SERVICE ACE? WHICH ACADEMIC SERVICES AND RESOURCES TRULY BENEFIT STUDENT ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT
As all students are guaranteed equal opportunity in education by the Fourteenth Amendment of the constitution and interpretations from the 1954 Supreme Court Decision, Brown versus the Board of Education, disadvantaged students need support to have the capacity to take advantage of the equal opportunity. In this study, student athletes are considered a disadvantaged population due to the constant conflicts between athletic and academic commitments. Consequently, collegiate institutions have a responsibility to provide educational equal opportunity for their student-athletes. The major objective of the study is to determine the relationship between student-athlete graduation rates and a set of variables (services, administrative support, staff, budget, and space) which exist at NCAA Division-I programs, which are members of the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletes (N4A). After a multiple regression test was run on the variables, with the student-athlete graduation rate as the dependent variable, the researcher found an inverse relationship between services offered by institutions in the study and the student-athlete graduation rate. This finding leads the researcher to examine the student-athletes' academic preparation. Those student athletes with higher high school grade point averages posted higher college graduation rates. The data showed that summer school before the beginning of the freshmen year of college is statistically significant and has a positive impact on student-athlete graduation rates.

INTRODUCTION
Student athletes accept an immediate quandary when they accept an athletic scholarship to financially support their college education. Students who accept an athletic scholarship are required to miss classes, exams, and, in the most extreme cases, choose a major that accommodates their athletic schedule.

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Sack and Stavrowsky (1998) argue that “the granting of athletics scholarships subverts educational values in two fundamental ways” (p. 95). Since athletic skill is the primary factor for granting the scholarship, some academically under-prepared student athletes “will have neither the motivation nor the aptitude to perform college level work” (p. 95). Second, once student athletes sign their letter of intent, coaches and athletic administration have an “…inordinate control over [their] lives…” (p. 95). When athletic responsibilities clash with academic demands, student athletes are often pressured to meet “the demands of coaches who make key decisions [annually] about scholarship renewal.” Also, coaches’ job security is primarily based on their win/loss record, not student athletes’ academic successes. Coaches pressure student athletes to produce athletically just as alumni and boosters pressure coaches to produce winning seasons. As the student athlete is the least empowered figure in this competitive cycle, there is little wonder as to why some student athletes might pay more attention to play books than textbooks.

Further, student athletes at any Division-I institution confront five athletic activity areas, which present obstacles to their education. Division-I student athletes are required to practice for athletic competition. Though the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) limits practice time to a maximum of 20 hours per week, this practice time can still interfere with class time. Also, Division-I student athletes are required to travel away from campus during class time to athletically compete with other schools. In addition to dealing with travel times and competition schedules, Division-I student athletes spend many hours reviewing competition film, visiting an athletic trainer for injuries, and participating in a weight lifting regiment. Time spent in these activities is time not spent preparing for class. When these five factors and pressure from coaches are considered together, it can be concluded that the activities required of student athletes to keep their scholarship and the pressurized environment in which they function might interfere with the student-athletes’ equal opportunity in education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Equal opportunity in education is a requirement for success that was established in the 1954 landmark decision of Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, based on a clause of the Fourteenth Amendment that guarantees all students equal opportunity in education. The Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment in the Brown case guarantees all students equal opportunity in education.

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State
deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law (Article XIV).

This portion of the Fourteenth Amendment specifically mandates equal protection under the law for all U.S. citizens. The equal protection clause has been interpreted to guarantee equal opportunity in education to all. The 1954 Brown versus Board of Education decision overturned the “separate but equal” decision from the 1896 Plessy versus Ferguson Case. The decision in the 1954 Brown Case determined that separate facilities did not create the conditions for equal opportunity in education for African-American students. An excerpt from the Supreme Court Case, Brown versus Board, documents that equal opportunity is directly linked to education:

In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms (Brown v. Board, 1954).

The court concluded that separate facilities do not provide equal opportunity in education because separate facilities do not provide equal protection under the law. In short, colleges and universities that receive any federal funds must provide equal opportunity in education for all of their students. As all students are guaranteed equal opportunity in education, disadvantaged students need support to have the capacity to take advantage of the equal opportunity.

After considering the 1954 Brown v. Board decision, Mithaug, author of Equal Opportunity Theory (1996), develops Equal Opportunity Theory. He writes, “Equal opportunity postulates two regulatory interventions” (Mithaug, 1996, p. 38). The first intervention builds individual capacity to self determine—that is, make choices. The second intervention builds opportunity by decreasing obstacles. These interventions in combination increase the possibility of those people with fewer prospects to engage in opportunity. Therefore, a society or institution that practices Equal Opportunity Theory provides the conditions in which any person can experience self-determination. A society or institution that practices Equal Opportunity Theory would build the disadvantaged population’s capacity to engage in opportunity by removing obstacles and creating options for disadvantaged populations.

