What Do We Know About the Career Maturity of College Student-Athletes?

A Brief Review and Practical Suggestions for Career Development Work with Student-athletes

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide useful information concerning career maturity and college student-athletes. An overview of developmental tasks college students face and how they relate to career maturity will initially be presented. Next, the construct of career maturity will be discussed as it relates to two career development theories associated with the construct (i.e., Super and Crites). Practical suggestions on how to enhance student-athlete career maturity based on theory, research and the author's experiences will follow.

INTRODUCTION

An area of interest of college student service providers and athletic department personnel is how student-athletes' overall career development can be facilitated during their college years. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has demonstrated a strong commitment to this process by making career development a main component of their "Challenging Athletes Minds for Personal Success" (CHAMPS/ Life Skills) programming model for student-athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2003; Ward, 1999). Several researchers have also devoted considerable attention to student-athlete career development (Ahlgren, 2001; Etzel, Barrow, & Pinkney, 1994; Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1996; Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; Lantz, 1996; Lantz, Etzel, & Ferguson, 1996; Martens & Cox, 2000; Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984).

One important aspect of student-athlete career development is career maturity. Several researchers have investigated: (a) how mature student-athletes are from a career standpoint; (b) how participation in college athletics may be related to career maturity; as well as (c) variables thought to influence the development of career maturity of college student-athletes (Ahlgren, 2001; Bals, 1992; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Doms, Monteleone, & White, 1994; Jacques, 2000; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001; McKinney, 1991; Muczko, 1993; Smallman, & Sowa, 1996). A central purpose of this paper is to provide information on selected aspects of student-athlete career development as they relate to the construct of career maturity. Initially, a brief look at the developmental aspects of college students and career maturity will be presented. This will be followed by a discussion of two career development theories associated with the construct (i.e., Super and Crites). Practical suggestions based on theory, research, and our work with student-athletes on the career maturity of college student-athletes will follow.

CAREER MAJORITY THEORY AND COLLEGE STUDENT-ATHLETE

What is "career maturity?" While career maturity means different things to different people, Donald Super (1990) defined career or vocational maturity as "the individual's readiness to cope with the developmental tasks with which he or she is confronted because of his or her biological and social developments, and because of society's expectations of people who have reached that stage of development" (p. 213). Super and J. O. Crites' (Crites, 1974) theories of career development and career maturity seem to be particularly valuable to those interested in studying the career development of college student-athletes and to helping professionals (e.g., academic advisors, counselors, CHAMPS-Life Skills coordinators) who provide support services to these young people. Their two models will be discussed after a brief summary of the developmental tasks of college students as they relate to career development.

DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AND CAREER MATURITY

Just like their non-athlete peers, college student-athletes are adolescents and young adults who must meet and master many so-called "developmental tasks" during their tenure at the university. Over the course of their approximately four to six years as undergraduates, college students confront the formidable challenges of: (a) becoming independent, (b) clarifying identity, (c) identifying a sense of direction and purpose, (d) fine tuning values, and (e) learning to be personally responsible for day-to-day activities (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968; Farnsworth, 1966; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This passage through the college years has been described by Medalie (1981) as a "mini-life cycle". During this period, students encounter predictable personal and career development-related milestones to which they make adjustments (e.g., leaving home, identifying an academic major, investing energy in a major, and leaving the college experience behind for the world of work).

In general, students say that one of their principal motives for going to college is to prepare well for a meaningful, productive career (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). A needs assessment conducted by Etzel, Barrow, and Pinkney (1994), revealed that the student-athletes sampled were curious about their career-related interests, skills, personality characteristics, values and how to go about formulating plans leading to the world of work. Unfortunately, many college students are relatively "clueless" about the career development path. It has been estimated that about a quarter to one-half of incoming students have at best a vague notion of their future career plans (Gordon, 1995). While most student-athletes seem to view the experience of college as an opportunity; their motivation for attending college and/or what to do once they get there is often vague. We have seen many new student-athletes who say they head to college to: (a) continue to pursue their athletic interests and dreams (with all or some of their educational expenses paid for); (b) because it is what most of their peers are going to do; (c) because they are under pressure from family or others to do so; or (d) some combination of the above.

In contrast, at the end of their mini-life cycle, many student-athletes, having devoted considerable time and energy to studies and sport, remain quite uncertain of their career path and /or the steps that lead to their first job or graduate school. Like freshmen, seniors and fifth-year students often experience considerable distress in response to these novel transitions, in and out of college, that are filled with detachments and new attachments (Schwartz & Riefler, 1984). Although many of these older student-athletes are quite "career mature", some are not.

