

The “Lost Literature” of Student-Athlete Services:
A Content Analysis of *Academic Athletic Journal* Articles from 1985 to 2006
Rubin, Lisa M.

Abstract

The National Advisor/Academic Athletic Journal was published by the National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals (N4A) from the early 1980s to 2006. Scholarship in the student-athlete services field was “lost” because it was only available in print to members. Much of this literature has been unread and uncited. Thirty-one issues published from 1985 to 2006 were collected and digitized to preserve and share in an open-access repository. A content analysis was conducted on 168 items over 22 years to understand the topics and trends in this missing literature, the foundation for the field of student-athlete services. The journal published 99 empirical articles and 69 gray literature items in this time frame. Sharing these articles allows 241 unique authors to receive credit for their work in future research. Findings show many current issues affecting college athletes and student-athlete services professionals were prevalent in the journal’s issues. Implications for policy and suggestions for future research were presented.

Keywords: student-athlete services, N4A, scholarship, content analysis

The “Lost Literature” of Student-Athlete Services:

A Content Analysis of *Academic Athletic Journal* Articles from 1985 to 2006

The National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals (N4A) is a professional organization whose members support college athletes academically and holistically. According to Rubin and Moreno-Pardo (2018), “Student-athlete services professionals include academic counselors, tutor coordinators, life skills program coordinators, and learning specialists” who serve the college athlete population on their campuses (p. 1). Prior to its name change in 2017, N4A stood for the National Association of Academic Advisors of Athletics, which was established in the 1970s (Rubin, 2017). In 2015, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) partnered with N4A to take on offering professional development to those who worked in the area of life skills/student-athlete development, rather than solely advising and learning support (Navarro et al., 2020).

In 1985, N4A published its 12th issue of a peer-reviewed journal, *The National Advisor*, in collaboration with the Career Guidance Foundation’s Athletic Guidance Center to contribute scholarship on the evolving field of student-athlete services (Esquinas, 1985). The foreword emphasized that the journal “serves as a resource for any academic advisor attempting to keep abreast of issues relating to the athlete” (*The National Advisor*, 1985, p. i). Given 11 issues had been published prior to Spring 1985, the journal likely started around 1980. The journal name and its mission to be a resource for any academic advisor was more broadly focused than solely on the membership of the N4A. However, the journal was distributed to its members via the mail, and was never digitized or distributed to libraries widely.

Around the same time, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (formerly National Academic Advising Association) launched the first issue of the *NACADA*

Journal in 1981, the impetus being the need to further establish the importance of academic advising within higher education (Miller & Miller, 2022). Habley (2009) called for an increase in academic advising scholarship to justify academic advising as a field and a discipline. Within its first two decades of publication, the *NACADA Journal* had increased advising scholarship from three to nearly 400 articles, with an ascending focus on empirical articles as the journal established itself (Gordon & Grites, 2001; Miller & Miller, 2022).

In 1986, Gerald S. Gurney took over N4A’s journal as editor and changed its name to *Academic Athletic Journal* to better reflect the scope of the publication (Gurney, 1986). The first issue of the *Academic Athletic Journal* was labeled Volume 1, Issue 1. Various issues of the journal included submission guidelines with a defined audience, topics of interest, and purpose beginning in 1991. The primary audience of the *Academic Athletic Journal* was “the membership of the N4A, that is, athletic academic counselors. The secondary audience includes other professionals working with student-athletes in the fields of education or counseling at the secondary and post-secondary levels” (*Academic Athletic Journal*, 1991, p. i). Suggested topics (aims and scope) included “historical overviews of topics related to student-athletes; reviews of publications related to student-athletes; practical applications of theoretical or research-based conclusions; and research on student-athletes, including a full discussion of results and implications” (*Academic Athletic Journal*, 1991, p. i). Each issue listed an editorial board comprised of scholars and scholar-practitioners.

The *Academic Athletic Journal* ceased publication in 2006. Its contents and scholarly contributions remained on bookshelves in N4A members’ offices, inaccessible to others. The authors who were published in the journal did not get the credit for building a foundation of scholarship in student-athlete services for this reason. In his review of literature regarding the

professionalization of academic advising, McGill (2019) cautioned, “More scholarship is needed to set consensus parameters before advising is considered a bona fide profession” (p. 97). While referring to academic advising more broadly, this directly relates to the “lost literature” contained within the *Academic Athletic Journal*, as the foundations of research in athletic advising have not been accessible for scholars in the past four decades to build upon what exists within this publication. Shaffer et al. (2010) emphasized, “A knowledge base is important not only for the benefit of future students who will be the beneficiaries of better advising, but also for the sake of the reputation of academic advising as a legitimate profession” (p. 75). Thus, this body of work was a missing treasure that could enhance the professional contributions of student-athlete services professionals.

This article first reviews literature on student-athlete academic performance, development, college experience, and support outside of the *Academic Athletic Journal*. The rationale for this study is explained, then the methods which were followed to analyze the journal’s contents. I then described the findings and explore their significance in the discussion, which includes limitations and implications, followed by the conclusion.

Literature Beyond the *Academic Athletic Journal*

Outside of the *Academic Athletic Journal* before 2006, there were limited publication outlets for research in this area. Early studies between the 1980s and early 2000s are found in journals in the fields of sociology, human resources, counseling, and social science. Seminal works by Adler and Adler (1985) and Adler and Adler (1987) on athletes’ role conflict and impact on their academic performance were published in *Sociology of Education and The Social Science Journal*, respectively. Early research on the intersection of race, gender and sport (Kiger & Lorentzen, 1986) and female athletes’ academic accomplishments (Meyer, 1990) was

published in *Sociology of Sport Journal*. Lally and Kerr’s (2005) study on athletes and career development was published in *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*. Maloney and McCormick’s (1993) study on athletic participation’s influence on academic achievement was published in *The Journal of Human Resources*. The first study to include scholarship status as a factor impacting athlete academic performance (Purdy et al., 1982) was published in *Social Problems*. Upthegrove et al.’s (1999) study on race and academic performance of college athletes was published in *Social Science Quarterly*. A study on athletes’ identity development (Valentine & Taub, 1999) was published in *Journal of College Counseling*. Outside of *Academic Athletic Journal*, only one study on the backgrounds and job duties of athletic advisors (Brooks et al., 1987) was published in *The Sport Psychologist*.

Foster et al. (2022) studied the lack of sport research in eight higher education journals from 2010 to 2019, emphasizing,

the inequitable coverage of athletics and athletes within higher education journals signals to the athletic community, and those who study it, that their time, energy, and development are less important to those in higher education and negates their experiences entirely. (p. 180)

Some articles in the time frame of the *Academic Athletic Journal* were published in student affairs or higher education journals. Nishimoto’s (1997) article on football team culture and academic outcomes was published in *College Student Affairs Journal*. Simons et al.’s (1999) pivotal study on athletes and motivational types was published in *Journal of College Student Development*. A study of athletes’ graduation rates by Ferris et al. (2004) was published in *Research in Higher Education*. Two articles were published in *New Directions for Student*

Services, Broughton and Neyer’s (2001) piece “Advising and Counseling Student-Athletes,” and Hill et al.’s (2001) paper on trends facing college athletes and athletic departments.