Mithaug’s Equal Opportunity Theory provides the theoretical foundation which justifies student-athlete support service programs. Student Athlete Support Service Programs (SASSPs) must assist student athletes to have the capacity to engage in opportunity. Second, SASSPs must help student athletes to overcome obstacles created by participation in intercollegiate athletics. SASSPs should build student-athlete capacity and help them to overcome obstacles through services provided to them.
HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Some colleges and universities have not always been concerned with their student athletes’ graduation rates. Therefore, some of the best college athletes were often recruited without regard for their successful education. In the 1960s and 1970s, many collegiate institutions were more concerned with the college athletes’ eligibility to compete within the rules of the college sport governing organizations, not graduation. Instead of providing services to help student athletes earn their education, some institutions permitted fraudulent services that resulted in unethical academic practices such as transcript tampering. For example, the FBI found that a New Mexico basketball coach made arrangements to forge a basketball player’s transcript to get this athlete admitted into college (Lapchick, 1991, p. 209). At some schools, services were in place to enroll student athletes in easy classes with cooperative professors who would pass them. Walter Byers, former NCAA Executive Director (1951–1987) and author of Unsportsmanlike Conduct argues:

A more balanced view of educational exploitation is that the college admissions office and faculty exploit the athlete by taking on board a poorly prepared student and providing to him or her course work of minimum quality so the athlete can meet minimum eligibility standards (Byers, 1995, p. 299).

Furthermore, Dr. Raney and Dr. Knapp, two professors at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, discovered that most basketball players at their institution enrolled in an unusual number of physical education activity courses. While the basketball team had transcripts riddled with Ds and Fs, the higher grades in the physical education activity courses kept the players eligible to compete (Knapp & Raney, 1987, p. 11).

Academic scandals during the late 1970s and the 1980s revealed academic indiscretions instead of credible academic support services for student athletes. At the University of Southern California, 19 football players enrolled in a speech course did not attend class. In 1978, the University of Southern California track star, Billy Mullins, forfeited an NCAA title because of credits simultaneously earned at four widely separated junior colleges. Arizona State forfeited five football games when it was revealed that players received credit for courses they were enrolled in but did not submit work or attend (Lapchick, 1991, p. 213).

In some cases, student athletes are coddled and do not make basic decisions when it pertains to their academic progress. Adler and Adler (1991) report on such instances in their sociological study of a southwestern collegiate athletic team.

The assistant coach in charge of academics enrolled players into their college, major, and their classes. He was responsible for making sure they were taking courses that fulfilled their distribution as well as major requirements, and he took care of the mechanics of enrolling them in classes. The players,
uninvolved in academic decision making, had little direct contact with professors ... academic counselors, or academic administrators. As a result, the players did not learn how to handle these academic matters, nor—in many cases—were they interested in doing so ... they took it for granted that this was the way things were (p. 130).

These types of services hinder the student athlete’s development. They fail to take personal responsibility nor see the importance of developing independence in non-athletic settings. In short, if a student athlete is coddled in a fashion similar to the aforementioned scenario, they in turn are infantilized and rendered ineffective in their day-to-day lives without the assistance of coaches who typically offer assistance only while the student athlete is eligible to participate in intercollegiate athletics.

On the heels of these scandals, in 1991 Congress passed the “Needs to Know Bill,” that mandates that collegiate institutions publish their student-athlete graduation rates. Politically, institutions have become increasingly concerned with student-athletes’ graduation rates being published. Since the “Needs to Know Bill,” more schools have become anxious with the publicity associated with student athletes’ graduation rates.

However, many schools still commit NCAA academic violations. In 1996, the NCAA Committee on Infractions found that a “prospective student athlete received fraudulent academic credit and that the assistant coach was aware that the student athlete did not complete the course work” (Reith, 1996, p. 1).

Michigan State received a four year probation from the NCAA for academic infractions committed by academic advisors for student athletes.

The athletics student advisor violated the principles of ethical conduct when he assisted three student athletes in obtaining academic credit or grade changes need to be eligible .... In one case, he offered improper inducement to a faculty member and a tutor to assist a student athlete. When two instructors first refused to change grades, he arranged for submission of fraudulent medical information, on the basis of which the instructors made special arrangements for the student athlete to submit late course work and examinations. One of the faculty members was induced to backdate a university grade change form so that it would appear [that] the student athletes had met Big Ten Conference satisfactory progress rules. The student advisor also assisted the student athletes in submitting fraudulent papers” (Reith, 1996, p. 1).