Increased autonomy, improved self-esteem, and the acquisition of "transferable" life skills (e.g., setting goals, managing time, performing under pressure, working as part of a team) are important outcomes of the student-athlete experience that can lead to successful transition out of college and into the world of work (Ahlgren, 2001; Pace, 1979). As they grow over time, student-athletes also need to develop more sophisticated ways of information gathering and better interpersonal and career decision-making skills (Miller & Winston, 1990). In the long run, college student-athletes obtain much useful information leading to a meaningful niche in the world of work. Perhaps more importantly, they become quite different people - hopefully evolving into well-adjusted, relatively mature young adults. The advisor's job is to help them along the way.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SUPER'S THEORIES

Donald Super contributed what he termed a "loosely unified set of [career development] theories" focused on stages of change in the self-concept" (Brown & Brooks, 1984, p.218). Super, as cited in Zunker (1994), described his theory of career-related self-concept as "essentially a matching theory in which people consider the compatibility of their own personal attributes and the attributes required by an occupation (p.208)." Accordingly, career choices are determined by aspects of one's self-concept which is believed to change over time (Leong & Brown, 1996). It is further assumed that the better the perceived fit between self-concept and occupation, the more satisfied, well-adjusted, and successful a person can be in a career and changing life roles (Klein & Weiner, 1977).

From Super's perspective, career development occurs over time as people develop specific personal competencies, the assessment of which is useful to our to our understanding of career maturity levels (Walsh & Betz 1995). He proposed that the typical career maturity path may be characterized by five developmental life stages including: (1) growth, (2) exploration, (3) establishment, (4) maintenance, and (5) decline. During these stages, people are assumed to work through developmental tasks that occur at approximate ages. These tasks include: (1) crystallization (ages 14-18), (2) specification (18-21), (3) implementation (21-24), (4) stabilization (25-35), and (5) consolidation (late 30's-40's) (Walsh & Betz, 1995). As the reader can see, tasks 1-3 appear to have the most relevance for work with college student-athletes

Crystallization

During the "crystallization" stage of adolescence, Super contended that people develop ideas about what type of career they imagine pursuing. This is a time when teenagers dream of doing certain things with their lives and/or being like someone they identify with and admire. For many student-athletes, those people are often respected family members, a coach, a teacher, or sometimes a famous sports figure. Some do not have these idealized persons or "objects" of identification. Of those who do, a high percentage of athletes who participate in sports where professional opportunities exist suggest that they aspire to be professional athletes (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987). Unfortunately, the odds of going on to a professional career in sport are quite slim (i.e., approximately 2 - 3%), with the average career span in the four major professional sports being approximately 3.5 years (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2000; Nixon & Frey, 1996). Investigators Brown and Hartley (1998) sampled 114 male NCAA Division I and Division II student-athletes and found that those who had a goal of playing professionally scored lower on a career maturity measure. Some researchers have also suggested that many student-athletes who participate in sports where attractive professional careers are possible such as football, baseball and basketball may formulate similarly unrealistic, immature career plans believing that they will go on to a "fun" professional career (American Institutes for Research, 1988; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Martinelli, 2000).

Specification

During the "specification" stage, which in theory transpires during the undergraduate college years, young people begin to identify vocational inclinations and hopefully start to investigate possible career paths. Ideally, the late teens and very early 20's should be a time of a great deal of exploratory activity for college students (e.g., career counseling, part-time work, shadowing, and internships). Regrettably, aspects of the athletics lifestyle and culture may discourage student-athletes from engaging in these activities. For example, NCAA rules limit the amount of money a student-athlete can earn during the school year (often discouraging part-time work) and do not permit schools to pay for career-development related testing or counseling that may help student-athletes make more appropriate choices (personal communication, B. Cox, April 28, 2003). In the case of young people who have put off this important life activity until after their athletics eligibility has expired, specification activity may be postponed into the early to mid-twenties or later on in adulthood.

Implementation

In their early 20's, the implementation phase, people typically enter the world of work or graduate school. It is a time in life when vocational identity usually solidifies (Sullivan, 1953). Like their non-athlete peers, the majority of graduating student-athletes appear to successfully make this transition. Unfortunately, some struggle to make the jump. These people who do not graduate in a timely fashion are often the "unmoored souls" previously "pre-NFL, pre-NBA, or pre-MLB" majors seen hanging around their college town and athletic facilities after their peers have departed. Hopefully, assistance is available to these former student-athletes that will allow them to complete their education and eventually head on to the world of work. Examples of such "helping hands" are: (1) career and counseling centers that keep their doors open to older returning students; (2) CHAMPS-Life Skills programs; (3) assistance available from the National Consortium for Academics and Sports (Northeastern University Center for the Study of Sport in Society, 2003), (4) and the NCAA degree completion Program.

