survey exit interview. Seven of the schools using online surveys only have one person overseeing those surveys, with the individual sport supervisor being the most likely person having the oversight (*n = 4, 31%*).

Table 3

Online Survey Oversight	*Total Oversight*		*Individual Oversight*	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Athletic Director	15%	2	0%	0
Sport Supervisor/Athletics Senior Staff	69%	9	31%	4
Faculty Athletics Rep (FAR)	15%	2	0%	0
Faculty Athletic Committee (FAC) member	23%	3	15%	2
Institutional Research	8%	1	0%	0
Faculty member (not on FAC)	0%	0	0%	0
Student-Athlete Services administrator	23%	3	0%	0
Human Resources	0%	0	0%	0
Independent research organization	0%	0	0%	0
Other	15%	2	8%	1

N = 13

Table 3 below displays the data for the oversight of paper surveys. Check all that apply was once again the option for this question. All 6 respondents (100%) answered that their paper survey exit interviews are handled by Sport Supervisors. One-third (*n* = 2) of the respondents indicated that their school's Athletic Director oversees the paper survey and Student-Athlete Services administrator and FAR were each chosen once (17%). Four of the six institutions that currently use paper surveys to conduct student-athlete exit interviews only use one individual to oversee the surveys, as indicated by Columns 3 and 4 of Table 3. For each of the four schools that do not have multiple people overseeing the paper survey process, it is the specific Sport Supervisor that has total oversight.

Table 4

Paper Survey Oversight	Total Oversight		Individual Oversight	
	%	n	%	n
Athletic Director	33%	2	0%	0
Sport Supervisor/Athletics Senior Staff	100%	6	67%	4
Faculty Athletics Rep (FAR)	17%	1	0%	0
Faculty Athletic Committee (FAC) member	0%	0	0%	0
Institutional Research	0%	0	0%	0
Faculty member (not on FAC)	0%	0	0%	0
Student-Athlete Services administrator	17%	1	0%	0
Human Resources	0%	0	0%	0
Independent research organization	0%	0	0%	0
Other	0%	0	0%	0

N = 6

Table 5 shows who has oversight of the focus group at schools that use that method to conduct their student-athlete exit interviews. Only two respondents indicated that their athletic department uses focus groups to conduct student-athlete exit interviews. In each case, there is one individual, or group of individuals, that is responsible for the oversight of the focus group. One institution selected "Faculty Athletic Committee" and the other selected "Other," specifying that their "Athletic Council" oversee focus groups.

Table 5

Focus Group Oversight	Total Oversight		Individual Oversight	
	%	n	%	n
Athletic Director	0%	0	0%	0
Sport Supervisor/Athletics Senior Staff	0%	0	0%	0
Faculty Athletics Rep (FAR)	0%	0	0%	0
Faculty Athletic Committee (FAC) member	50%	1	50%	1
Institutional Research	0%	0	0%	0
Faculty member (not on FAC)	0%	0	0%	0
Student-Athlete Services administrator	0%	0	0%	0
Human Resources	0%	0	0%	0
Independent research organization	0%	0	0%	0
Other	50%	1	50%	1

N = 2

Reason for choosing current method

Respondents were asked, "Why did your department chose its current method for conducting student-athlete exit interviews?" It then listed five options as well as a sixth option, "Other," which allowed them to manually enter in their reason for choosing the method they use. The most popular response was, "Developed internally by athletic department," with over three-fourths (77%) of respondents selecting it. "Recommended by NCAA" had the next highest percentage (19%). "Recommended by athletic conference" and "Developed internally by academic institution" were both chosen by 15% of respondents ($n = 4$) and "Other" was selected 3 times (12%). The three responses coupled with choosing "Other," included (1) "Best practices from other institutions and historical data," (2) "Genuinely interested in seeking feedback," and (3) "Used by the current AD for over 30 years." As was the case with Tables 2-5, the last two columns of Table 6 represent the institutions that selected only one reason for choosing their current method. Fifty percent of all respondents ($n = 13$) indicated their school's reasoning for choosing their exit interview method was developed internally by the athletic department. Six other institutions indicated a one individual reason for choosing their method of conducting exit interviews: Developed internally by academic institution ($n = 3$), Other – (1) and (3) from above ($n = 2$), and Recommended by athletic conference ($n = 1$).