In 1997, Grambling State University received a two year probation for academic infractions. During the 1993-94 and 1995-96 seasons, a women’s basketball player at Grambling was allowed to “practice, participate, and receive financial aid … after her ACT test scores had been invalidated” (Renfro, 1997, p. 1).

The University of Texas at El Paso received a five year probation for several NCAA infractions in 1997. During the fall of 1994 and the fall of 1996, 27 student athletes in various sports “were enrolled in fewer than 12 credit hours and were
ineligible to participate in intercollegiate athletics competition," yet they traveled from campus, with expenses paid, to compete in athletic contests (Renfro, 1997, p. 2). Through 1992–1996, the institution "certified the eligibility of numerous student athletes using a method to calculate grade point averages that was contrary to NCAA legislation and institutional policy" (p. 2). Further, the institution allowed at least 17 student athletes to compete while they "had not completed the required percentage of credit hours" to be eligible (p. 2).

ACADEMIC SERVICES AND STUDENT ATHLETES

In regard to academic services, Tinto (1993) writes that students find a connection to their collegiate institutions through counseling and advising services. he argued that:

The utilization of counseling and advising programs during the early part of the student career underlines the fact, evident to most counselors, that not all students enter college with clearly held goals. . . . Absence of goal clarity often leads students to call into question the reasons for their continued presence on campus. In situations where the rewards for participation are minimal, it may lead students to withdraw from college. . . . [Advising and counseling services] tend to be most effective when seen to be an integral and positive of the educational process which all students are expected to experience. When represented in a negative fashion, for instance when advising and counseling are required only for persons in trouble, they are considerably less effective (p. 152).

Though Tinto is speaking about the general student population, student athletes must be especially careful in planning their academic career as they must consider conflicts with athletic competition and NCAA eligibility requirements when they select classes.

Klepper and McGinty (1987) also document the significance of student services in helping students successfully complete college. Students need guidance through academic advising to achieve academic successes (pp. 7–8). In considering factors that contribute to attrition, students attribute poor academic advising and boredom with courses as the leading reasons for dropping out (Beal & Noel, 1980, p. 8).

Despite the importance of proper academic advising to help any student make sound academic decisions, student athletes have historically received academic advising that keeps them eligible to compete, not to earn a viable degree (Wiggins, 1991, p. 172). Historically, many student athletes who were admitted for revenue sport participation exhausted their eligibility, never to graduate with a degree. For example, in the Fall of 1960, the University of Iowa recruited football standout Connie Hawkins. Despite his athletic contributions, he faced social alienation in a hostile campus environment, performed poorly in his classes, and
was then forced out of school in 1961 (Wiggins, 1991, p. 172). Prior to Hawkins, Jesse Owens, the famous Olympian, never received his degree from The Ohio State University. Owens had been advised against taking academically demanding courses that would lead to a degree, primarily to keep him eligible (Wiggins, 1991, p. 170). At various colleges and universities across the country, this erroneous advisement practice continued into the 1970s. A number of student athletes were funneled into courses taught by athletic department personnel and advised to take courses from professors who had reputations for giving preferential treatment to student athletes. Unfortunately, the academic advising practice that only keeps student athletes academically eligible to participate in sports also denies them the opportunity to capitalize on collegiate educational opportunities.

In an article entitled “Student Services for Intercollegiate Athletics,” Gunn and Eddy (1989) write that institutions must commit to providing effective services if they want to increase their student-athlete graduation rates. Gunn and Eddy recommend that institutions create effective student-athlete support service programs (SASSPs). SASSPs must recognize that student-athletes are a unique population. Unlike other students, student athletes have different time constraints and energy demands. Further, student athletes endure a “role conflict” between academics and athletics for student athletes; their role as an athlete often conflicts with their role as a student. Specially trained personnel who are sensitive to student athletes’ issues and needs should be in place to help student athletes through college. These personnel should have specialized training sensitive to athletic systems, academic systems, and the role conflict student athletes endure when trying to progress through these systems. The SASSPs, with the support of their institution, have a responsibility to create the necessary climate of encouragement and support which is produced through services specifically for student athletes. Thus, services tailored for student athletes should increase student-athlete graduation rates (Gunn & Eddy, 1989, pp. 36–44). Gunn and Eddy (1989) recommend the following services designed specifically for student-athletes: orientation, academic advising and registration, academic progress reports, individual conferences with student-athletes, workshops, study hall, and peer mentors to guide student athletes through college. Further, Gunn and Eddy recommend that SASSPs must have presidential support at their respective universities to be successful. The SASSP department head should report directly to a Chief University Officer who in turn reports directly to the university president (pp. 36–44).