There were also a number of articles published on stereotypes and perceptions of college athletes by faculty, staff, and non-athlete students. Simons et al. (2007) surveyed 538 athletes about their academic experiences and how they were treated by professors and non-athlete students. Participants reported they were treated negatively by non-athlete students and especially faculty. This study was in the *College Student Journal*. In a study of faculty perceptions’ of athletes’ academic deviance in the *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, Kuhn and Rubin (2022) found faculty had low perceptions of deviance, but there were more negative perceptions for men’s football athletes. The more connection there was between faculty and athletes, the less likely they were to have negative perceptions (Kuhn & Rubin, 2022). Stokowski et al. (2016) studied 369 academic advisors’ perceptions of athletes’ academic engagement and athletic departments, and Stokowski et al. (2020) explored 155 academic advisors’ open-ended comments from the 2016 survey. These studies found that academic advisors held a negative view of athletes and athletic departments, especially toward athletes on football and men’s basketball teams. Academic advisors felt disconnected with athletic advisors’ roles and actions in helping athletes academically. The 2016 study was in *Journal of SPORT* and the 2020 study was in *The Mentor: Innovative Scholarship on Academic Advising*.

All of the studies on stereotypes and perceptions of college athletes and their academic performance suggested the more familiar faculty, staff, and non-athlete students are with athletes and academic regulations they are required to meet, the more positive the perceptions are. Further, Rubin and Lewis (2020) found that there are tensions which exist between campus advisors (both primary role and faculty) and athletic advisors in communication and

collaboration. Their study in the *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics* offered many suggestions for how advisors might improve their relationships to support college athletes through graduation.

Studies focused on the academic support of college athletes do not often fit within sport management journals’ aims and scope. As the study of academic advising and student-athlete services is relatively young, new journals started in the 2000s and 2010s which would publish these topics. These journals include *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*, *Journal of Higher Education Athletics and Innovation*, *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, *Journal of Student-Athlete Educational Development and Success*, and *Journal of the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education* (Foster et al., 2022).

Though the *Academic Athletic Journal* appears in name and scope to focus mainly on athletic advising and athletes’ academic environment, it also encompassed articles on life skills, or what is now primarily known as student-athlete development (Navarro et al., 2020). In their book on student-athlete programming, Navarro et al. (2020) highlighted key programming areas offered by student-athlete services units: student-athlete development (including leadership and career development); community outreach and engagement; specialized learning and target tutoring; return to learn; mental health and well-being; degree completion; diversity, equity, and inclusion; transition programs; and international travel/study abroad. Applying the Athlete Development (ADL) model, Stokowski et al. (2020) sought to determine which resources and athletic department staff members contributed to the winning success of athletic programs in the Directors’ Cup standings, a sponsored recognition of highly successful programs across divisions and institutional types. They found that athletic trainers, sports psychologists, and learning specialists significantly contributed to winning success (Stokowski et al., 2020).

N4A’s Student-Athlete Development Task Force (2022) published its “SADV Task Force White Paper Outline” which aimed to establish common language in the field of student-athlete development specifically. This “branch” of student-athlete services is adjacent to athletic advising, focusing on students’ holistic development and preparation for life after college and sport rather than academics. This white paper emphasized six standards of focus for student-athlete development programs: personal enhancement (e.g., financial literacy, mental health, transitions); Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC); career development; leadership; civic engagement; and diversity, equity, and inclusion. At its 2024 national convention, N4A introduced its plan to pilot and launch SADEV360, a tool to establish standards and assessment for student-athlete development programs (Luckey et al., 2024).

There are overlaps between these two areas, though specialized learning and targeted tutoring does not fit within a student-athlete development department, for example. In Navarro et al. (2020), SAAC is housed within leadership development. However organized, there are key areas in student-athlete services that in recent years are of interest to scholar-practitioners in the field. Studying the success of programs in these areas helps those who work in student-athlete services see if students are effectively learning and growing based on set outcomes for these programs. Stokowski et al. (2019) posed a question on social media to former college athletes to learn about their transition out of sport experiences. They gathered responses that ranged from negative (e.g., sense of loss) to positive (e.g., prepared for the future). Similarly, Weight et al, (2022) conducted 215 interviews with former athletes with a range of decades beyond their college athlete careers. They found that their participants retained skills and life lessons from their athletic careers that continued to benefit them over time. Gauging program impact on former athletes is one way to evaluate offerings for student development.

The Search for Lost Literature: Rationale for the Study

In my quest to contribute scholarship in the field of student-athlete services, which encompasses athletic advising, student-athlete development, learning support, and mental health and wellbeing services among other areas (Navarro et al., 2020), I discovered this wealth of knowledge from research and model programs in the *Academic Athletic Journal* was unavailable besides a handful of copies at the Library of Congress (Fall 1985, Spring 1987) and The Ohio State University Libraries (Spring 1993; Fall 1994; Spring 1995; one each of the two issues from 1996, 1999 and 2001; Winter 2002, Winter 2003, Fall 2005, Fall 2006). With the blessing of the N4A Board of Directors as copyright holder of the journal in September 2020, I launched my hunt to collect as many issues of the journal as possible through the last publication in 2006.

My initial plan involved contacting N4A past presidents, retired members, and long-time members of the organization. In total, I contacted 40 current or former members of N4A in the search for printed copies of the journal, and some of them offered to reach out to additional people to help me. The COVID-19 pandemic caused some challenges, as many people did not feel comfortable going to their offices to look for journal copies. Additionally, several retirees tossed their printed journal issues in the trash before I contacted them or forgot about my request and did so before I sent them a reminder. Shipments of printed journals and photocopies of issues arrived on my doorstep over the 2020-2021 academic year. In addition, members who wished to retain their physical copies sent me scans instead. After all of these efforts, I was able to collect 31 consecutive issues from 1985 to 2006! According to Alexander (2020), discovery of critical issues in a field is “limited to what the existing literature is able to reveal” (p. 11). This motivated me to locate these issues and study their contents to add significant contributions to the study of student-athlete services and give authors credit for their work.