Table 6

Reason for Choosing Current Method	*Total Reasoning*		*Individual Reasoning*	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Recommended by NCAA	19%	5	0%	0
Recommended by athletic conference	15%	4	4%	1
Recommended by outside consultant	0%	0	0%	0
Developed internally by athletic department	77%	20	50%	13
Developed internally by academic institution	15%	4	12%	3
Other	12%	3	8%	2

N = 26

Satisfaction level with current method

Participants were asked "How satisfied are you with your department's current method(s) of conducting student-athlete exit interviews?" They were asked to respond using a five-point Likert scale: (1) very dissatisfied, (2) dissatisfied, (3) neutral, (4) satisfied, and (5) very satisfied. The data in Table 7 below suggests that the majority of schools are content with their current methods ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.69$). Eighty-five percent of respondents were either satisfied ($n = 13$, 50%) or very satisfied ($n = 9$, 35%) with their institutions current methods. 15% ($n = 4$) respondents were neutral on how they felt towards their current methods. Zero respondents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Table 7

Current Method Satisfaction Level

	%	*n*
Very Dissatisfied (1)	0%	0
Dissatisfied (2)	0%	0
Neutral (3)	15%	4
Satisfied (4)	50%	13
Very Satisfied (5)	35%	9

N = 26
M = 4.19
SD = 0.69

Along with the aforementioned Likert scale question, respondents were asked what about their current methods work well for their athletic department. The format of the question was open-ended response. There were a total of 13 responses to this question. While each response was unique to its own institution, there were a few identifiable themes. One such theme is that the one-on-one interview is impactful. A face-to-face interview allows for candid feedback and a more conversational atmosphere. A number of respondents also commented on how using multiple methods works well. It allows for more in-depth analysis of the student-athletes'

experiences and adds validity to the results. A third pattern that arose was that using multiple people or committee to conduct the interviews worked well for schools. It allowed for academics to have a part in the process, to really uncover the full student-athlete experience. It also avoids putting the burden on one individual to oversee, organize, and analyze the results of every single student-athlete exit interview.

As a follow-up to Question 12, Question 13 then asked respondents how their institutions could improve their current method(s) for conducting student-athlete exit interviews. Responses were again open-ended and there were a total of 11 responses. Once more, a number of distinguishable themes emerged in the responses. The most discussed improvement was the structure of the exit interview itself ($n = 4$). Respondents indicated a desire to increase the amount of face-to-face interaction with student-athletes and administrators to conduct the interviews ($n = 3$). Stressing the importance of the interviews to the student-athletes is also a necessary improvement to the respondents ($n = 2$). Respondents also showed an aspiration to include a wider range of administrators for the exit interviews. Frequency of interviews was also discussed. Adding multiple per year or just once at the end of every academic year could improve the results. And finally respondents expressed a desire to compile and utilize their results more effectively.

Topics being discussed in student-athlete exit interviews

Question 8 asked respondents to list the topics that are being discussed in current student-athlete exit interviews. They were given seven, check-all-that-apply, options, with an additional Other choice, in which they could specifically list the topics discussed that didn't fall under options 1-7. Below in Table 8 are the responses for the twenty-six respondents. All respondents

(100%) indicated that both "Overall athletic experience" and "Academic support provided by the athletic department" were topics discussed in current exit interviews. Twenty-five respondents (96%) also checked that "Overall university experience" and "Professional behavior of coaching staff" were topics discussed in exit interviews. "Athletic development support provided by the athletic department" and "Overall academic experience" were each selected by twenty-four respondents (92%), and Academic support provided by the institution was selected by 81% of respondents ($n = 21$). Six respondents (23%) also selected "Other." While each response that followed "Other" was different, there were a few topics that appeared more than once: "Strength and Conditioning" ($n = 3$), "Sports Medicine" or "Athletic Training" ($n = 3$), and "Compliance" ($n = 2$).

Table 8

Topics Being Discussed in S-A Exit Interviews

	Total Discussion	
	%	*n*
Overall university experience	96%	25
Overall athletic experience	100%	26
Overall academic experience	92%	24
Academic support provided by the institution	81%	21
Academic support provided by the athletic department	100%	26
Athletic development support provided the athletic department	92%	24
Professional behavior of coaching staff	96%	25
Other	23%	6

N = 26

Reporting exit interview data

Question 9 asked, "How does your institution report the data collected from student-athlete exit interviews?" Respondents were given three options: (1) "Written report," (2) "Notes taken and stored, but no results formally written," and (3) "Other, please specify." Sixteen respondents (62%) indicated their institution reported data in the form of "Notes taken and

stored, but no results formally written." "Written report" was selected by half of the respondents

(50%). As shown in column 4 of Table 9, the majority of institutions used only one method. Nine

institutions (35%) report their data only through written report, and nine institutions (35%) take

and store notes without formally writing a report. Four institutions (15%) selected "Other," with

three of those institutions (12%) selecting "Other" exclusively. Each response was unique ($n =$

1), and included: (1) "Specific major concerns will be investigated," (2) "Approved requests,"

(3) "Reports per team and cumulative – looking for consistencies in data to improve future

student experience and development," and (4) "Spreadsheet with comments – no names used,

sport may be listed;" the latter three being the ones used exclusively, without another reporting

method.