Athletic Identity and Career Self-Efficacy

Two aspects of Super's model that seem to be especially relevant to student-athletes are having: (1) an unrealistic self-concept, and (2) a limited self-concept. Super (1990) observed that people who own unrealistic, simple self-concepts tend to make inappropriate career choices. Regrettably, these attributes are commonly observed in college student-athletes, many of whom own so-called strong "athletic identities" (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993).

Athletic Identity

People with limited self-concepts may lack ample information and experience to allow them to make wise career choices (Super, 1990). For example, when conducting career and personal counseling interviews with student-atblete clients seeking majors, one author (EE) has frequently observed that many student-athlete clients report not knowing how to find out about academic major options or the nature of occupations. Many report having had little or no job experience outside of sport-related endeavors (e.g., sport camps).

Freshman and sophomore student-athletes with limited perspectives on life and foreclosed self-views may experience difficulty identifying a meaningful academic major, typically required by the NCAA before the onset of their junior year. Career development is hampered by not spending at least some time and effort early on targeting meaningful, interesting major options. Unfortunately, the following career immature phenomena are often seen by those who advise and counsel student-athletes: (a) selecting academic majors "by default" (i.e., without exploring one's interests, skills, and abilities); (b) being encouraged by powerful others (e.g., coaches, academic advisors, peers) to pursue athletics-friendly majors (i.e., to fit academic responsibilities around training and competitive schedules); and/or (c) being told that one can major in a field of interest (i.e., when recruited) only to find out that it is not possible given the requirements of athletic participation (i.e., the old "bait and switch").

In a sense, NCAA rules may both help and hinder student-athlete's identity and career development. For example, the formal selection of a major requires them to make a commitment to pursuits they may know little about and/or have been provided limited time, energy and encouragement to devote to vis a' vis their lifestyles. Major declaration may "resolve ambivalence for some students, but prematurely shuts down exploration for others" (Margolis, 1989, p. 76). Beyond the normal changing of majors (one or two times on average) and the usual uncertainties associated with this choice, older student-athletes (i.e., juniors, seniors, and "fifth years") may regret their major selection. Some postpone or put little or no systematic thought or effort into career development or career planning until the end of the undergraduate years; some return for career counseling only after graduation and unfulfilling work trials or failed attempts at professional sport. These people report feeling bewildered when they could be on track to thrive in the world of work or graduate school.

Heavy investment in the athlete lifestyle over time can contribute to adopting a strong athletic identity (i.e., over-identification with the athletic role and lifestyle) (Brewer et al., 1993). Such a restricted view of self and personal potential may limit: (a) exploration of other activities of interest, (b) normal experimentation with different social roles, (c) non-sport-related relationships, (d) academic achievement and, (e) future vocational opportunities (Brown, Glastcher, & Sheldon, 2000). Student-athletes who own strong athletic identities can be considered akin to Marcia's (1980) "foreclosed" students who tend to not seek out options for change and growth. Such student-athletes seem to foreclose on the athlete role and limit their educational and vocational options. Recent research has examined the possible relationship of athletic identity to the career development of college student-athletes (Brown, Glastcher, & Shelton, 2000; Doms, Monteleone, & White, 1994; Martens & Cox, 2000; Murphy, Brewer & Petitpas, 1996; Owens, 1994). For example, Owens (1994) found that student-athletes with a strong athletic identity engaged in less career exploration behavior than did student-athletes with a weaker athletic identity. Similarly, Murphy et al. (1996) found that athletic identity and foreclosed identity were significantly related to a measure of career maturity. In contrast, Brown et al. (2000), Martens and Cox (2000), and Kornspan and Etzel (2001) did not find significant relationships between athletic identity and a career development measure. Martens and Cox, however, observed that "many student-athletes do not or cannot distinguish between athletic and vocational identity, and so might not seek occupational information and assistance from university career [or counseling] centers" (Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001, p.70).