In 1991, the Knight Commission, comprised of 80 experts of athletic administrators, coaches, student athletes, and leaders of professional sport leagues, spent a year developing nationwide recommendations for intercollegiate athletics. The Knight Commission (1991) concurs with Gunn and Eddy and further recommends that the university president must have a full understanding of athletics to support the SASSP.

In summary, SASSPs and their parent institutions should understand that student athletes are a unique population. In turn, SASSPs need specially trained personnel,
services, and university presidential support to effectively create equal opportunity for student athletes. As a result of some institutions following these recommendations to provide better academic services for student athletes, Gunn and Eddy (1989) report that the College Football Association has speculatively suggested that an increase in student-athlete services at colleges might be the reason for the national increase in student-athlete graduation rates.

RATIONALE FOR STUDYING THIS PROBLEM

The rationale for studying this issue is the need to determine if institutions are meeting their responsibility to provide educational equal opportunity for their student athletes. The background discussion documents the fact that academically fraudulent services have been provided for student athletes. Though student athletes were academically eligible to participate in intercollegiate sports, academically fraudulent services did not help a number of student athletes earn a proper education. As academic scandals became more publicized in the 1980s, academic services for student athletes began to grow and emerge in university communities. However, as student-athlete support service programs (SASSPs) emerged, there were no systematic guidelines for budgets, personnel, or the services for appropriately supporting student athletes.

Student-athlete support service programs across the nation currently have many different organizational structures, resources, and services. Many professionals in the field currently speculate on the various support systems and services needed to provide equal educational opportunity for their student-athlete populations. Further it has not been determined what personnel and space are required to operate SASSPs. Therefore, this study examines the field of student-athlete support service programs and the resources required to operate the program.

SIGNIFICANCE TO STUDENT-ATHLETE GRADUATION

As evinced during the research for this study, there is limited research that examines an institution’s investment in developing services for student athletes. Consequently, the professional field does not have empirically supported information associated with institutional conditions that provide equal opportunity in education for its student athletes.

Student service professionals who serve other disadvantaged populations might tailor this study to conduct a comprehensive examination of other student service programs. What are the resources needed to yield higher graduation rates for minority students, student with learning disabilities, and international students? Concisely, what resources should be in place to support student populations whose experiences are incongruent with the mainstream university culture? Little work has been done that links the importance of academic support services for
disadvantaged groups and the resource inputs that are required to implement services. Second, little work has been done which considers the student-athlete population as a disadvantaged group that requires special academic support.

With shrinking enrollments and budget cuts, resource availability has a serious impact on an institution's resource allocation to its service programs. Therefore, this study should provide information that administrators can use to develop and sustain their student-athlete support service programs.

THE STUDY

The major focus of the study is to determine the relationship between student-athlete graduation rates and a set of variables (services, administrative support, and resource support to student-athlete support service) that exist at NCAA Division-I programs. This study will also examine ten variables in a step-wise regression that might have an impact on the student-athlete graduation rate. Since no comprehensive documentation specifically addresses what services reconstitute the conditions for equal opportunity for education for student athletes, there was no instrument that surveys administrators in regard to services, administrative support, and the resource allocation required to provide such services for student athletes. Therefore, I specifically designed this instrument as I could find no other to investigate services for student athletes. The instrument designed for this study endured many revisions and was reviewed by a panel of experts in the field of academic advising and support for student athletes. I asked a panel of experts to review the instrument to establish content validity. The panel includes a vice president, athletic academic coordinators, directors of SASSPs, a journal editor, and researchers who have developed their own instruments.

Segments one through five of the instrument collected data that was used to establish correlation between information and the graduation rate. The final section, segment six, uses a Likert scale to gather data in relation to feedback to the student-athlete support program from various university administrators, and the potential support student-athlete support programs receive from the institution. The instrument also collected data on the following: institutional demographics, information on services, academic monitoring, personnel, physical space, fiscal support, and administrative support.