Table 9

Method of Reporting Data	Total Reporting		Individual Reporting	
	%	n	%	n
Written report	50%	13	35%	9
Notes taken and stored, but results not formally written	62%	16	35%	9
Other	15%	4	12%	3

N = 26

Utilizing exit interview results

Question 10 asked respondents to indicate how their institutions utilize the results of the

information and data collected from student-athlete exit interviews. A total of 7 options were

listed, including Other with an option to specify. Twenty-four of twenty-six respondents (92%)

indicated that the results were for internal use by the athletic department. Forty-two percent of

respondents ($n = 11$) indicated that results were for internal use by the university. Fifty percent

of respondents ($n = 13$) indicated their results were for internal athletic department use only (as

seen in column 4 of Table 10 below) and only 4% of respondents ($n = 1$) said that their exit

interview results were for internal use by the university only. No respondents indicated that their

data was reported to the NCAA or the respective athletic conference. Also, no respondents

indicated that their results were posted on the institution's or athletic department's websites.

Fifteen percent of respondents ($n = 4$) selected "Other," however, none of them exclusively

chose that option, meaning they utilized results in multiple ways. These responses included

sharing the results with academic committees/councils and coaches.

Table 10

Utilization of Exit Interview Results	*Total Utilization*		*Individual Utilization*	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
For internal use by university	42%	11	4%	1
For internal use by athletic department	92%	24	50%	13
Reported to NCAA	0%	0	0%	0
Reported to athletic conference	0%	0	0%	0
Posted annually on the institution's website	0%	0	0%	0
Posted annually on the athletic department's website	0%	0	0%	0
Other	15%	4	0%	0

N = 26

Question 11 asked respondents to use a 5-point Likert scale to indicate the level to which

the results from student-athlete exit interviews currently guide athletic department decisions. The

options were: (1) Not currently, never has in the past, (2) Not currently, but have in the past, (3)

Yes, to a minimal extent, (4) Yes, to a moderate extent, and (5) Yes, to a great extent. Table 11

below displays the results from Question 11. The average response was 4.00 ($SD = 0.57$).

Eighteen respondents (69%) selected option 4. Options 3 and 5 were each selected by 15% of

respondents ($n = 4$). Zero respondents indicated that they are not currently using exit interview

results to guide their athletic department's decision.

Table 11

Exit Interview Results Level of Guidance for Athletic Department Decisions

	%	*n*
Not currently, never has in the past (1)	0%	0
Not currently, but have in the past (2)	0%	0
Yes, to a minimal extent (3)	15%	4
Yes, to a moderate extent (4)	69%	18
Yes, to a great extent (5)	15%	4

N = 26

M = 4.00

SD = 0.57

Comparisons by geographical region and athletic department budget

After recording the results from each of the survey questions, further analysis was completed to compare the respondents' institutions by their geographic location and total athletic department budget. Five distinct geographic regions were used: (1) Northwest, (2) Southwest, (3) Midwest, (4) Southeast, and (5) Northeast. The following 5 tables show the responses to survey questions 1, 6, 7, 9, and 10. For each of these tables, all 26 respondents' results were reported. Under each column, *N* represents how many institutions belong to that geographic category.

Institutions were also broken down into 4 categories based on their 2013 athletic department budget (Data collected from the 2013-2014 academic year via The Equity in Athletics Data Analysis cutting tool). The ranges for the budgets were: (1) $15,000,000-$29,999,999, (2) $30,000,000-$44,999,999, (3) $45,000,000-$74,999,999 and (4) $75,000,000+. In the following 5 tables below, the budgets are listed in $1,000's and at the bottom of each column, the *N* represents how many institutions fell into that range. For these tables, only 25 institutions were counted because there was no budget data for one of the respondents. Due to a small *N*, the geographic regions and budget ranges are not representative of these regions and

ranges as whole. Also, because of the small sample size, statistical calculations were not conducted to determine significance between independent variables or budget and region.

Tables 12 and 13 below shows the responses to Question 1, "What method(s) does your academic institution currently use to conduct student-athlete exit interviews?" 100% of respondents in the Northwest and Northeast use both face-to-face interviews and online surveys. Midwest institutions had the highest percentage of paper survey usage (43%). Only two regions, Southwest and Southeast, had schools that use focus groups to conduct their exit interviews.

