

AN INVESTIGATION OF ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENT- ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

This investigation examined the degree of control that college student-athletes felt they had regarding their academic experiences. Findings indicate that student-athletes have high academic aspirations but face structural as well as personal obstacles in maintaining control over their academic experiences. Time demands of their sports, lack of high school preparation, and inadequate personal study habits collectively contribute to the academic problems experienced by student-athletes. In addition, partial qualifiers under Proposition 48, All-American student-athletes, and white student-athletes demonstrate more control over and more seriousness about their academic experiences when compared to Proposition 48 full qualifiers, all other student-athletes, and black student-athletes, respectively.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Recent attention disclosing perceived low graduation rates among student-athletes at NCAA Division I institutions has generated much criticism, leading to Congressional intervention and NCAA reforms. Student-athletes are generally viewed as victims caught in an institutional incongruity: the "win at all costs" philosophy and business mentality of intercollegiate athletics versus their amateur status and the imposed academic integrity of higher education (Coakley, 1990). Because of the visibility of student-athletes and the sensitive issues currently permeating intercollegiate athletics, colleges and universities are vulnerable to media and public scrutiny. Consequently, student-athletes are held accountable to a higher standard of academic excellence and moral values than typical students are (Coakley, 1990).

Research on the academic experiences of student-athletes emanates from dichotomous findings which make the validity of assumptions about academic accountability seem paradoxical. The primary focus hinges on the dual role conflict experienced by student-athletes and their inability to balance the role expectations placed on them academically and athletically (Adler & Adler, 1987; Funk, 1991; Lance, 1987; Leonard, 1986, 1987).

One segment of the literature argues that the time demands of NCAA Division I revenue-producing men's sports (football and basketball) are incompatible with the academic component of the student-athletes' college experience and lead to academic failure or low graduation rates (Adler & Adler, 1982, 1987; Coakley, 1990; Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982). Lower grade point averages and lower graduation rates among college student-athletes as compared to high school student-athletes confirm that contention (Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982).

The academic problems associated with dual role conflict has sometimes led to unethical practices and cheating (Blann, 1990; Leonard, 1986, 1987). The academic clustering of men's basketball players into physical education "jock" courses undermines the academic role of student-athletes and perpetuates negative stereotypes of anti-intellectualism among college student-athletes (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987; Raney, Knapp, & Small, 1983; Sailes, 1993). "Grade fixing" or altering transcripts is another allegation permeating some athletic departments (Leonard, 1986). Most often it is black male student-athletes who are falling off the graduation track at higher rates than their white counterparts (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987; Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986; Lederman, 1992; Nyquist, 1985; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982).

The antithetical inquiry indicates that student-athletes demonstrate high levels of expectation, motivation, and academic ideals during their freshman year (Adler & Adler, 1985; Leonard, 1987). Other inquiries indicate that student-athletes have higher grade point averages and graduate at approximately the same percentage as the general student population at most major universities (Coakley, 1990; Henschen & Fry, 1984; Lederman, 1992). It is widely held that the revenue-producing sports and their time demands are the chief variables negatively affecting the academic success of student-athletes (Blann, 1990; Leonard, 1986). However, many Division I football and men's basketball programs are able to graduate relatively higher percentages of their student-athletes than the graduation rates of traditional students (Eitzen, 1987). Student-athletes who would not have met academic eligibility requirements as incoming freshmen under NCAA Proposition 48 have made successful academic progress and have gone on to graduate (Walter, Smith, Hoey, Wilhelm, & Miller, 1987). In addition, the NCAA has passed some reforms and is currently reviewing others which are designed to protect the rights of student-athletes.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Many of the studies investigating academic accountability among student-athletes examine the impact of structural (i.e., organizational or institutional) variables. It appears to be universally accepted that the time demands of athletic participation, specifically in football and men's basketball, contribute chiefly to the problems associated with the dual role expectations placed upon student-athletes. Consequently, much of the scrutiny examines the philosophies and politics of university athletic departments and questions the ability of the NCAA to govern its member institutions and protect the rights of student-athletes to receive an education and graduate from college.