This project had two components: digitization and a content analysis. It was very important to me that these foundational works be accessible to anyone so they can be learning tools, building blocks of scholarship for the field, historical records, and be read and cited so the authors finally be recognized for their contributions. The digitization project spanned 2021 through 2023, involving significant time scanning, editing, making files accessible for screen readers, creating high resolution image files for preservation, and developing an open access repository that launched online in 2023, hosted by K-State Libraries. The content analysis project is the focus here, to share what the journal published from 1985 to 2006. The analysis of the 168 items in the journal would benefit the field for the following reasons: 1) identify foundational research in the field of student-athlete services, 2) understand historical trends and topics of interest within the professional association’s only journal in its years of growth, and 3) recognize gaps in topics in the journal which may appear in different publication venues or support the need for further research. Because I focused on a text-driven analysis, I explored the content of these journals inductively without established research questions (Krippendorff, 2019; White & Marsh, 2006). This approach is “indebted to the tradition of grounded theory” (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 385). This means that I began analysis without theoretical assumptions while reading the contents of the journal (Puerta & García, 2024).

Methods

After collecting and digitizing all issues of *The National Advisor* and *Academic Athletic Journal* from 1985 to 2006, I used text-driven content analysis to examine the contents of these 31 issues (Krippendorff, 2019). Content analysis “offers scholars an inventory of the body of literature” (Williams et al., 2020, p. 469). This “lost literature” provides a foundation of knowledge in the field of student-athlete services, and what scholarship influenced the field in its

early years (Mottarella et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2020). While the journal did not report demographic backgrounds of its authors, historically members of N4A and this profession are women and people who identify as racially marginalized (Rubin, 2017; McDowell et al., 2009; Watkins et al., 2022). Rubin’s (2017) survey of the profession showed 57% were female; Watkins et al. (2022) found 73% of athletic advisors in Division I to be women. The NCAA (2023) demographics database includes self-reported data from 2012 to 2023 by athletic departments. In that time frame, athletic advisors/counselors were comprised of a range of 60-66% women, and life skills coordinators/student-athlete development professionals were represented by between 69-75% women.

By including all of the items published, I ensured that women and scholars of color would finally receive credit for their contributions to the literature, a practice of reaching toward equity. Linder et al. (2020) used a mixed methods approach to “[track] specific quantifiable measures and [review] articles for specific themes” (p. 1021) in their content analysis of research on campus sexual violence, which I followed for this study. The goal was to discover more breadth for both historical/archival purposes of the journal, and also to establish base knowledge and topics of importance within the field.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

There were 168 items published in *The National Advisor* and *Academic Athletic Journal* from 1985 to 2006 over the 22 years and 31 issues I collected. Of these, 99 were empirical studies and 69 were non-empirical items (e.g., editorials, commentaries, literature reviews, book reviews), which is considered “gray literature” (Alexander, 2020, p. 13; Quin, 2017, p. 378). Issues were not published in 1998 or 2004. Many of the issues had a list of all published articles in the journal in a time frame before the issue, which enabled me to figure out which items in

each journal issue I needed to search for when collecting issues. Essentially, once I determined the issues’ contents, the inclusion criteria was any item, empirical or not, published in any issue I could collect from the start of the journal’s publication through when it ceased in 2006. I aimed for a content analysis over a statistical study of peer-reviewed items, so I opted to include all published items in the journal issues, as nonempirical items can be “viewed as making an important contribution” to understanding a field with limited scholarship (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020, p. 143).

I was unable to locate any record of the initial publication for *The National Advisor*, thus, I excluded anything published before 1985, because it is unknown what the contents of those journals were. The first issue I collected, *The National Advisor* Spring 1985 issue, was listed as the 12th issue. Thus, I am excluding 11 issues of the journal which were most likely published between 1980 and 1985. Two supplemental files correspond to the literature included in the study: a list of issues published in the journal, and a list of all 168 items with an abstract or summary, many of which I developed myself after reading each item.

Positionality

I consider myself a scholar-practitioner in the field of student-athlete services. I began my career in this field in 2005, a year prior to N4A’s ceasing the publication of the *Academic Athletic Journal*, of which I received a few printed copies as a member. I joined the N4A’s Research Committee while both a full-time staff member in student-athlete services and part-time doctoral student in higher education leadership, eventually becoming committee chair. In addition, I served on the N4A Board of Directors in a role with oversight over the Research Committee.

During my term as committee chair, I was approached by members who were interested in restarting the *Academic Athletic Journal*, but the Board was not interested in hosting a journal

at the time. Since 2014, I have been a faculty member focused on student-athlete services at my institution. I teach, research, and engage in service activities related to this field, and also advise graduate students, including college athletes. Thus, my purview comes from almost two decades of membership and engagement with the student-athlete services field and its constituents, while contributing scholarship to this field.

Data Analysis

For this study, I employed mixed methods, using a qualitative approach to understanding key topics of articles in the journal, and quantitatively, looked for frequencies and percentages within the categories listed below and amongst the keywords identified. Applying “qualitative (i.e., content analysis) and quantitative (i.e., descriptive statistics)” methods in systematic reviews is one approach to synthesizing data (Wilson & Anagnostapoulous, 2021, p. 655). Frequencies are considered quantitative content analysis data (White & Marsh, 2006). Pigott and Polanin (2020) noted, “Systematic reviews follow three basic steps: searching the literature, screening abstracts and full-text documents, and coding included studies” (p. 27). First, I developed a spreadsheet to keep track of article contents as I read individual articles. For each article, I documented the journal name, publication year, volume and issue numbers, title, authors, and page numbers. Even though the first issue of *The National Advisor* I acquired was noted as the 12th issue, I could not access the previous issues before 1985. Since the Spring 1986 issue of *Athletic Academic Journal* was denoted as *I*(1), I assigned the 1985 volume as 0 and issues as 1 and 2 for the scope of this project. Next, I wrote an article summary, sometimes starting with a provided abstract if one was published and adding onto it, or drafting one from scratch. I also documented the research paradigm (e.g., positivist, constructivist), methodology

(i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, critical, philosophical/theoretical), and if a survey instrument was used and/or created for the article.

Four paradigms—positivist, constructivist, critical, and pragmatic—are defined as they were applied in my analysis. The positivist paradigm refers to “a worldview to research, which is grounded in what is known in research methods as the scientific method of investigation” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 30). The constructivist paradigm aims “to understand the subjective world of human experience” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33). The critical paradigm focuses on “social justice issues and seeks to address the political, social and economic issues, which lead to social oppression, conflict, struggle, and power structures at whatever levels these might occur” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 35). Lastly, the pragmatic paradigm allows researchers to use “more practical and pluralistic approaches” deemed “most appropriate for studying the phenomenon at hand” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 35).

I included methodology and research paradigm in my analysis, as study design is an important factor in understanding the types of publications which appeared in these journals, and paradigms reference how a study was designed and the lens in which it was analyzed (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Cabrera et al., 2022; Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020; Pigott & Polanin, 2020). Hakimi et al. (2021) explained, “The type of study gives an important overview of the nature of the research evidence in this particular field” (p. 685). In this process, I also identified which items were peer-reviewed and empirical studies, and which were gray literature (Cabrera et al., 2022).