While the instrument was very lengthy, the panel of experts agreed that this is an important study which has never been conducted for this professional field.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Setting

The study focuses on the Division-I institutions of higher learning with intercollegiate athletics that were active members of the National Association of
Academic Advisors for Athletes (N4A) at the time of the study in the Fall 1997. Division-I institutions were chosen because these institutions have a commitment to compete at the highest level of amateur athletics in higher education. Division-I institutions commit to more intercollegiate athletic competition than Division-II and Division-III schools and commit more money to their athletic programs by providing a minimum of 14 different sports for intercollegiate athletic competition.

Organizational structure: Student-athlete support service programs have a variety of reporting structures. Student-athlete support service programs might be organizationally structured within an athletic department, academic affairs, or student affairs. Also, some programs are divided into women’s sports only, men’s sports only, or combined sports. A student-athlete support program, depending on the number of athletic teams at each institution, can serve 200 to over 1,000 student athletes.

Population

The population is the 146 primary department heads of student-athlete support service programs at Division-I NCAA institutions who were active in the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletes (N4A) at the time of the study in the Fall of 1997. N4A member institutions, through their participation in this national organization, have demonstrated a commitment to student athletes’ development as athletes, students, and productive adults. As I do not discount the potential commitment to student athletes of any non-N4A member, this survey was administered to those who have made the commitment to meet at N4A regional and national meetings to discuss issues and regulations that will better serve collegiate student athletes.

The study focused on the primary department head in student-athlete support service programs. Respective primary department heads might have a title such as Assistant Athletic Director, Academic Coordinator, or Director of Student-Athlete Support Services. These different titles relate to the different organizational structures for these programs. As a result of these differences, some primary department heads have a great deal of autonomy including signature authority over a budget, or ability to make decisions without continuous review. However, some department heads have little latitude in their day-to-day operational planning. Nonetheless, this population was chosen because they should have the easiest access to fiscal information and experiential and educational information relative to their personnel. Further, the primary department heads would also have the best grasp on the importance of space and best understand how binding his or her decisions are.

Sample

The sample surveyed is the population of primary department heads of the 146 Division-I institutions that were also financially active members of the N4A. The final count yielded 91 participants who returned their surveys. Ninety-one participants represent 62.3 percent of the sample, where \( n = 146 \). Further, the 91
respondents represent 30.1 percent of all NCAA Division-I institutions at the time of the study.

**Data Variables**

**Dependent Variable**

*Student Athlete Graduation Rates* – The instrument requests graduation rate data for 1993, 1994, and 1995 as the key to this study. I specifically requested graduation rates of three different years in case a single year might be an anomaly. For example, an institution that typically posts a 70 percent student-athlete graduation rate, might experience a dip in their statistics which might be related to coaching turnovers or the elimination of a sport from an athletic program, prompting those student athletes to seek athletic participation at another institution. While these circumstances will result in lower graduation rates, these potential statistical discrepancies could be attributable to other factors beyond the control of the student-athlete support service program.

**Independent Variables**

*Services* – The instrument collected service data in regard to one-on-one counseling for student athletes, academic monitoring, tutoring, study hall, and access to computer labs. Further, institutions might target four specific sub-groups in their student athlete populations: all student athletes; those considered academically at-risk; freshmen student athletes; and the sports that were the focus of an extensive 1988 study. The National Study of Intercollegiate Athletics focuses on men’s basketball, men’s football, and women’s basketball because “they spend more time in their sport during the season than they spend preparing for and attending class combined” (Center, 1988, p. 25). Further, Pascarella et al. found that “compared to male non athletes, male intercollegiate football and basketball players had significantly lower levels of writing skills, reading comprehension, and critical thinking” (Pascarella et al., 1999, p. 21). The National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletes (N4A) considers men’s track and women’s track respectively as an “at-risk” sport because these athletes compete throughout the entire academic year and often after the academic year is complete. Men’s and women’s track student athletes are continuously competing. Subsequently, they invariably take time away from their schoolwork, which adversely affects their academic performance. The data for services is directly related to an institution’s commitment to focus on the four aforementioned target populations.

*Staff* – The instrument solicits information about the quantity of professional staff, part time staff, and student staff. A larger staff can provide more and constant individual attention for their student athletes. In turn, this attention, which would provide more academic guidance, creates a better service for student athletes. Further, the instrument surveys specific staff members assigned to
special populations such as student athletes with learning disabilities, football, basketball, and track.

Space – I asked respondents about their perception of their space. Obtaining the square footage of space for each institution would have been difficult. A SASSP with more square footage can provide and directly supervise one-on-one tutoring, study groups, academic skills workshops, and group or individual academic advising sessions. Also, each school has different demands on space and different populations to serve. Therefore, instead of attempting to quantify the many possible answers regarding space, this grid provides a more consistent method by which to collect data.