The second budget range ($30,000,000-$44,999,999) is the only group of institutions in which online survey (83%) had a higher percentage than face-to-face interviews (67%). The third range ($45,000,000-$74,999,999) is the only group of institutions to not use paper surveys for conducting student-athlete exit interviews. Only two budget ranges had schools that used focus groups, confirming it as the least popular interview method listed.

Table 12

S-A Exit Interview Method	Northwest	Southwest	Midwest	Southeast	Northeast
Face-to-Face Interview	100%	83%	71%	70%	100%
Online Survey	100%	50%	43%	50%	100%
Paper Survey	0%	17%	43%	30%	0%
Focus Group	0%	15%	0%	10%	0%
N = 26		N = 2	N = 6	N = 7	N = 10	N = 1

Table 13

S-A Exit Interview Method	$15,000 - $29,999	$30,000 - $44,999	$45,000 - $74,999	$75,000 +
Face-to-Face Interview	71%	67%	83%	83%
Online Survey	29%	83%	67%	50%
Paper Survey	29%	17%	0%	50%
Focus Group	0%	17%	0%	17%
N = 25	*N = 7*	*N = 6*	*N = 6*	*N = 6*

*Budget listed in $1,000's

Table 14 and 15 display the results from Question 6. The Northeast region was the only region in which, "developed internally by athletic department" wasn't the response with the highest percentage. 0 regions had institutions that reported that they chose their current method based on a recommendation from an outside consultant. The Southeast schools appear to have the most athletic conference influence because 30% of respondents in this region chose "recommended by athletic" conference, which was the highest of any region.

The $30,000,000-$44,999,999 range was the only group of institutions to have more than 1 school say that their reasoning for using their current method(s) was recommended by the NCAA ($n = 2$). Interestingly, the $75,000,000 group of institutions had the lowest percentage of schools claim their methods were developed internally by the athletic department (50%), but that group had the highest percentage that were developed internally by the academic institution (50%). In fact, of the other nineteen institutions outside the $75,000,000 range, only one school cited that their interview method was developed internally by the academic institution.

Table 14

Reason for Choosing Current Method	Northwest	Southwest	Midwest	Southeast	Northeast
Recommended by NCAA	50%	17%	29%	10%	0%
Recommended by athletic conference	0%	0%	14%	30%	0%
Recommended by outside consultant	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Developed internally by athletic department	100%	83%	86%	70%	0%
Developed internally by academic institution	0%	0%	14%	30%	0%
Other	0%	17%	14%	0%	100%
N = 26	*N = 2*	*N = 6*	*N = 7*	*N = 10*	*N = 1*

Table 15

Reason for Choosing Current Method	$15,000 - $29,999	$30,000 - $44,999	$45,000 - $74,999	$75,000 +
Recommended by NCAA	14%	33%	17%	17%
Recommended by athletic conference	14%	17%	17%	17%
Recommended by outside consultant	0%	0%	0%	0%
Developed internally by athletic department	86%	83%	83%	50%
Developed internally by academic institution	14%	0%	0%	50%
Other	0%	0%	33%	17%
N = 25	*N = 7*	*N = 6*	*N = 6*	*N = 6*

*Budget listed in $1,000's

Question 7 was a Likert-scale question that surveyed respondents' level of satisfaction with their institution's current method(s) of conducting exit interviews. Tables 16 and 17 are frequency tables showing how many respondents in each region and budget range selected each of the five levels of satisfaction. None of the five regions had any respondents select "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied." Below each column is the mean and standard deviation of

the satisfaction level for each region. Midwest respondents had the highest level of satisfaction ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.76$), followed by Southeast ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.63$), Southwest ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.75$), Northwest ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.41$), and Northeast ($M = 4.00$, $SD = $ N/A).

Similar to the geographic regions, none of the four budget groups had any institutions select that they were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with their current methods. The two highest budget ranges had the highest level of satisfaction ($M = 4.33$), which is a greater mean than any of the 5 regions had. The lowest budget range had a mean of 4.14 ($SD = 0.69$) and the $30,000,000-$44,999,999 range had the lowest mean of 4.00 ($SD = 0.89$).