With the caveat that my meaning-making is subjective through my positionality, I also went through an iterative coding process to inductively develop keywords for the articles (Krippendorff, 2019; Wilson & Anagnostopoulous, 2021). Coding “establishes categories that are

relevant and valid” (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 31). Following a similar process to Lee et al. (2021) in their approach to narrative synthesis, in my first round of open coding, I identified keywords based on my knowledge of the field and what stood out from the article, especially when writing or editing the abstract/summary (Williams & Moser, 2019). Next, I grouped similar codes together to create a new, more streamlined categories through axial coding, which simplified some the keywords and made it easier to identify trends and themes in these issues (Williams & Moser, 2019). Transparency in how I conducted the analysis of this literature is crucial (Wilson & Anagnostopoulous, 2021). Table 1 provides examples of key themes from the second round of coding with initial codes to show how I grouped similar codes into an overarching key theme. These examples come from four of the top eight key themes from the analysis, which is further explained in findings. Both rounds of coding appear in the supplemental spreadsheet containing the list of articles. Descriptive quantitative data included the number of editors, frequency of themes, the top 10 key themes and frequency by decade, and frequency of research paradigms and methods in empirical articles. These can be found in Tables 2–6. There are also calculated percentages which are included in the results section below.

Findings

Descriptives

The 168 published items in the journal over the 22-year span were written by 241 unique authors, 186 of whom authored empirical articles. This study has enabled access to the work of 241 authors, representing a variety of demographic and educational backgrounds, who deserve credit for their contributions to literature in the field (Boveda et al., 2023). Additionally, this project also exposes scholars and practitioners alike to a specialized journal and content which is not typically published in generalist, sport management, or higher education journals which

garner a wider audience (Boveda et al., 2023; Foster et al., 2022). As a scholar of this field, I was devastated to realize many research projects, including many of my own, did not give proper credit to the authors and works from this “lost literature” because either scholars did not know about them or did not have access to the articles.

Though not comparable, in a content analysis of the *NACADA Journal* from 2010 to 2020, 179 items were published in a 10-year span, including 148 empirical articles (Mottarella et al., 2022). Eight unique editors, including two women, oversaw journal activities, shown in Table 2. Of the 69 non-empirical items 58 (84%) were published prior to 2000, and 56 of 99 (57%) empirical articles utilized survey instruments, many of which were created for the studies. One instrument, the Student-Athlete Rapport Survey, had an unfortunate acronym (SARS) (Green & Denson, 1993).

The content analysis revealed a very lengthy list of key themes from the articles since more than one keyword was attributed to them. In Table 3, the top 10 key themes (by frequency) demonstrated the most critical topics in the journal and to the field. Both rounds of coding are in columns in the supplemental file of all 168 items in the content analysis. Table 1 was previously introduced as an example showing how these themes were developed with the examples of academic performance, academic predictors, academic support, and skills (four of the top eight key themes). There was some overlap with related keywords, as an article with the key theme of demographics may also have sex/gender and/or race listed for it. Table 4 shows the top 11 to 20 key themes from articles by frequency.

Six themes each had a frequency of 5: theory, stress, non-athlete students, Division III, basketball, and well-being. An additional four themes each had a frequency of 4: study hall, legal issues, Division II, and coaches. All remaining themes had a frequency of three or less. Division

I and football each had a frequency of 9 and continue to be popular subjects for research on intercollegiate athletics. Basketball and Division III each had 5, and Division II only had 4. The *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience* published a special issue on NCAA Division III college athlete development and experience in 2022, but few studies in athletics have considered students outside of Division I as the focus (Hodges & Darvin, 2022).

Though full decades are not available in the collection except for the 1990s, I looked at topical trends for the top 10 key themes across the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s in the journal. Table 5 shows the evolution of key themes throughout the publication by decade.

Table 5 shows a snapshot of 10 topical areas. Editorials were not consistently published in issues, as there were seven published of nine issues in the 1980s, six published of 15 issues in the 1990s, and eight published in seven issues, including one guest editorial. The remaining themes from articles show some ebb and flow of topical interests, which a decreased focus on academic support in the 2000s. Academic predictors were a hot topic in the 1980s. Academic performance remained steady across the entire publication, whereas certain topics peaked in the 1990s (demographics, career development, sex/gender). In the 2000s, skills had the highest frequency of any topic with only 8, so there were broader and varied interests across topics in this time frame compared to in the previous two decades.

Research Paradigms & Methodologies

For the 99 empirical articles, I considered the research paradigms, or lenses in which authors framed their approach their studies in their way of thinking, and the methodologies employed by authors for their research studies. Bearman et al. (2012) cautioned, “the higher education sector is multi-disciplinary and lacks a single unifying paradigm that underpins

research and reporting” (p. 637). The four paradigms I identified included were positivist, constructivist, critical, and pragmatic.

In addition, I considered the methodological approaches employed by authors for the empirical studies in N4A’s journal. In their article on the history of the first 20 years of scholarship in the *NACADA Journal*, Miller and Miller (2022) noted that some editors intended to only publish quantitative studies, especially at the start of the 1990s and also at the beginning of the 2000s, while other editors took a broader approach in accepting and publishing submissions with different methodological approaches. Table 6 shows the breakdown of research paradigms used by methodology.

The most prevalent lens by far was the positivist paradigm, found within 63% of all empirical items. Though different methodological approaches were used, clearly the majority (62%) were quantitative studies, of which 56 (90%) were in the positivist lens. These findings are in line with what was considered rigorous or real research in the *NACADA Journal* during this time period (Miller & Miller, 2022).

Key Themes

This collection of 31 issues spanned a wide range of topics, paradigms, and article types. The top 10 themes are displayed in Table 3, and their prevalence by decade is seen in Table 5. Considering the journal’s name and target audience, the themes of academic support, skills, academic performance, career development, and academic predictors align with its aim and scope. Models represent best practices offered to the readership. Demographics, sex/gender, and race are related themes. Editorials often introduced issues or shared guest opinions. Esquinas’ (1985) editorial in Spring 1985 reiterated the importance of scholarship in this growing field. Jackson’s (1999) editorial called for athletic advisors to support students during a presidential

election cycle. All of his editorials called for more scholarship to further justify the need for the field. The final editor, Gruber (2003), requested more submissions bridging theory to practice.

In looking at the “bookends” of this 22-year collection, the Spring 1985 issue topics included: supplemental instruction, study hall, two articles on academic interventions, tutoring, computers/technology, purpose of advisors’ supporting athletes, organizational climate for athlete support units, group academic counseling, drug testing, legal issues of athletic participation, and a support letter for Proposition 48 (academic reform legislation). Ferris’ (1987) article “Survey of Five Athletic Academic Support Facilities” compared the facilities and resources of Georgia Tech, Kentucky, Minnesota, SMU, and UNC-Chapel Hill. Resources at the time included typewriters and mainframe access for students!