Budget – The instrument measured institutional support in the form of budgetary support from the university or college to the student-athlete support service program. Also, this segment factored in the impact of the NCAA Enhancement Funds. While an institution might earn money from its revenue-producing student athletes, that same institution might allow the customary NCAA grant funds to each Division-I institution. The Enhancement Funds finance the services required to academically support that institution’s student athletes. These questions address the source of fiscal support and the authority primary department heads have over their budgets.

Administrative Support – The instrument used a Likert scale to establish the respondents’ perceptions about their respective institutions’ overall administrative support of the student-athlete support service program. This segment on administrative support is the only variable that relies on subjective opinions. Nonetheless, professional perspectives provide data that relate to administrative support for student-athlete support service programs. This segment is important because while an institution might have resources, if the primary department heads do not have administrative support, they cannot implement proper service. The remainder of the segment is attempting to determine who is trying to exert their influence on the student-athlete support service program and how this influence will affect a program’s ability to provide support services.

A multiple regression with the dependent variable as the student-athlete graduation rate, and the aforementioned independent variables, produced the results shown in see Table 1.

There is no significant relationship between student-athlete graduation rates and the administrative support, budget, staff, or space. These data show that the p-value for staff, space, budget, and administrative support are not in the rejection range, that is not beyond the .05 level. The $R^2$ for this regression shows a weak relationship with a score of .126.

However, these data reveal an inverse relationship between the services offered to student athletes and the student-athlete graduation rate. The score for services, .0048, is in the rejection range. However, the negative sign indicates an
Table 1. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Student-Athlete Graduation Rates (N = 91)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Std. coeff.</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>-.342</td>
<td>-2.908</td>
<td>.0048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>-.106</td>
<td>-0.685</td>
<td>.4953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.334</td>
<td>.7390</td>
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<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>1.417</td>
<td>.1607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin. support</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>1.017</td>
<td>.3126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An inverse relationship between services and the student-athlete graduation rate. While I admit this is at first glance a puzzling finding, the data reveal that the schools in this study which offer more services often have a lower student-athlete graduation rate. The data showed that an institution posts a higher score in the service segment of the instrument by focusing on the five at-risk sports: football, men’s basketball, women’s basketball, men’s track, and women’s track.

Step-Wise Regression Test with Ten Independent Variables

After collecting data, I also conducted a step-wise regression with ten independent variables to reexamine which variables have an impact on the general student-athlete graduation rates. The following are the ten independent variables in the step-wise regression:

1. Service
2. Budget
3. Staff
4. Space
5. Administrative support
6. The high school grade point average of those student athletes who attend private colleges versus the high school grade point average of those student athletes who attend public colleges.
7. Summer school for incoming freshmen
8. Athletic rank
9. The primary department head’s perception for successfully providing service to student-athlete
10. Participation in Division I-A competition (Division I-A is more demanding and time consuming than I-AA, or I-AAA competition)
In addition to the five variables used in the multiple regression test (service, budget, space, staff, and administrative support), I added five additional independent variables added for the step-wise regression test. While the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) might provide an interesting variable for examination, SATs were not included in the original data collection as I did not anticipate my investigation of services to lead back to student athletes’ academic preparedness.

Additional Independent Variables

High School Grade Point Average – The high school grade point average of those student athletes who attend private colleges versus the high school grade point average of those student athletes who attend public colleges. This variable determines the student athlete’s academic preparedness before coming to college.

Summer School – While colleges often do not have a direct impact on the high school academic preparation, institutions can have an impact on pre-college academic preparation though summer school before the freshmen year. I created an indicator binary variable for colleges that have summer school for their freshmen student athletes before college. Colleges who provided this service received a “1,” schools that did not provide summer school for freshmen before college student-athletes received “0.”

Athletic Rank – The instrument asked each participant about the success of the athletic program. Some schools have a great deal of post season play, tournaments, bowl games, and championships that require more time of their student athletes. The extra time required for post season play, which can create a more extreme conflict with academic pursuits, might have an impact on the student-athlete graduation rates.

Primary Department Head’s Perception to Provide Service – As the primary department head should presumably direct the programs and services of the office, I assumed that the primary department head would professionally ascertain the SASSPs success for serving students. If the department head does not feel comfortable with the program, it might be assumed that the program is performing poorly.