Career self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, a construct similar to self-confidence, can be thought of as a person's belief that s/he can successfully do something that is required to produce a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977). Having the confidence to engage in career-related tasks (e.g., interest identification, major selection, job information seeking, and participation in internships) is assumed to reflect a relatively mature sense of career self-efficacy. Career self-efficacy is believed to positively influence future job-related attitudes, efforts, and behaviors that shape career decisions (Betz & Hackett, 1986; Taylor & Betz, 1983). It has been observed that students with higher levels of career-related

self-efficacy typically exhibit higher levels of career maturity (Luzzo, 1993). According to Riffe and Alexander (1991), student-athletes can and often do acquire a great deal of transferable self-confidence from their athletic experiences, thus shaping their self-concept in a useful way. However, if a young person's confidence primarily stems from sport-related experiences, s/he may feel secure in the athletic realm but quite diffident in other life roles (e.g., in the student or worker role). Therefore, athletic participation can be seen as a double-edged sword: it can both facilitate and detract from involvement in useful, future-oriented activities as well as positively or negatively impact the ways one thinks and feels about work and career.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CRITE'S THEORIES

J.O. Crites (1978) saw career maturity as involving: (a) career choice "content", and (b) career choice "processes". From his perspective, a young person is considered career mature if s/he possesses accurate career-related information and well-developed planning and decision-making skills (Walsh & Betz, 1995). Crites further believed that a career mature attitude was characterized by: (a) decisiveness in making career choices, (b) active involvement in decision-making, (c) independence in thinking and action, (d) understanding and acceptance that work is not always fun, and (e) realistic goals and aspirations.

Career immature student-athletes may display a so-called "indecisive disposition" (Wooten, 1993). This mind-set is seen as the product of a life history in which an individual has somehow not acquired some combination of self-confidence, tolerance for ambiguity, cultural involvement, sense of identity, and self- and environmental knowledge to effectively deal with career decision making and other common problems (Holland & Holland, 1977, as cited in Wooten, 1993). Fuqua, Blum, and Bartman (1988) found that indecisiveness was also related to traits such as low career self-efficacy, external locus of control, and lack of a clear identity. Some student-athletes appear to be rather "wishy-washy" when it comes to making decisions in the face of uncertainty, perhaps because many of their life decisions have been made for them by influential others or because they are deficient in some of the afore mentioned attributes. Alternatively, they may act hesitantly and/or appear ambivalent or "stuck" in career development matters and other personal issues due to rather limited experience at making independent decisions or owning inadequate decision-making skills.

Lifestyle Issues

According to Crites, men and women with mature career attitudes should demonstrate high levels of active involvement in the career development process. As noted above, some student-athletes are quite involved, yet just as many appear not to be involved. The way student-athletes' days are normally structured may not allow them to be actively involved much in career development thinking or action. For example, Ferrante, Etzel and Lantz (1996) observed that "practice and competition can drastically limit the amount of free time student-athletes have available for accessing needed assistance (p.11)." While officially limited to 20 hours of athletics-related activity by the NCAA, it is clear that student-athletes can easily be involved in much more than 20 hours of "mandatory" and "voluntary" activity per week when one considers travel to and from competition, conditioning, injury rehabilitation, study halls,

video viewing, etc. (Sperber, 1990). Accordingly, Martens and Lee (1998) noticed that college student-athletes often have more time commitments than many other students and really may not have the time or energy to actively participate in career development activities (e.g., workshops, job fairs, counseling).

Insufficient student-athlete involvement in the career development process may also occur because of the time of day when career development programs are offered (Ferrante et al. 1996; Martenelli, 2000) and because of a "divided campus" (Martens & Lee, 1998). Indeed, few student-athletes see themselves as "early birds," but very few are truly "night owls" (Pinkney, 1996). Ferrante et al. (1996) suggested that student-athletes usually have some free time and some energy left during early evening hours. However, they may be more inclined to use this time for rest, recreation or "socializing" rather than personal growth. In describing their divided campus theory, Martens and Lee (1998) note that many student-athletes are or feel segregated from the rest of campus because many athletic facilities and services are removed from the athletics mainstream. Thus, they may not be inclined to use services that the university makes available to students (e.g., career or counseling services). Student-athletes, like some of their coaches, report that they do not know that such services exist on campus, and/or if they do know about them, they do not know where they are located. It has also been observed that some coaches discourage the use of helping services outside of the athletic department assuming that they can care for student-athlete needs "in house" (Ferrante et al. 1996).