Table 16

Current Method Satisfaction Level	Northwest	Southwest	Midwest	Southeast	Northeast
Very Dissatisfied (1)	0	0	0	0	0
Dissatisfied (2)	0	0	0	0	0
Neutral (3)	1	1	1	1	0
Satisfied (4)	0	3	3	6	1
Very Satisfied (5)	1	2	3	3	0
N = 26	N = 2	N = 6	N = 7	N = 10	N = 1
	M = 4.00	M = 4.17	M = 4.29	M = 4.20	M = 4.00
	SD = 1.41	SD = 0.75	SD = 0.76	SD = 0.63	SD = N/A

Table 17

Current Method Satisfaction Level	$15,000 - $29,999	$30,000 - $44,999	$45,000 - $74,999	$75,000 +
Very Dissatisfied (1)	0	0	0	0
Dissatisfied (2)	0	0	0	0
Neutral (3)	1	2	0	1
Satisfied (4)	4	2	4	2
Very Satisfied (5)	2	2	2	3
N = 25	N = 7	N = 6	N = 6	N = 6
*Budget listed in $1,000's	M = 4.14	M = 4.00	M = 4.33	M = 4.33
	SD = 0.69	SD = 0.89	SD = 0.52	SD = 0.82

The following tables (Table 18 & 19) display the percentage of respondents in each region and budget range to the question asking the method in which their institutions report data collected from student-athlete exit interviews. The Midwest region was the only region in which "notes taken and stored, but results not formally written" had a higher percentage than "written report." Four out of six schools (67%) in the Southwest report their data using written reports, giving that region the highest percentage of written reports.

The $45,000,000-$74,999,999 budget range was the only group to have zero schools select that they report the findings and results of their exit interview data via a formal written report. The highest budget range ($75,000,000+) had the highest percentage of schools write formal reports (67%) and the lowest percentage of schools that take and store notes, but not write anything formal (33%).

Table 18

Method of Reporting Data	Northwest	Southwest	Midwest	Southeast	Northeast
Written report	50%	67%	43%	50%	0%
Notes taken and stored, but results not formally written	50%	33%	86%	40%	0%
Other	50%	0%	0%	20%	100%
N = 26		N = 2	N = 6	N = 7	N = 10	N = 1

Table 19

Method of Reporting Data	$15,000 - $29,999	$30,000 - $44,999	$45,000 - $74,999	$75,000 +
Written report	29%	50%	0%	67%
Notes taken and stored, but results not formally written	71%	33%	83%	33%
Other	14%	17%	33%	17%
N = 25	N = 7	N = 6	N = 6	N = 6

*Budget listed in $1,000's

Finally, Tables 20 & 21 shows how the different regions and budget ranges utilize the results of their student-athlete exit interviews. For each of the five regions, "for internal use by the athletic department" had the highest percentage. The Midwest region was the only region to have zero institutions select that results were for internal use by the university. Zero regions listed that they report their results to the NCAA or their respective athletic conferences. Also, zero regions reported that their institutions annually post exit interview results on their school and athletic department website.

The lowest budget range ($15,000,000-$29,999,999) had the lowest percentage of schools report that results are used for internal use by the university (14%). The second budget range was the only group to not have 100% of its institutions select that exit interview results were utilized for internal use by athletic department. Similar to the five geographic reasons, no schools report their results to the NCAA, their respective athletic conferences, or post them on either their academic institution's website, or their athletic department's website.

Table 20

Utilization of Exit Interview Results	*Northwest*	*Southwest*	*Midwest*	*Southeast*	*Northeast*
For internal use by university	100%	33%	0%	70%	100%
For internal use by athletic department	100%	83%	100%	90%	100%
Reported to NCAA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Reported to athletic conference	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Posted annually on the institution's website	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Posted annually on the athletic department's website	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	50%	17%	14%	10%	0%
N = 26	*N = 2*	*N = 6*	*N = 7*	*N = 10*	*N = 1*

Table 21

Utilization of Exit Interview Results	$15,000 - $29,999	$30,000 - $44,999	$45,000 - $74,999	$75,000 +
For internal use by university	14%	67%	33%	67%
For internal use by athletic department	100%	67%	100%	100%
Reported to NCAA	0%	0%	0%	0%
Reported to athletic conference	0%	0%	0%	0%
Posted annually on the institution's website	0%	0%	0%	0%
Posted annually on the athletic department's website	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	0%	50%	17%	0%
N = 25	*N = 7*	*N = 6*	*N = 6*	*N = 6*

*Budget data listed in 1,000's

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study provides a valuable addition to the current literature on exit interviews and the impact they can have on evaluating the student-athlete experience at Division-I institutions. The findings of this study will be interpreted through the Institutional Isomorphism theory, which states that similar institutions are influenced by one another, and tend to imitate one another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Student-athlete exit interview method

Neal (1989) stated that critical to the success of an exit interview is the structure of the contact with the departing employee. Therefore, one of the most important findings in this study would be to determine what methods are currently being used by institutions to conduct exit interviews with their student-athletes. More than three-fourths of the survey respondents (77%) indicated that their institution currently uses face-to-face interviews as a method for conducting student-athlete exit interviews. Face-to-face interviews can facilitate a climate for student-athletes to share information, which is another critical element to an exit interview's success according to Neal (1989).