In the last years of publication, the topics in the final 2005 and 2006 issues included: athletic retirement, learning strategies course, support for athletes with learning disabilities, academic stereotypes of African American female athletes, counseling for athletes (stressors, non-academic), athletes’ academic motivation, athlete-faculty interactions considering demographics, athlete isolation from campus (including facilities), and an op-ed in support of study abroad for athletes. The overlap with the 1985 Spring issue was the learning intervention topic. This journal has made a significant contribution to the foundational body of knowledge in student-athlete services.

Discussion

The analysis of *The National Advisor/Academic Athletic Journal* from 1985 to 2006 has developed an understanding of the foundational scholarship in a relatively young field. Editors continuously called for more submissions to the journal to build evidence for the field’s importance and share best practices to support students. The connections between what I found

in the journal and what is currently of importance to N4A regarding the holistic development of athletes are interesting.

Of the top 20 themes found in the content analysis, 13 aligned with a key programming area from Navarro et al. (2020) and/or the N4A Student-Athlete Development Task Force (2022). N4A also offers Model Practices Awards on an annual basis, continuing the tradition of sharing best practices with its members. After excluding editorials, N4A, Division I, football, and models, which are not related to programming areas specifically, that left two themes that do not quite fit: eligibility and ethics. Eligibility could be related to academic support of course, but it also is about meeting minimum requirements to compete. The theme of academic support is related to both specialized learning and targeted tutoring, and degree completion. The skills, academic predictors, and at-risk themes also tie to specialized learning and targeted tutoring, and academic performance connects with degree completion.

The themes of demographics, sex/gender, and race all align with diversity, equity, and inclusion, which overlapped between the two key focus areas for programming. Both freshmen and transitions connect with the transitions/personal enhancement areas. Identity fits in with both personal enhancement and student-athlete development. Student development fits many categories and generally to student-athlete development. Overall, these 13 themes within the top 20 demonstrate the literature in *Academic Athletic Journal* encompassed key areas considered vital to the profession today and focus on college athletes’ holistic development.

Topics in Journal Still Relevant Today

In student-athlete services today, many of the hot topics and emerging specialty roles in athletics (e.g., career development, leadership development, pay for play, learning support) were

written about in this journal decades prior (Navarro et al., 2020). This past body of literature offers an important contribution to understanding topics which impact college athletes today.

Career Development

Career development was the sixth most prevalent key theme with 19 articles about it between 1989 and 2003. Career development topics covered in these articles included four articles on freshmen; three on model programs; three on comparing athletes and non-athletes; two on transferable skills; two on football athletes; and one each on identity foreclosure/athletic retirement, professional sport aspirations, female athletes, and Black male athletes. Career development has become an important aspect of student-athlete services, with some athletic departments’ hiring professionals solely focused on career development of athletes (Navarro et al., 2020). Athletic advisors and student-athlete development professionals recognize the importance of parallel planning, so students can prepare for a career alongside working on their athletic dreams (e.g., become a professional athlete or Olympian) (Streufert, 2020).

Because of athletes’ difficult schedules, they may miss out on opportunities to develop for their future beyond sport, such as through study abroad, internships, or working a part-time job. There have been recent articles on transferable skills from athletics to the workplace (Weight et al., 2020) and positive experiences for athletes in internships (Coffin et al., 2022). Programs like the University of Nebraska’s post-eligibility opportunities (PEO) program, in which athletes are funded to pursue study abroad, internships, or start graduate education after exhausting their athletic eligibility, have not been researched to determine how program outcomes influence athletes’ career development and future success (Nebraska Huskers, n.d.). Including the career development literature from this journal as a foundation for studies like this could be monumental in advancing career development for college athletes.

Member Surveys

The demographics and educational backgrounds of student-athlete services professionals allows for understanding who is in the profession, the people who directly support college athletes through their academic and holistic development. There were two member surveys published in *Academic Athletic Journal*. The first, “The NAAAA: Ten Years Old and Changing” by Mand and Fletcher (1986), was conducted after N4A had been established for 10 years and included 72 participants. Findings showed that veteran advisors were male, over 30, with coaching experience especially in revenue sports, and newer advisors were women, who tended to be younger with no coaching experience. The second, “Athletic Academic Counseling: A Survey of Members of the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics” by Serrano in 1987, studied 112 participants. Findings showed there were more male counselors than females, males earned higher salaries, just over half had masters degrees, and that more than half of respondents did not see athletic advising as a permanent career. Several studies of the profession have been conducted outside of this journal without access to these two foundational surveys of members. Around this same time, Brooks et al. (1987) surveyed 134 athletic advisors, and found

the majority of advisors and counselors were male, held a master’s degree, and were former athletes in revenue-producing sports. They were employed primarily by athletic departments and provided counseling services, for the most part, to male college athletes involved in revenue-producing sports. Counseling services for college athletes focused primarily on academic matters, with considerably less attention devoted to personal-social or vocational counseling. (p. 200)

This study outside of the *Academic Athletic Journal* affirms what both Mand and Fletcher (1986) and Serrano (1997) found.

Rubin (2017) surveyed 277 N4A members to explore their backgrounds and experiences. She identified a shift from a male-dominated role to one which employed more women. About half of the participants were former college athletes, 87% held masters degrees and 8% had doctoral degrees, and there was not one defined career path or graduate program which set professionals up for a position in this field. A year later, Vaughn and Smith (2018) surveyed 115 athletic advisors, finding 83% held masters degrees and 67% of respondents were female. They also found that there are various graduate degree programs and pathways to athletic advising roles. The most recent study by Watkins et al. (2022) focused solely on Division I athletic advisors. Of their respondents, 95.6% held a masters degree or higher in various disciplines, but most dominated by education or sport studies-related areas. The majority felt a graduate assistantship or paid internship offered the most preparation for their roles. The first two studies from *Academic Athletic Journal* are foundational to understanding who is in student-athlete services. All of these studies can show historical changes to the role’s demographics, educational backgrounds, and trainings which have changed over N4A’s almost 50 years of existence.

Learning Support

Issues from Spring 1985 and 2006 included articles on learning support and interventions. While research both in this journal and others has been relatively limited on learning specialists’ roles and supporting athletes who have learning challenges, this work continues to be of interest. Wolverton (2016) called learning specialists “the hottest hire” in intercollegiate athletics a decade after the journal ceased publication. The unfavorable but popular term “at-risk” to describe athletes with various academic or life challenges appeared 12

times as a key theme in this journal’s articles, which could have directly informed articles about the work of learning specialists (Steinberg et al., 2018, p. 78). Top key themes, including academic support (37), academic predictors (16), and skills (24), all pertain to the growth and nuances of learning support within student-athlete services. With so many articles on topics related to the role of learning specialists, there is a historical base of the work to inform future research on the development and evolution of learning support for college athletes.