Locus of Control

Crites also proposed that people with more mature career attitudes are usually more independent in their career-related thinking, decision-making, and behavior. This aspect of Crites' model links to the developmental task of becoming autonomous (Chickering, 1969) and the construct of "locus of control". Rotter (1954) proposed that there are two basic types of locus of control: internal and external. Internal locus of control is the expectancy that reinforcement is contingent upon one's own thinking or behavior. Whereas, external locus of control is the expectancy that reinforcement is contingent upon outside forces such as luck, fate, chance, or powerful others (LeUnes & Nation, 1996). College students with an internal locus of control appear to be more likely to exhibit higher levels of career maturity than college students with an external locus of control (Bluestein, 1987; Gable, Thompson, & Glanstein, 1976). Some re search on student-athlete locus of control suggests that many student-athletes tend to own a more external rather than internal locus of control (Etzel, 1990; LeUnes & Nation, 1982; Toye, 1987) and that career locus of control is related to a student-athlete's level of career maturity (Ahlgren, 2001; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). Student-athletes who tell us that they are free to make their own decisions, relatively independent of the influence of others like parents and athletics staff, have a tendency to be more career mature than others. Accordingly, student-athletes with an internal locus of control would be considered more career mature if they believed, for example, that major selection is up to them and that obtaining a first job would be based on their own abilities and job-seeking efforts. These student-athletes are often more goal-oriented. In comparison, less mature student-athletes who own a more external locus of control may take the path of least resistance when choosing a major and/or assume that getting a job will come about as a result of uncontrollable forces, such as luck or fate. These individuals are the more passive.

Unpleasant work?

Another component of Crites' theory that is applicable to career development work with student-athletes is the appreciation that work is not always fun (Crites, 1978). This presumption does not seem to have been discussed much if at all in the literature. If student-athletes have not learned this earlier in life, this revelation is one that incoming young people soon begin to comprehend when the level of academic involvement and training for their sport is experienced as typically much higher than in high school or, in some cases, junior college. This insight and the experiences associated with it may impact one's investment in school, sport, and career development activities.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPERS FROM CAREER MATURITY THEORY AND RESEARCH

It has often been said that there is nothing more practical than a good theory. Based upon the thinking of Super and Crites, several practical suggestions are helpful in facilitating career maturity. These suggestions are also based on the literature above and staff experiences in working with college students and college student-athletes.

Possibilities and Resources

Many potential programming ideas and interventions are available to cultivate student-athlete career maturity. While some of these can involve considerable effort and a small amount of money to develop, most can be crafted in very little time and employed on a very limited budget. Good examples of some basic ideas and interventions can be found in free materials available from the NCAA. For those institutions that have an NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills program, free instructional and workbook materials are available in the career development commitment area. The topics included in these workbooks are Freshman - Senior Years, Post-College, Agents, Alumni Career Network, and Life after Sports Seminar. (See http://www1.ncaa.org/membership/ed_outreach/champs-life_skills/index.html.). Another free resource from the NCAA is the brochure "A career in professional athletics: A guide to making the transition" (NCAA, 2000). At the very least, the inside cover of this publication provides data about the possibility of heading on to professional athletics, information that is an eye-opener for many new student-athletes who strongly identify with the professional sport dream and often bank on doing so.

Early Interventions

Clearly, timing is of the essence in most endeavors; the process of career development programming is no exception. Perhaps the most practical suggestion from a timing perspective is to start early. Several preliminary options exist. One useful initial intervention is to send introductory letters and/or brochures to incoming student-athletes soon after they decide to attend your school. These materials can include information about on-campus services, links to the university's or athletics department's web sites, and information about the student-athlete's academic advisor and/or CHAMPS/Life Skills coordinator.

Most universities also offer summer orientation programs for the general student population with some targeted to specialized groups like student-athletes. These brief encounters are excellent opportunities to meet incoming student-athletes and their families and to share information about career development tasks. With influential family members hopefully present, advisors and others can emphasize the importance of directing some initial effort to these tasks (e.g., major options), even though many student-athletes may not sense its importance at the time. All of these suggestions can help get the career development ball rolling.