Another interesting finding regarding exit survey methods was that over half of the institutions surveyed (58%) currently use multiple methods for conducting student-athlete exit interviews. This data supports Neal's (1989) claim that certain organizations found it more

effective to use a pre-interview survey/questionnaire coupled with a face-to-face interview. The pre-interview survey can serve as guide to lead the face-to-face interview (Neal, 1989).

Exit interview oversight

Based on the findings, sport supervisors and athletics senior staff members were the most popular choice for conducting student-athlete exit interviews (69%). Student-athlete services administrators and members of the Faculty Athletic Committee had the next highest percentage. Athletic Directors, given their oversight and ultimate responsibility for the well-being of student athletes, had a surprisingly low percentage of institutions (15%) report that they participated in exit interviews for student-athletes. Interestingly, zero institutions indicated that coaches had oversight in student-athlete exit interviews.

Studies have shown that there is a great importance surrounding who is actually conducting the interview. A sport supervisor would satisfy Neal's assertion that the person conducting the exit interview must be knowledgeable about the work of the company since sport supervisors are constantly interacting with the team. These individuals are also likely to be perceived as credible and approachable, which are two additional characteristics Neal (1989) sees as essential qualities for interviewers to have.

Neutrality of the interviewer is also a topic that has previously been studied. Giacalone & Duhon (1991) claim that exit interviews should be conducted by someone who is perceived as neutral to the employee. This may explain why zero institutions reported coaches having any involvement with the student-athlete exit interview process. The findings from this study do not, however, support Giacalone & Duhon's claim that staff members from the personnel or human resources department would be the best choice to conduct student-athlete exit interviews. Only

one of twenty-six institutions surveyed (4%) used a human resources staff member to conduct student-athlete exit interviews. And the one respondent that did in fact utilize human resource personnel indicated that the staff member was part of a collection of staff members conducting the interviews. Also, the Faculty Athletics Committee, another seemingly neutral entity, was only selected by three institutions (23%).

Another way to ensure even more neutrality of the interviewer is to use an independent, third-party to conduct the exit interviews. Branham (2005) found that third-party vendors provide the best way to achieve nonbiased results. These independent interviewers possess the critical skills need for successful exit interviews (Branham, 2012). Branham concluded that no matter how much employees trust company representatives, there will always be a few departing employees who do not feel comfortable opening up. Interestingly, zero respondents indicated using an independent research organization to conduct student-athlete exit interviews. It is logical to assume that graduating student-athletes would follow Branham's conclusions, and there may be a number of student-athletes each year that do not completely open up to athletic administrators conducting their exit interviews. It will be interesting to see moving forward if schools follow Branham's advice and seek independent organizations to conduct their student-athlete exit interviews.

Method reasoning

Based on the findings, it is clear that a number of factors contribute to an institution's reasoning for choosing their current methods of conducting exit interviews.

"Developed internally by athletic department" was the most chosen reason (77% of all respondents) for why schools conduct their certain methods. This is interesting because despite

internalizing the development of their own specific methods, the majority of schools are conducting student-athlete exit interviews in similar manners, as seen in Table 1. Institutional isomorphism may be what is causing this to happen. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) stated that organizations (in this case, universities) are increasingly homogenous within given domains. And that without standard procedures in place (as is the case with NCAA Bylaw 6.3.2), mimetic isomorphism can explain the fact that schools are somewhat imitating others' processes for conducting student-athlete exit interviews. However, true isomorphism would be illustrated if respondents all indicated that they each used similar methods. One particular extended response from an individual also demonstrated this phenomenon by stating their institution's reasoning was based on "best practices from other institutions."