High Impact Practices & Transitions

Another growing area of research in the field has centered on high impact practices for athletes and transitions into college. Kuh (2008) introduced 10 high impact educational practices (HIPs) in college: first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning/community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses/projects. In recent years, research has soared on these topics pertaining to college athletes specifically. The most prevalent HIP in *Academic Athletic Journal* is freshman seminars and experiences. Articles included a freshman study skills program (Whitner & Sanz, 1988), an academic and career exploration course for freshmen (Hattig, 1991), a career orientation program for freshmen football athletes (Street & Schroeder, 1996), specialized advising interventions for freshmen (Yap & Nelson, 1999), and a learning strategies course to improve freshmen academic performance (Tebbe & Petrie, 2005).

HIPs continue to be a hot topic in research on college athletes. Ishaq and Bass (2019) highlighted the barriers to athletes’ engagement in HIPs, including differences in attitudes between coaches and advisors, lack of resources, campus-athletic department dynamics, lack of athletes’ time for HIPs, and institutional control of HIPs implementation. Recent publications

include a review of quality dimensions in freshman seminars for athletes (Grafnetterova et al., 2020), the engagement of athletes in undergraduate research (Rubin et al., 2020), athletes’ involvement in community service (Martin, 2018), and even the suggestion to classify athletics participation as a HIP itself (Harry, 2023). How athletes engage in different HIPs continues to be of interest to both athletics and higher education scholars.

Amateurism and Name-Image-Likeness

As the college athletics landscape continues to evolve with name-image-likeness (NIL) and further discussion on pay for play, it is worth noting that Schubert and Gillett’s (1986) article “The Student-Athlete’s Predicted Monetary Value to an Institution” seems appropriate to revisit, as it highlighted Doug Flutie and Patrick Ewing as examples of college athletes impactful to their institution’s bottom line. Reed’s (1992) article “Athletic Scholarships as Contracts: Legal Ramifications for the University and Obligations of the Student-Athlete” suggested athletes are contractually treated as employees yet courts protected their amateur status. NIL became legal in 2021, allowing college athletes who are U.S. citizens to become entrepreneurial either by showcasing their athletic talent or doing something else entirely to make money (Rubin et al., 2021). Prior to July 2021, athletes were not allowed to make money at all, even if they majored in violin and performed at a show, because the NCAA restricted their ability to use their name, image, and likeness. The NCAA believed that athletes would benefit from being a NCAA athlete, even if they were just playing the violin. The only U.S. citizens restricted from being entrepreneurial besides college athletes were some prisoners who were not allowed to profit off of their crime(s).

As of August 2024, the *House vs. NCAA* case is in settlement discussions, with the NCAA due to pay \$2.7 billion in back pay to athletes prior NIL, plus a future \$20 million in

revenue sharing between athletic departments and athletes in popular sports like football and men’s basketball (Auerbach & Williams, 2024). The articles published from 1986 and 1992 pertain to the current discussion about pay for play, which started with NIL, soon with revenue sharing, and may lead to the classification of college athletes as employees of their institutions. There is a treasure chest full of research here to continue exploring in relation to current and future hot topics.

What is Missing from the Lost Literature?

Just as it is important to recognize the contents of the journal, I must also acknowledge some of the hot topics in within current research on this area which are limited in the journal or may not be published on at all. In Fong et al.’s (2017) study, they discovered variables missing from their literature search. In the literature review, numerous articles outside of this journal were introduced as part of the foundational scholarship in student-athlete services. The *Academic Athletic Journal* ceased publication in 2006, and so much has evolved in intercollegiate athletics after the last issue was printed.

Student Development Topics

Several student development topics were limited in the 22 years of archives I explored. There were no articles on financial literacy, personal branding, social media, the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, or. leadership academies. Eiche et al.’s (1993) article “An Exploration of Leadership Characteristics in College Athletes” was the sole article on athlete leadership development, which is very current area of interest for college athlete development (Heim et al., 2022; Navarro et al., 2020; Rubin & Nwosu, 2021). Social media did not exist until the last few years of the journal’s existence, which may explain why scholars did not have enough data or time to study this phenomenon.

Another current spotlight for college athletes is mental health. Athletic departments with financial resources are hiring more mental health counselors, who support students through athletic retirement among many other issues (Navarro et al., 2020). Limited articles in the *Academic Athletic Journal* focused on mental health, athletic retirement, and sport psychology. Richardson et al.’s (1990) study “Peak Performance for Student-Athletes” examined a sport psychology intervention’s impact on freshman football athletes’ anxiety. The 1995 study “A Comparison Between Injured and Uninjured Football Players on Selected Psychosocial Variables” by Brewer and Petrie explained the psychological impact of athletic injury on 916 football players. Williams-Rice’s (1996) article “After the Final Snap: Cognitive Appraisal, Coping, and Life Satisfaction among Former Collegiate Athletes” explored coping strategies for athletes once their playing days were over. Lubker’s (2006) study “Athletes’ Feelings of Isolation and Separateness as Determined by Campus Design: A Theoretical Perspective” explored how athletes are isolated from the rest of campus through athletic department structures and physical locations. Athlete isolation was further explored by Rubin and Moses’ (2017) study on the athletic subcultures within student-athlete academic centers.

The NCAA (2024) has invested more into its mental health resources for college athletes in recent years. The *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics* published a special issue on mental health and college athlete well-being in 2020 (Auerbach & Stokowski, 2020). Research has also explored how social media influences the mental health of college athletes (Brougham, 2021). Even as athletes have access to NIL money and a potential revenue share from their sport participation, mental health will continue to be important. Future studies may look at mental health based on athletes’ additional responsibilities of managing money and NIL contract requirements (e.g., required appearances at events which take time), the negative impact of roster

caps on athlete participation in college sport, and how the *House vs. NCAA* case may destroy Olympic sports and lead to athletic departments’ cutting “non-revenue” sports. All of these issues will impact the mental health of college athletes, as will social media.

Profession-Related Topics

In the body of literature I studied, there is an absence of information on evaluating advisors and programs. Model programs were shared, but not necessarily how to evaluate them. While it may be amusing to see information about computers and facilities from the 1980s and 1990s, having standards such as those in the N4A (2022) white paper for student-athlete development programs is beneficial. In Rubin’s (2017) survey of the profession, she found that most advisors did not know how they were evaluated (e.g., criteria). N4A’s institutional programs currently offers program review and certification, which sends consultants to review a program during a site visit based on guidelines (N4A, 2013). There is also an academic integrity assessment process. However, individual certification for athletic advisors, which was tested for five years, did not continue (Rubin, 2017). This is something other professions, such as athletic trainers and strength coaches, use as a required credential for hiring. Scholarship on how student-athlete services professionals and programs are evaluated is still pertinent to the field, and these topics, along with increased scholarship in general, contribute information which further justifies this work.