Few, if any, studies have examined student-athletes to determine their perceptions regarding personal control over their academic experiences while immersed in their dual roles as "student" and "athlete." The intent of this investigation was to conduct a study to ascertain such perceptions and to answer the following question: Is the institution primarily responsible for the academic/athletic dilemma of the student-athlete, or does the student-athlete also contribute to the problem?

The dependent variable employed in this investigation was perception of academic accountability, while the independent variable was athletic participation. For the purpose of this investigation, the variable "academic accountability" refers to the subject's willingness to accept and engage in the behaviors essential to achieving academic success (e.g., regularly attending class, attending study tables, organizing or participating in a study group in preparation for an exam, setting high academic standards and not settling for minimal eligibility requirements, reorganizing class notes, and utilizing academic counseling).

It was hypothesized that, regardless of the organizational and institutional demands placed on student-athletes, they maintain some degree of control over their academic outcomes but choose to defer that control.

METHOD

Instrument

To complete this investigation it was necessary to develop a questionnaire. Informal interviews with student-athletes as well as precedents in the related literature about academic accountability among students were used as guides in the development of that instrument.

The instrument was designed to reveal the perceptions and beliefs of the subjects regarding their academic experiences at their respective institutions. The questionnaire contained thirty items employing a five-point Likert scale coded in the same direction and ranging as follows: (5) strongly agree; (4) agree; (3) undecided; (2) disagree; (1) strongly disagree. Among the questions

included in the instrument were the following: "I could do more to get better grades;" "I study only enough to remain eligible to participate in athletics;" "I do not have enough time to prepare for my studies;" "I have good study habits." (See appendix for the complete text of the questionnaire.)

Subjects

The questionnaire was administered to 918 male student-athletes in more than 100 NCAA Division I institutions throughout the country. The distribution of the sample is shown in Table 1. Coaches and academic counselors were identified and asked to administer the instrument to the student-athletes under their guidance.

Table 1

Subjects

Group	N
African American	236
Caucasian	552
Other/Undeclared	130
Freshmen	438
Sophomores	144
Juniors	173
Seniors	163
Men's Basketball	120
Football	270
Other Men's Team Sports	246
Men's Individual Sports	282
Student-Athletes on Athletic Scholarship	617
Student-Athletes Not on Athletic Scholarship	301
Qualifiers	755
Partial Qualifiers	163
All-Americans	207
Not All-Americans	711
TOTAL SAMPLE	918

RESULTS

Comparison of Grade Point Average

A preliminary examination of the data and the cross-tabular inquiry revealed certain trends (see Table 2). The number of student-athletes who received A's and B's in high school dropped when they went to college. Correspondingly, more student-athletes received C's and D's in college as compared to high school.

Table 2

Comparison of Grade Point Average

GRADE	HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE	CHANGE
A	21%	4%	- 17%
B	52%	38%	- 13%
C	17%	37%	+ 20%
D	11%	20%	+ 9%

Comparison of Behavior and Perceptions

The chi square ($\chi^2 \geq 53.7$, $p = .005$) statistical procedure was employed to determine significance (distinct patterns of behavior or perceptions within the sample responses) within the cross-tabular inquiry. Significance was disclosed among the following measures:

(1) Of the sample, 82 percent would have attended college even if they had not been offered an athletic scholarship; however, 48.6 percent discovered they were academically unprepared to attend college.

(2) 41 percent believed that the academic requirements for college were too difficult, with 80.3 percent requiring academic counseling to maintain athletic eligibility.

(3) 82 percent studied only enough to remain eligible, while 55.3 percent admitted to not having good study habits.

(4) 80 percent disclosed that sports were more important to them than their studies, and 96.1 percent said they were capable of doing better academically.

(5) 73 percent reported being able to balance the roles of student and athlete, but 62.2 percent said they were fearful of losing their eligibility due to low grades.

(6) 59 percent said they could get better grades if they had more time for their studies; however, 44.7 percent disclosed that they got better grades when their sport was in season.

(7) Approximately 66 percent of the sample indicated a commitment to their academic majors.

(8) 67.3 percent expected to graduate by the time their eligibility expired, 42.5 percent planned to continue on to graduate or professional school, and 75.2 percent planned to use their college degrees to secure employment.