Exit interview satisfaction

Based on the findings, the majority of respondents are currently satisfied or very satisfied (85%) with their current methods for conducting exit interviews. However, this statistic was not as telling as the responses we got from two follow-up questions regarding their satisfaction. These responses aligned very well with the findings of previous studies conducted on the topic of exit interviews. One respondent stressed the importance of 1-on-1 interaction for the interviews. Another respondent indicated that the use of multiple interview methods works well for their school, which is very similar to Neal's (1989) findings that a pre- or post-interview survey, coupled with a face-to-face interaction, yields the best results. A third respondent indicated a desire for their school to conduct student-athlete exit interviews multiple times with their athletes; either after every academic year or at the end of each season. The fact that institutions are actively seeking to alter their methods of conducting exit interviews, despite being satisfied,

does not fit with the theory of institutional isomorphism. However, this response does support Giacalone & Knouse's (1997) findings that conducting random, follow-up interviews can allow a company to better gauge responses and may eliminate response bias that may occur at the time of one single interview, distorting responses.

Interviewee response distortion itself is another critical component to student-athlete exit interview. One respondent indicated that they wish that there was more importance placed on exit interviews and stress the importance of proper feedback. This statement confirms Knouse & Beard (1996) findings that a concern with the exit interview process is the focus on obtaining honest and accurate answers from the interviewees. As mentioned previously, Giacalone & Knouse (1989) identified five areas that may lead to interview distortion, many of which are applicable to student-athlete exit interviews. First, interviewees often make personal considerations. For an athlete that may mean that they are not as truthful in responses to an athletics senior staff member because they may believe it will prevent them from receiving sound letters of recommendations or references from those individuals. Second, interviewees may make distortions to protect co-workers. In the case of student-athletes, that means protecting teammates or other student-athletes. Lastly, interviewees may provide erroneous information because they do not have time or incentive to think through how they feel. The findings in this study greatly support that last area. One respondent stated, "The biggest issue is finding a good balance regarding the length of the survey as student-athletes have complained in previous years that the survey is too long." This is an important piece of the exit interview puzzle that this school will have to solve in order to get the most out of their student-athlete exit interviews.

This point was greatly demonstrated by the two exit interview surveys that were attached by two respondents. All survey respondents were given the option to attach any surveys their

athletic departments currently utilize for exit interviews. Despite only receiving two surveys (8%), the vast differences between the surveys illustrated how important finding a balance in survey length truly is. The first survey was extremely in-depth, consisting of over ten pages worth of questions for student-athletes to answer. The second survey was a simple, one-page survey. The first survey almost certainly covers every topic of the student-athlete experience that the institution is concerned with. But it cannot be overlooked that its extreme length may lead to student-athletes rushing through it and answering untruthfully or not in-depth enough. The second survey requires very of the student-athletes' time, but it may not create enough useful data for that institution. This wide gap in survey formatting does not align with isomorphism, and an argument can made that the NCAA or athletic conferences should create guidelines to streamline the processes to ensure accuracy, validity, and metrics for comparisons.

Topics discussed in exit interviews

The specific topics discussed in exit interviews have not been researched as extensively as the format of the interviews themselves. Habbe (1952) and Lefkowitz & Katz (1969) found that topics covered should include the soundness of the selection process, personnel practices, sources of job dissatisfaction, and unsatisfactory supervisors. Giacalone & Duhon (1991) furthered this by stating that topics covered during exit interviews are varied and may be different for every company. Interestingly, that did not appear to be the case in this study. Findings indicated that topics being discussed in student-athlete exit interviews were similar across the board for the institutions surveyed. Both overall athletic experience and academic support provided by the athletic department were selected by 100% of respondents. The topic

with the lowest percentage was academic support provided by the institution, and even that was selected by twenty-one of twenty-six schools surveyed (81%).

It should also be noted that these topics are all being discussed at every institution, despite the high prevalence of respondents claiming that their student-athlete exit interview methods were developed internally by their own athletic departments. This may be explained by Skille's (2009) findings with isomorphism and sport clubs in Norway. The goals of these clubs were the same, causing the clubs to act in certain ways that mimicked the other clubs. Likewise, the goals of Division-I FBS institutions are similar. Therefore, those schools may all want to determine the same things from their student-athletes' experiences, thus causing them to ask the same questions and cover the same topics in exit interviews.

One topic that did not appear in the responses regarding topics discussed in exit interviews, was life after college athletics. According to NCAA data released in 2015, only two Division-I sports, Baseball and Men's Ice Hockey, had a percentage above 2% for the likelihood of student-athletes to make it to the professional level. Therefore, the vast majority of the 460,000 student-athletes competing each year will not continue after their college eligibility has been exhausted. Keeping that in mind, it is perplexing that no respondent mentioned post-sports life in their exit interviews. This also counters recommendations from Neal (1989) regarding the four basic elements every exit interview should include. One element is a separation assistance function. While it's important to use the exit interview as a way to gauge the student-athletes' experiences, if handled by athletic department personnel, the interview should involve discussing the athletes' future plans and how the athletic department can assist in their advancement to the professional world.