The lack of evaluation criteria is one factor leading to burnout in the profession. Only one article, Oja’s (1987) study “A Survey of Moral Concerns and Job-Related Stress among Academic Advisors of College Athletes,” was related to burnout. Numerous studies on burnout in this profession have been published in a short time frame as high turnover rates prevented athletic departments from retaining people with integrity. Rubin and Moreno-Pardo (2018)

interviewed 38 student-athlete services professionals experiencing burnout who considered leaving or left the profession. They learned several reasons for burnout: the lack of a career path, health issues resulting from work, the 24/7 access required in their roles, low salaries, and lack of recognition. Gellock and Dwyer (2023) studied antecedents to job burnout among athletic advisors and learning specialists. They determined, “mismatches in perceived job community, control, rewards, values, and workload for academic support professionals in collegiate athletics significantly impacted both dimensions of job burnout. Additionally, emotional exhaustion positively impacted turnover intention” (p. 304). Harry et al. (2023) surveyed 15 athletic advisors on workaholism. They found that personal characteristics, athletics culture, and the athletics environment all contributed to increased workaholism amongst advisors. O’Rourke (2024) interviewed eight athletic advisors to understand how they experience workplace stress and antecedents to job burnout. Her analysis revealed four themes: impact of turnover, family conflict, constantly “on,” and minimization of job burnout. Oja’s (1987) is foundational to all of these studies, and now a broader picture of burnout in the profession is taking shape. All of these studies provided suggestions for supporting professionals and preventing burnout, but studies have yet to show implementation of these implications into practice to reduce the problem.

Limitations

While I was able to gather and analyze contents of the journal from 1985 to 2006, upon discovering there were 11 issues published prior to 1985, I know that the earliest scholarship and writings about this field are unlikely to be discovered or credited. Thus, it is difficult to see shifts in trends by decade since literature from the early 1980s is inaccessible. This study was limited to the content of the journal issues of *The National Advisor* (1985) and *Academic Athletic Journal* (1986-2006), 168 articles in 31 issues over a 22-year period. As I mentioned previously,

there were other articles published in this time frame in other venues which were not part of the content analysis. Including articles outside of the journal would not have aligned with this particular study’s purpose, though that scholarship is valued and important in this field. In addition, as a scholar, I struggled with my bias toward empirical items in the contents, given that the other published items have historical value and implications for the field also.

Implications

Model programs, approaches, counseling techniques, and theories published in this journal from 1985 to 2006 can inform practice today. Eighteen of the articles were coded as “Models,” which suggests they are potentially or at least were best practices for the field. Open access to this body of knowledge also provides a stronger foundational base for scholarship in this field, and researchers should read and cite relevant works that pertain to current research. More research is needed in emerging areas of athlete support, such as those listed in the discussion as missing. Practitioners’ and scholars’ access to and understanding of these works further justifies the complex nature of the work student-athlete services professionals do (Rubin, 2017; Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018).

Revisiting the lack of scholarship in higher education journals about college athletics presented by Foster et al. (2022), this study’s findings suggest that there are many aspects of the college student experience from the breadth of topics in the journal, especially regarding academic predictors, interventions, and outcomes. Lough et al. (2017) presented “The Importance of Emerging Research in College Athletics: Informing Higher Education Graduate Programs” at the Council on the Advancement of Higher Education Programs preconference within the Association for the Study of Higher Education, noting that college athletics have been inextricably tied to institutions of higher education and have cultural significance in higher

education suggesting athletics permeates many discussions and decisions surrounding colleges and universities today, often impacting budgets and institutional affiliations. Journals which are publishing on intercollegiate athletics, higher education, and/or academic advising might also consider offering a special issue on these topics.

Many journals, such as *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*, *Journal of Student-Athlete Educational Development and Success*, *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, *Journal of Higher Education Athletics and Innovation*, and *NACADA Journal* have published on related topics since their inception, but most of these journals are still early in their own histories. A special issue on student-athlete services—especially within the ever-evolving context of litigation, revenue-sharing, scholarship and roster limits, amateur status, NIL contracts, the transfer portal, and potential for athletes to become employees of their institutions—would add more to the literature while also further documenting the fascinating history of this profession and its uniqueness within higher education. As research on college sports has increased in the past decade in the higher education field, higher education journals should especially consider developing a special issue on college athletics and connections to institutions and the culture of higher education, or at least encourage submissions through calls for manuscripts on college athletics to both engage scholars on the intertwining of these two scholarly areas and inform curricula in higher education programs.

Informing Policy

N4A still has the authority to restart its journal. However, as this has come up from time to time, the Board of Directors has opted not to sponsor the journal. However, N4A conferences have added an Innovation in Research and Technology showcase to celebrate data-driven practice and scholarly contributions to the field. It is important for N4A to promote these

archives of its journal so members have access to foundational literature in the field. With the growing interest in offering programming for college athletes’ holistic development, mental health, financial literacy, branding, and preparation for life after sport by athletic departments, connecting the scholarship of the past to research on these areas since 2006 and what is happening right now is paramount. This also supports the justification of student-athlete services professionals and their critical role in intercollegiate athletic departments. Research on burnout has offered implications to prevent turnover to retain people in these challenging positions. Past research informs future practice, as many current issues in athletics have cycled throughout history in college sports since the 1800s (Smith, 2011).

One suggestion is for N4A to offer a research and innovation track at its convention. Currently, there are tracks for advising, diversity, learning specialists/tutor coordinators, personal and professional development, small programs, student-athlete development, and student-athlete welfare/mental health, which is an impressive list of options. However, few concurrent workshops involve research. It is important to recognize scholarly contributions by practitioners and members in the field. Another suggestion is to offer a Research 101 workshop for members at the conference and between conferences in a webinar format. One topic which would benefit the membership would be to understand the differences between assessment, evaluation, and research; why they are important; and how they can be used to justify the work student-athlete services professionals do. The best people to conduct research on student-athlete services and the development of the athletes they serve are those doing the work. Conducting research does not require a doctorate or a faculty position, so professionals should be empowered to contribute to the scholarship in the field, which supports its development as a profession (Habley, 2009; McGill, 2019; Shaffer et al., 2010).

In the past, N4A has had a “hot topics” session on its last conference day on members who were interested in pursuing a doctoral degree while working in the field. Providing opportunities for professionals to learn about how they can help grow the field and study its impact can only help N4A and its members. NACADA’s annual conferences include a common reading which engages its members in reviewing scholarship prior to a session for attendees to discuss it, as well as scholarly paper sessions focused on academic advising scholarship with remarks from a discussant (NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, 2024). These activities allow for significant professional development for members, and would be a beneficial practice for N4A to also consider including at future conventions.