Division I-A Participation over Division I-AA or Division I-AAA Participation – Division I-A schools commit more time, money, and resources to compete at the highest level of amateur athletics. These schools also have more visibility through televisions, radio, and other public venues which are stressful and distracting to the student athletes who compete. Further, Division I-A schools tend to travel more and have more difficult competition schedules. Therefore, I consider that participation in Division I-A sports might have an impact on the student-athlete graduation rates because that level of amateur athletics could potentially create more conflicts with academic endeavors. By adding a binary indicator variable (that is a Division I-A school is awarded a “1” and schools that are not Division I-A (Division I-AA, and Division I-AAA) are awarded a “0”), I was able to develop a variable to add to the step-wise regression.
Table 2. Step-Wise Regression Summary: Variables in Model-Student-Athlete Graduation Rates vs. Ten Independent Variables (N = 91)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Regression coefficient</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>Standard coeff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>-.133</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>-.286</td>
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<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>5.684E-5</td>
<td>1.621E-5</td>
<td>.344</td>
</tr>
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<td>Private/Public</td>
<td>17.132</td>
<td>2.984</td>
<td>.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer School</td>
<td>6.640</td>
<td>2.998</td>
<td>.202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis on Step-Wise Regression

With the many different variables collected by the survey, I administered a step-wise regression in order to determine which variables are statistically significant in relation to the student-athlete graduation rates.

A step-wise multiple regression analysis indicated that services, budget, the impact of high school GPAs for student athletes who enter private college versus high school GPAs for student athletes who enter public college, and summer school for incoming freshmen are statistically significant variables in relation to student-athlete graduation rates. The step-wise multiple regression analysis also revealed that athletic rank, staff, space, opinion, administrative support, and participation in Division I-A competition do not have a significant impact on the student-athlete graduation rates (see Table 2).

The standard coefficient, which shows the strength of each variable in the model, indicates the strongest relationship between private college student athletes and the student-athlete graduation rate. Those who go to private college have the strongest academic preparation in high school and the highest graduation rates. Summer school before the freshmen year of college is a statistically significant factor that positively affects student-athlete graduation rates. Colleges that offer summer school before the freshmen year are providing a service statistically proven to help institutions meet their responsibility to reconstitute equal opportunity in education for their student athletes. Further, this step-wise regression indicates an inverse relationship between the services offered and the student-athlete graduation rate, as indicated by the negative standard coefficient with the services variable. This finding is consistent with the inverse relationship between services and student-athlete graduation rates found in the multiple regression test.
IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

My interpretation of these results is that an institution does not recreate equal opportunity for student athletes by providing more services once a student athlete begins the freshman year. The inverse relationship indicates that institutions are responding to the admission of less academically prepared student athletes with an increase in support services. In short, schools that admit student athletes with weaker academic profiles are providing more academic support services to help these under-prepared student athletes succeed in college. This study reveals that summer school before the freshman year is the service that statistically provides the most academic success for student athletes. Institutions with lower student-athlete graduation rates score higher in the services segment of the survey.

Further, the resources, such as budget, human resources, and space, did not prove to be statistically significant variables in the multiple regression nor the step-wise regression test. Extra resources alone do not have a positive impact on student-athlete graduation rates. However, if such resources are allocated to support academic preparation such as summer school, the data suggest that such resources could have a positive impact on student-athlete graduation rates.

While I initially hypothesized that the obstacles preventing higher student-athlete graduation rates were related to poor services, given these data I would claim that the major obstacle preventing higher student-athlete graduation rates is the student athletes’ poor academic preparation. In order for institutions to meet their responsibility to provide equal opportunity for education in student athletes, these institutions need to address the poor academic preparation of some student athletes. While the original focus of this study examined services for student athletes, the need for academic preparation before the collegiate athletic career emerged as the salient issue.

However, the academic preparation issue has many controversial underpinnings, which include access to collegiate education for those student athletes who are poorly prepared. A majority of poorly prepared students tend to be from minority groups or lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As expected, the preceding data reveal that student athletes who attend private college enter college with stronger high school quality point averages than those student athletes who attend public college. These data suggest that high school academic preparation is a key factor to higher collegiate graduation rates for student athletes. Further, once the NCAA mandated Proposition 48, which imposed stricter minimum high school GPAs and SAT scores for student athletes to compete, student athletes’ graduation rates increased. In 1986, Proposition 48 mandated that the entering freshmen class of student athletes must graduate high school with a 2.0 in 11 core courses and earn a composite score of 700 on the SAT to compete in NCAA intercollegiate athletics during the freshmen year.

Student-athletes in the two classes prior to the new standard graduated at a rate one to two percent lower than the general student body. The class of
student-athlete in 1990 continued the pattern set by the previous four classes of graduating at a rate one or two percent higher than the general student body (NCAA, 1997, p. 1).