Comparison by Group

The analysis of variance ($F \geq 1.08$, $p = .005$) was employed to determine variability among the groups by race (black and white), academic eligibility (partial and full qualifiers under Proposition 48), and level of athletic performance (All-American and not). Significant differences were uncovered on all three constructs (see Table 3).

Table 3

Comparison by Group (Analysis of Variance)

Group I	Group II	F
Whites ($\bar{X} = 77.8$)	Blacks ($\bar{X} = 72.8$)	1.28
Partial Qualifiers ($\bar{X} = 80.3$)	All Others ($\bar{X} = 72.6$)	2.35
All-Americans ($\bar{X} = 74.4$)	All Others ($\bar{X} = 71.5$)	1.12

($F \geq 1.08$, $p = .005$)

In a comparison by race, white student-athletes ($\bar{X} = 77.8$) displayed more academic accountability than black student-athletes ($\bar{X} = 72.8$). In a comparison of academic eligibility status, student-athletes who were partial qualifiers under NCAA Proposition 48 ($\bar{X} = 80.3$) revealed more academic accountability than student-athletes who met the specific academic eligibility requirements for freshman student-athletes ($\bar{X} = 72.6$). All-Americans ($\bar{X} = 74.4$) had a higher degree of academic accountability than student-athletes who were not All-Americans ($\bar{X} = 71.5$).

DISCUSSION

Overall, a paradoxical relationship exists when academic accountability among intercollegiate student-athletes is examined. While a

large percentage of student-athletes aspire to do well academically, their behavior indicates otherwise. The student-athletes did, however, take responsibility for their lack of preparation.

The behavior of the student-athletes appears antithetical to their academic aspirations. The findings indicate the following: (1) most study only enough to remain eligible and believe that sports are more important than studies; (2) most believe they are capable of doing better academically; and (3) the majority do not have good study habits.

Another paradox surfaced. While many subjects reported the academic requirements for their courses were too difficult and most seemed fearful of losing their eligibility because of low grades, more than half thought they could do better academically if they had more time to pursue their studies. However, when the student-athletes had the least time available to them (i.e., during their sports season) almost half of the sample said their grades were higher during that period than they were in the off-season.

This confounding paradox could be interpreted in one of two ways. First, it could be an indication that student-athletes took less demanding courses or were clustered into "jock" courses during their seasons of competition (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987). Second, it could be an indication that the student-athletes' time is more structured during their sports seasons because of the time demands of competition. Consequently, during their playing seasons, student-athletes probably are more disciplined and focused as compared to the off-season (Sailes, 1986). Since it is difficult to determine which interpretation is prevalent without more evidence, further investigation needs to be conducted in this area.

It is not surprising that black student-athletes scored lower on the variable "academic accountability" than white student-athletes. The literature on the academic performance (e.g., grade point averages and graduation rates) of black student-athletes consistently shows them trailing white student-athletes (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987; Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986; Lederman, 1992; Nyquist, 1985; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982). The disadvantaged educational background of black student-athletes more than likely accounts for their lower scores on this variable.

The findings that All-Americans and partial qualifiers are more serious about their studies than other student-athletes appear to justify intuitive expectations. Both groups have much more to lose by demonstrating a less serious attitude about their academic requirements. All-Americans probably are starters and need to do well academically to maintain their starting positions; partial qualifiers stand to lose another year of eligibility and/or competition after having forfeited their freshman year.

SUMMARY

This study was able to disclose that a paradoxical relationship exists in the role expectations of student-athletes at NCAA Division I institutions. While the student-athletes in the sample had academic aspirations, several structural variables such as time demands of sport participation and lack of high school preparation prevented them from reaching their academic goals. Further, student-athletes did little more academically than meet the minimum requirements necessary to maintain their athletic eligibility. A number of student-athletes used the academic counseling services offered by their respective institutions; unfortunately, indications were that this was not enough to offset the anxiety of losing athletic eligibility or graduating by the time their eligibility expired. Further evidence revealed that those student-athletes with the most to lose had stronger values relative to their academic success. However, it appears that black student-athletes were not able to overcome the disparities illustrated in the related literature.