Utilization of exit interview results

All (100%) respondents indicated that their institutions currently use the results of student-athlete exit interviews to guide athletic department decisions. With all institutions surveyed using exit interview results, it places an added importance and necessity for accurate and valid results. When you compare that percentage to the fact that 85% of respondents claimed they are either satisfied or very satisfied with their exit interview methods, it appears that schools are currently getting a lot out of their exit interviews. For the 15% of schools who claimed to be neutral in their satisfaction level, yet are still using the results to guide their department decisions, institutional isomorphism may be an explanation. DiMaggio & Powell (1989) suggested that "actors" may occasionally forsake their own best interested in order to follow established logic and mirror the actions of their peers. Thus, even though there may be room for improvement of their methods, because similar schools are utilizing exit interview results, these schools will as well.

Geographic region and athletic budget comparisons

After comparing results from the 26 respondents as a whole, institutions were then broken down into five geographic regions and four athletic department budget ranges. Due to the low N's in each of these categories, no statistical methods were performed, as they would have yielded inconclusive results. However, when examining results of these new categories, a few observations were made that support the institutional isomorphism theory that schools within the same social system or geographic region, act similarly to one another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

First when it comes to exit interview methods, institutions in the Northwest region of the United States used the same two methods for conducting exit interviews. All (100%) institutions in that region use both face-to face interviews and online surveys, while 0% use paper surveys or focus groups. The schools in the third budget range, $45,000,000-$74,999,999, had similar responses as well: 83% use face-to-face interviews, 67% use online surveys, and 0% use the other two methods.

Across all geographic regions, the major reason for choosing the schools' current methods remained the same. Developed internally by the athletic department was selected by 70% or more of the schools in every geographic region (the only region it wasn't, was the Northeast, but that is because one institution chose "Other" instead. The respondent then listed, however, that the method was developed and used by the former athletic director, qualifying it to fit in that similar category). The only budget range to have a difference in reason for choosing their current method was the highest budget, $75,000,000. These institutions with the largest athletic department budget had more academic institution input in their methods. Fifty percent of respondents in that category (36% more than any other category) indicated that their methods were also developed internally by the academic institution. This collaboration between academic institution and athletic department to develop the method may explain why the schools in the $75,000,000 budget range to also have the highest level of satisfaction ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.52$).

Conclusion

Student-athlete exit interviews are an important tool for the success and direction of Division-I FBS athletic departments. They allow for athletic directors administrators to gain insight into the student-athlete experience at their university, by going directly to the source.

Despite a high level of internalization of results and methods, similar universities are discussing the same topics, while using identical methods. However, institutions should consistently evaluate their current methods for conducting these exit interviews, in order to ensure they are receiving the best information to guide future decision making. Outsourcing exit interviews to a third-party may become a trend for athletic departments, as research shows that skilled, independent interviewers provide for the best return on results. It will also be interesting to see if the NCAA expands on its bylaw and creates a way to standardized exit interview methods across the board for institutions, thus allowing for a more standard metric to compare schools' effectiveness of processes.

Future Studies

There are many related studies that would make excellent follow-up studies to this thesis. The most logical would be to survey institutions at differing NCAA divisions and compare the results. This study focused strictly on the highest level of the NCAA, Division I-FBS. It would be interesting to compare current exit interview practices at Division I-FCS, Division II, and Division III to these results, especially considering those lower divisions promote a more active mission to developing the overall student and enhancing the college experience. The findings in a study that analyzes those lower divisions may be useful for Division I institutions looking to focus on improving student-athlete experience because it allows them to not just make comparisons with like peers.

Another important follow-up study would be to further examine how the results of the exit interviews are impacting athletic departments' decision making, and whether they are

improving the student-athlete experience. Also, whether exit interviews, similar to SAAC, are a good vehicle for providing student-athletes with a "voice" to express their views and opinions.

Investigating student-athlete exit interviews from the student-athletes' perspective may also be a compelling study. It may provide feedback on how to best reach student-athletes so that there is no answer distortion. The findings may also show what student-athletes feel they should be getting out of their university experience. It may help determine the services provided to student-athletes during their time at an institution and allow for better post-collegiate athletics experiences for student-athletes.

It would also be interesting to research the differences in responses for student-athletes who complete exit interviews immediately after they have exhausted their eligibility versus student-athletes who are 5, 10, and 20 years removed from college. Instant feedback is extremely useful for schools, but student-athletes may not see the whole picture immediately. Combining their experience in their four years as a student-athlete with experience in the professional world may allow for more profound feedback.

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