Systematic Information Gathering

If time and a little bit of money are available, some brief surveying or standardized testing associated with early career development work (e.g., Self-Directed Search, Career Maturity Inventory Attitude Scale, Athletic Identity Measure, educational and work history surveys) may be appropriate to administer during orientation. Simple "home-made" Likert-scaled questionnaires are easy to create, administer and process. They can be designed to ask about: (a) current thinking about majors, (b) understanding of one's educational/career-related interests, values, and skills; (c) ability to make decisions and confidence in doing so; (d) freedom to make decisions; (e) information available to make decisions; (f) understanding of the steps needed to make decisions; and (g) knowledge of available resources. Such inquiries help to plant career development seeds and begins the process of assisting new student-athletes (e.g., to develop individualized educational-career development portfolios/files). Based on feedback from these instruments, advisors and counselors can help student-athletes, especially the relatively career immature, with career and academic issues. For example, individual and group counseling sessions or workshops can be offered to help incoming young people learn about decision-making and related transferable life skills (e.g., goal setting). Information from surveys, standardized testing, and brief interviews can also help advisors and counselors get an initial feel for student-athlete backgrounds and developmental status. Recent research has suggested that testing can help student-athletes develop more realistic career plans (Martinelli, 2000). Street and Schroeder (1996) conducted a study in which they implemented both the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1985) and the SIGI-PLUS program (Educational Testing Service, 2003). These interventions decreased the frequency of student-athletes who chose professional sport as their primary career of choice.

Information Access

Most athletic departments have web sites. These are wonderful places to include information about resources available to student-athletes who find this way of accessing information quite appealing. These sites can include downloadable files on topics of interest (e.g., the career development path, major selection, resume writing) specifically crafted for your school's student-athletes. Links to on-campus (e.g., advising, career and counseling services) and distance resources (e.g., job search sites such as monster.com) may be included. One outstanding web site for advisors, other professionals and student-athletes is "The Counseling Center Village" (see http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/ccv.html). This site has many free and practical handouts, workshop outlines and links to other related sites.

How and when to access on-campus resources is essential to include on web sites. Many student-athletes are unfamiliar with the location of services that are often housed in facilities that are separate from athleties facilities. Even a campus map can be one small facet of the career development process. While this may seem like common sense, additional information about when these services are open is essential. Hopefully, these services offer assistance at odd times (e.g., evenings) to accommodate student-athletes and others with unique daily schedules.

Although they are not as exciting as web sites, letters, brochures and handouts are helpful and inexpensive. Whenever possible, these should be visually attractive and succinct to fit the apparent reading habits of many of today's student-athletes. For example, the Channing–Bete company publishes several generic brochures that seem to appeal to student-athletes. Good places to display these printed materials are advising offices, study centers, CHAMPS-Life Skills centers, waiting rooms, and athletic training rooms. Again, the "Counseling Center Village" offers many of these downloadable resources for free.

If your school offers a freshman/transfer orientation class for student-athletes, consider devoting at least one or two weeks to the career maturity path. The following options are constructive: (a) having an academic advisor speak about her or his work and majors; (b) inviting speakers from your school's career and/or counsel ing service to talk about what they offer; (c) having mature student-athletes who have gone through the major selection process to talk about their experiences; (d) administer a brief self-exploratory instrument (e.g., Self-Directed Search, AIMS) or other brief questionnaire to stimulate thinking about self and career awareness. If your institution does not have such a class, consider offering brief mid-day or early evening workshops starting in the fall to advance career maturity. Involve and keep coaches and other athletics staff members informed about any career development activities and resources available to their student-athletes through memos, e-mails and personal contacts.

CHAMPS/Life Skills

As noted above, the NCAA has made a significant investment in career development as part of its CHAMPS/Life Skills program model (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2003). The central purpose of this area is to promote the pursuit of student-athlete career and life goals. Practical aspects of the free resource manual available to program participants include: 1) career development; 2) freshman to senior years; 3) post-college; and 4) life after sports seminar. The Petitpas, et al. (1997) book on athlete career planning is an excellent resource that meshes particularly well with the above CHAMPS/LifeSkills information. Many other useful career development activities can be offered to student-athletes as part of a CHAMPS/Life Skills program. These include providing career development information in an orientation or separate career path class, career development presentations to teams, the encouragement of student-athletes to attend job fairs, job shadowing, resume and job application letter writing, and interview skill development.

SUMMARY

For many collegiate student-athletes, career development appears to be a low priority, afterthought or mystery. For advisors and other helping professionals who serve these young people, such perspectives are often puzzling and/or discouraging to encounter. Background information provided in this article links career development and career maturity theory and related research, thus providing helping opportunities and solutions. Hopefully, the reader can use some ideas to stimulate thinking and creative applications, thus facilitating student-athlete career maturity. Specifically this article described issues that student-athletes face during the specification and implementation stage of career development and also provided practical strategies that advisors can use to help student-athletes through these stages. Athletic identity and career self-efficacy issues in relationship to career maturity of student-athletes during these stages were emphasized. Researchers and practitioners should continue to conduct research on how athletic identity and career self-efficacy affect a student-athletes career development.

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