N4A can continue to celebrate the legacy of Dr. Kristina Navarro-Krupka and her pride in her scholar-practitioner identity (Navarro et al., 2020). With N4A’s emphasis on institutional programs, N4A can benefit from encouraging data-driven practice and having more members with interest in scholarship and its application to practice. This can also expand the consultants N4A has ready to continue offering program certification and the forthcoming SADEV360 tool (Luckey et al., 2024). Data-driven practice provides scholar-practitioners, practitioner-scholars, and administrators an understanding of the impacts resulting from the efforts of professionals in the field as they support students with their educational, career, and athletic goals (Navarro et al., 2020). Just as Lough et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of higher education leaders’ and programs’ recognition of college athletics as paramount to the culture and decision-making at many institutions, the hard work of professionals who support college athletes must be shared in a meaningful way based on evidence. An athletic department can put together a list of accomplishments by its athletes (e.g., conference honor roll members, community service hours, athletic achievements like conference titles and wins) to distribute to campus leadership, but

rarely does a list of successes by its staff get distributed. A press release on the athletic department web site may laud a team for a high GPA and give the head coach an academic bonus, but the support professionals who worked directly with college athletes are seldom recognized in the same way.

Future Research

Because this journal has not been in print since 2006, it would be interest to conduct a comprehensive analysis of scholarship in student-athlete services from other journals and see what has changed and evolved in terms of trends in topics, methods, and paradigms, as well as current publication venues for this research. Though this is still an emerging field of scholarship, it would be interesting to see how many empirical studies have been published since 2006. There are also other articles within this field that were published in other venues while the N4A’s journal existed, as mentioned previously, that likely received more attention since they were published in journals with a wider audience (e.g., sociologists). Thus, it would be interesting to compare findings from this content analysis with the articles published in other outlets, including higher education, academic advising, and sport journals. Also, it would be fascinating to determine if research since 2006 has shifted to different paradigms and methodologies. Additionally, though more scholarship has focused on Divisions II and III in recent years, there are still limited studies on these divisions, along with the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) governing bodies. At the very least, comparing the nine items in these journals on Divisions II and III to recent research on athletes in these divisions would contribute more to scholarship.

In addition, the hot topics that continue to evolve for college athletes (e.g., personal branding/entrepreneurship, civic engagement, diversity and inclusion) would be interesting to

study, especially about how athletic department staff support related initiatives for students. Lastly, it would be intriguing to see how the contents in this journal and articles published after 2006 align with the outcomes and competencies set forth for student-athlete development professionals and college athletes by the N4A Student-Athlete Development Task Force (2022).

Conclusion

Scholars have debated the importance of academic advising and whether it is actually a profession (McGill, 2019). Athletic advising, the original focus of N4A and main target audience of *The National Advisor/Academic Athletic Journal*, is related to academic advising, a field in which there are a small number of journals focused on it specifically beyond journals in higher education and student affairs. NACADA and N4A likely started their journals around the same time, as *NACADA Journal* published its first issue in 1981, and I estimated N4A’s first issue of *The National Advisor* was published around 1980. *NACADA Journal* published approximately 400 articles, whereas N4A’s journal published 168 in a 22-year time frame. While editors of the *Academic Athletic Journal* called for scholarly contributions from its members, research was not the main focus of this practitioner organization, and in the journal’s final nine years, two years did not produce any issues.

I maintain zeal to recognize this work so its authors get cited, and be reflexive of my own scholarship. I know that as the researcher, I am the instrument for making meaning through my analysis of these newly digitized archives (Wilson & Anagnostopoulous, 2021). My data and analysis are not neutral (Boveda et al., 2023). Revisiting my positionality, I have been a member of N4A since beginning my career in 2005, when the second to last issue of *Academic Athletic Journal* was published. I also have served as Research Committee Chair, cultivating a culture of research-informed practice and hoping members seek the opportunity to identify as scholar-

practitioners to advance the field. My excitement for this project also has led to some initial understandings of what was published in *The National Advisor/Academic Athletic Journal* to support a knowledge base for the field of student-athlete services. Future scholarship can use this repository of literature to better situate findings in a historical context, even if 1985 does not seem so long ago.

The opportunity to review an archive of past research and writing in the field of student-athlete services was rare. Through this content analysis, I discovered trends and interests for both scholars and practitioners in the *Academic Athletic Journal* for 22 years of its existence. Though the field of college athletics continues to evolve, the unique support services provided to athletes in the higher education setting remains a part of the experience. This body of knowledge enhances the foundation of research and commentary in the field of student-athlete services. While the journal is no longer in print, now there are numerous scholarly outlets for research in this area, which reach a wider audience. The future is very exciting for this field because it now has more roots in the past.

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*Asterisk indicates inclusion of source in review of the literature

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Table 1

Examples from Coding Process

Round 2 (Key theme)	Round 1 (Initial coding)
Academic performance	GPA's, academic performance, academic success, academics, education, academic accountability, success
Academic predictors	standardized tests, act, pre-testing, testing, aptitude tests, prediction, academic predictors, predictive model, predictors, academic autonomy
Academic support	athletic advisors, support services, academic support, tutoring, advising, group counseling, purpose of advisors, academic support program, athletic advising, athletic counselors, campus services, class checking, major vs. athletic advisor, sports counseling, academic advising, advisor support, supplemental instruction, proactive tutoring
Skills	cognitive skills, transferable skills, coping, intervention, skills, reading, academic motivation, athletic motivation, control, effort, leadership, intrinsic processing, motivations, learning strategies, self-advocacy, goal-setting

Table 2

Editors of The National Advisor/Academic Athletic Journal, 1985-2006

1985	1986	1986	1988	1989	1990	1991- 1995	1996- 1997	1999- 2002	2003, 2005- 2006
Richard Esquinas	Gerald Gurney	Richard McGuire	Gurney & McGuire	Gurney & McGuire, Nixon	Andrew Nixon	Katherine Lyons	Eric Denson	E. Newton Jackson, Jr.	Carol Gruber

Table 3

Key Themes from Articles (Top 10)

Key themes	Frequency
Academic support	37
Skills	24
Academic performance	21
Editorial	21
Demographics	20
Career development	19
Models	18
Academic predictors	16
Sex/gender	15
Race	14

Table 4

Key Themes from Articles (Top 11-20)

Key themes	Frequency
Freshmen	13
Transitions	12
At-risk	12
Eligibility	11
Identity	10
Student development	10
Division I	9
Football	9

Ethics	7
N4A	6

Table 5

Prevalence of Top 10 Key Themes from Articles by Decade

Key Theme	1980s Frequency (59 articles)	1990s Frequency (69 articles)	2000s Frequency (40 articles)
Academic support	14	16	7
Skills	11	5	8
Academic performance	7	8	6
Editorial	7	6	8
Demographics	5	12	3
Career development	1	13	5
Models	3	9	6
Academic predictors	10	5	1
Sex/gender	1	11	3
Race	5	7	2

Table 6

Research Paradigms and Methodologies in Empirical Articles

Research Design	Constructivist	Critical	Positivist	Pragmatic	Total
Critical		4			4
Legal				1	1
Literature review	1				1
Mixed methods	6		3	1	10
Philosophical/theoretical	8	2	1	4	15
Qualitative	4	1	2		7
Quantitative	3	2	56		61
Total	22	9	62	6	99