In fact, the most at-risk groups showed the greatest improvement after Proposition 48 was mandated. African-American student athletes and men's and women's basketball student athletes, who arguably have the toughest competition schedule that spans two academic terms and requires competition in the middle of the academic week, showed the greatest improvement after Proposition 48. Each group improved graduation rates by at least ten percentage points or more (see Table 3). However, while graduation rates rise for some at-risk populations, some at-risk populations are matriculating to college in fewer numbers.

...About seven hundred fewer sports scholarships were received by Black athletes in the first year of academic restrictions under Proposition 48. . . . Participation for black men and women in Division I dropped from 27% before Proposition 48 to 23.5% after Proposition 48 in the 1986-1987 year (Newsletter, 1997, p. 1).

As of August 1996, Proposition 16 was mandated. This tougher regulation requires student athletes to earn a 2.5 average in 13 core high school courses with a 700 on the SAT (820 after recentering). This requirement is along a sliding scale that will accept a lower high school quality point average of 2.0 and a higher SAT score of 900.

While Proposition 16 was designed to improve the quality of academic preparedness of student athletes entering Division I schools, it has reduced the number of minority student athletes and those student athletes from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who would have been eligible under the old rules. Witham argues:

<table>
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<th>Table 3. Graduation Rate for at-Risk Student Athletes Before and After the 1986 Proposition 48</th>
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<td>Year entered 1984</td>
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<td>Black male student athletes Graduation rate</td>
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<td>Black female student athletes Graduation rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black male basketball Graduation rate</td>
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<td>Female basketball Graduation rate</td>
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... potential effects of Proposition 16 have found that 72 percent of black athletes who entered college in 1984-85 would have been ineligible under the rule, compared to the 54% of the black students in the Education Department study. [Further,] the education statistics center found that 73% of students in the top quartile of the socioeconomic standing met the minimums of Proposition 16, while just 42% of those from the bottom quartile [met the minimums] (Witham, 1995, p. 2).

The complex issue is summarized by Peter Schonemann, a professor of psychology at Purdue University, who states, “...the overall increase in graduation rates [is] coming at a heavy cost: less access to college for black and poor students” (quoted in Witham, 1995, p. 2).

The data from this study and the information in regard to Proposition 48 both confirm that academic preparation is the key to graduating student athletes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SUMMER SCHOOL

Academic preparation for student athletes BEFORE they enter college is a crucial variable that has a significant impact on student-athlete graduation rates, in addition to the academic assistance student athletes receive while they are in college. The results of the multiple regression tests indicate that schools with lower graduation rates tend to provide more services, that is a post a higher score in the service segment. However, the step-wise regression test confirms that those schools that offer summer school for their incoming freshmen have a statistically significant and positive impact on their student-athlete graduation rates. In order for a collegiate institution to offer summer school for incoming freshmen student athletes, that institution needs to offer summer school for all incoming freshmen. The NCAA prohibits preferential treatment for student athletes because of their athletic status. A summer school program would need to establish an at-risk profile, then allow all students, including student athletes, admitted with that profile to attend summer school before their freshmen year. Many student athletes from lower socioeconomic backgrounds cannot afford summer school, which is not included in the athletic scholarship. In order to pay for the student athletes’ summer school costs, the school should be prepared to offer financial assistance to all students who qualify. Schools can establish an endowment to pay for summer school for those fitting the determined at-risk profile. Further, grants can be gained by the institution to financially support summer school costs.

CONCLUSION

While it might be uncumbersome to consider the student-athlete population a disadvantaged population, the fact remains that they dedicate their college careers to advance the prestige and prominence of the schools they represent. Many youngsters build their dreams around a chance to win championships, appear on television,
or to gain some economic stability through the possibility of professional athletic careers after college. In turn, thousands of collegiate athletic administration professionals and coaches make their livelihood on the backs of these youngsters. These collegiate athletic administration professionals and coaches also hope for the fame and glory that comes with championship athletics. Some schools build libraries and develop scholarship funds for the general student population from revenues generated in bowl appearances and television contracts. Nonetheless, when the arena lights are dimmed and the news releases yellow, many student athletes need to rely on their education. Given the sacrifice many student athletes make to represent their schools, and the dedication they show to better their athletic talent, these goals are often obstacles that can jeopardize a student athlete’s access to educational opportunity. By helping student athletes overcome these obstacles with academic services that enhance academic preparedness, college institutions can then reconstitute equal opportunity in education for their student athletes.

REFERENCES


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