This study was revealing. In a time when student-athletes are being subjected to more academic scrutiny, it appears that the messages of going to class, getting an education, and graduating are heard but not listened to. Although the academic aspirations of student-athletes may be sincere, their actions do not parallel those thoughts.

In light of these findings, it becomes imperative that coaches, academic counselors, and teachers make a greater effort to affect the academic values of student-athletes and help them develop the positive attitudes regarding their academic responsibilities that would lead to behavior modifications and ensure success in the classroom and beyond.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire

YOU ARE BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ATHLETES ABOUT THEIR ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES AT THE COLLEGE THEY ATTEND. YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY. PLEASE DO NOT PROVIDE ANY INFORMATION THAT MAY IDENTIFY YOU OR YOUR SCHOOL. ANSWER EACH QUESTION AS ACCURATELY AND COMPLETELY AS POSSIBLE. DARKEN THE APPROPRIATE SPACE ON YOUR RESPONSE SHEET FOR EACH QUESTION. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS STUDY OR WOULD LIKE A COPY OF THE RESULTS, PLEASE CONTACT DR. GARY A. SAILES, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, AT 812-855-0538.

1. What is your ethnic background?
 - a. African American
 - b. Caucasian
 - c. Hispanic
 - d. Asian American
 - e. Native American
 - f. Other
2. In what sport do you currently participate?
 - a. basketball
 - b. football
 - c. baseball/hockey
 - d. lacrosse, soccer, track & field, wrestling
 - e. tennis, golf, swimming & diving, other

3. What is your current year in school?
 - a. freshman
 - b. sophomore
 - c. junior
 - d. senior
 - e. fifth year senior
4. What is your current grade point average (based on 4.0=A)?
 - a. 4.0-3.5 (A average)
 - b. 3.4-3.0 (A to B average)
 - c. 2.9-2.5 (B average)
 - d. 2.4-2.0 (B to C average)
 - e. Below 2.0 (C average or below)
5. What was your grade point average when you graduated from high school?
 - a. 4.0-3.5 (A average)
 - b. 3.4-3.0 (A to B average)
 - c. 2.9-2.5 (B average)
 - d. 2.4-2.0 (B to C average)
 - e. Below 2.0 (C average or below)
6. Were you able to meet NCAA Proposition 48 requirements when you graduated from high school?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
7. If you were not able to meet NCAA Proposition 48 requirements, which requirement were you unable to meet?
 - a. ACT score
 - b. SAT score
 - c. grade point average
 - d. I met NCAA Proposition 48 requirements when I graduated from high school.
8. Did you receive an athletic scholarship to play sports at this school?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
9. Were you a high school All-American?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
10. Are you currently a college All-American?
 - a. yes
 - b. no

THE REMAINING QUESTIONS ASK FOR YOUR HONEST AND MOST SINCERE OPINIONS. PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ACCORDINGLY:

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 5 | STRONGLY AGREE |
| 4 | AGREE |
| 3 | UNDECIDED |
| 2 | DISAGREE |
| 1 | STRONGLY DISAGREE |

11. I would have attended college even if I had not received an athletic scholarship.
12. In high school, sports were more important to me than my studies.
13. In high school, I studied only enough to remain eligible.
14. Currently, sports are more important to me than my studies.
15. In high school, I had enough time to participate in varsity sports and pursue my studies.
16. I currently have adequate time to pursue my studies.
17. I had good study habits while in high school.
18. I currently have good study habits.
19. My high school classes prepared me for college academics.
20. I am very serious about and committed to my academic major.
21. I plan to graduate by the time my eligibility expires.
22. Upon graduation, I plan to continue my education by attending graduate or professional school.
23. I am capable of doing better academically.
24. Upon graduation, I plan to pursue a career within the field of my educational training.
25. I found the academic requirements for my courses difficult.
26. I find it difficult to concentrate on my studies after a game.
27. My athletic commitments demand too much of my time.

28. I get better grades during the playing season.
29. I am sure I could get better grades if I had more time to concentrate on my studies.
30. I take advantage of the academic counseling available to me to ensure my eligibility.