

Exploring the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes who graduated
from Texas community colleges

by

Kristy Urbick

B.S., Azusa Pacific University, 2007
M.S., California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2024

Abstract

Community colleges play an essential role in providing student-athletes with the opportunity to continue to pursue athletics and go to college. Community college student-athletes' experiences, specifically those of female student-athletes, are critical to examine. Female student-athletes have unique academic and social experiences that can influence their retention and degree completion. The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. This study was designed to add to the existing literature on female student-athletes and provide important information to aid in designing best practices for the retention and persistence of female student-athletes.

The methodology chosen for this study was a phenomenological design consisting of semistructured interviews with female student-athletes from Texas community colleges. The research findings were organized into the following themes from the study: (a) Classroom Champions, (b) Campus Belonging, (c) Athletic Family, (d) Faculty Role, (e) Value of the Associate's Degree, and (f) Overcoming Challenges. The findings indicated that community colleges are an important option for female student-athletes to continue participating in athletics and attend college. The participants reported having positive relationships with coaches, teammates, other athletes, and faculty. These relationships positively influenced their social and academic experiences, which helped the participants integrate into the college and obtain an associate degree.

Exploring the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes who graduated
from Texas community colleges

by

Kristy Urbick

B.S., Azusa Pacific University, 2007
M.S., California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2012

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2024

Approved by:

Co-Major Professor
Dr. Margaretta Mathis

Approved by:

Co-Major Professor
Dr. Robert Exley

Copyright

© Kristy Urbick 2024.

Abstract

Community colleges play an essential role in providing student-athletes with the opportunity to continue to pursue athletics and go to college. Community college student-athletes' experiences, specifically those of female student-athletes, are critical to examine. Female student-athletes have unique academic and social experiences that can influence their retention and degree completion. The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. This study was designed to add to the existing literature on female student-athletes and provide important information to aid in designing best practices for the retention and persistence of female student-athletes.

The methodology chosen for this study was a phenomenological design consisting of semistructured interviews with female student-athletes from Texas community colleges. The research findings were organized into the following themes from the study: (a) Classroom Champions, (b) Campus Belonging, (c) Athletic Family, (d) Faculty Role, (e) Value of the Associate's Degree, and (f) Overcoming Challenges. The findings indicated that community colleges are an important option for female student-athletes to continue participating in athletics and attend college. The participants reported having positive relationships with coaches, teammates, other athletes, and faculty. These relationships positively influenced their social and academic experiences, which helped the participants integrate into the college and obtain an associate degree.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	x
List of Tables	xi
Acknowledgements	xii
Dedication	xiii
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Background of the Problem	2
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Conceptual Framework.....	7
Alignment Table	7
Methodology	7
Delimitations and Assumptions	8
Significance of the Study	8
Definitions of Terms	8
Summary	9
Organization of the Study	10
Chapter 2 - Literature Review.....	11
Literature Search.....	11
Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks	12
Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure	12
Comeaux and Harrison's Academic Success for Student-Athletes' Conceptual Model	15
Goals and Commitments.....	19
Precollege Characteristics	19
Reason for Attending a Community College and Goals.....	20
Academic System and Integration	22
Athletic Influence on Academic Experiences	22
Grades	25

Academic Support Resources	26
Social Systems and Interaction	27
Athletic Influence on Social Experiences	27
Athletic Influence on Peer and Campus Involvement	28
Faculty Perception and Support	29
Sport Type and Scholarships	31
Gender Differences of Student-Athletes' Academic and Social Experiences	32
Goals and Commitments	33
Academic Systems and Integration	33
Social Systems and Integration	35
Outcome	35
Summary	36
Chapter 3 - Methodology	38
Purpose of the Study	38
Research Questions	38
Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks	38
Alignment Table	40
Research Design	40
Study Setting	41
Study Participants	42
Instrumentation	42
Data Collection and Data Sources	43
Data Analysis	44
Study Quality	46
Ethical Considerations	47
Reflexivity Statement	48
Limitations	49
Summary	49
Chapter 4 - Research Results and Analysis	51
Research Questions	51
Site and Participant Demographics	51

Findings	53
Research Question 1	53
Classroom Champions	54
Campus Belonging.....	57
Athletic Family	59
Faculty Role	64
Research Question 2	66
Value of the Associate’s Degree.....	67
Overcoming Challenges.....	71
Summary	73
Chapter 5 - Conclusion and Recommendations.....	74
Problem Overview	74
Purpose of the Study	74
Research Questions.....	74
Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks	75
Methodology	75
Data Collection	75
Discussion of Themes Related to the Literature	76
Classroom Champions	77
Campus Belonging.....	77
Athletic Family	78
Faculty Role	80
Value of the Associate’s Degree.....	81
Overcoming Challenges	82
Discussion Related to the Conceptual Framework	84
Practical Implications and Recommendations	86
Recommendations for Future Research.....	89
Summary	91
References	93
Appendix A - Alignment Table	104
Appendix B - Interview Protocol.....	105

Appendix C - Interview Questions	106
Appendix D - Informed Consent Form	108
Appendix E - Kansas State IRB Approvals	110
Appendix F - Letter to College Presidents.....	113
Appendix G - Letter to Athletic Directors and Coaches.....	114
Appendix H - Letter to Participants	115

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Tinto’s Model of Institutional Departure	14
Figure 2.2. Comeaux and Harrison’s Academic Success for Student-Athletes Conceptual Model	16
Figure 4.1. Type of Associate Degree Earned by Participants	52
Figure 4.2. Graduation Year of Participants	52
Figure 4.3. Sport Played by Participants.....	53

List of Tables

Table 3.1. Alignment of the Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks	39
Table 3.2. Tracy’s (2010) Eight “Big Tent” Criteria	46

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the South Texas cohort for helping me through this journey. I appreciate and value your insight, thoughtfulness, and support. Thank you, Casey, for your support and for reading my papers during the 1st year in the program. Thank you, Judi, for your support and encouragement throughout the process, and Shawnee, for always listening and supporting my ideas.

Dr. Margaretta Mathis, thank you for constantly pushing me to become the best version of myself. You were always available and had great feedback and insight that kept me on track. Dr. Robert Exley, thank you for your cheerful demeanor and always being there to support and encourage me. Lastly, thank you to my committee, Dr. Greg Peterson and Dr. Royce Ann Collins, for agreeing to be on this journey with me.

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my mom, Phyllis Willingham. Thank you for always being there for me.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Community colleges play an essential role in providing student-athletes with the opportunity to attend college and continue their pursuits of playing college athletics. Attending a community college after high school allows students to save money, stay close to their support systems, adapt to college life, and continue their pursuit of playing college athletics (Burgess & Cisneros, 2018). Student-athletes are a subgroup of the student population, and face different expectations and challenges contributing to their college experience (Le Com et al., 2009). The demands on a student-athlete can be complex because they must balance their time between academics and athletics, and they are expected to perform well in the classroom to maintain their eligibility to participate in athletics (Gaston Gayles, 2009). With the demands to excel in the classroom and as an athlete, there have been concerns about student-athletes' academic and personal development (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Student-athletes face different challenges in college than nonathletes due to the demands of academics and athletics. For student-athletes to succeed, they must navigate the demands of being a full-time student, and the demands of practice and athletic competitions. Male and female student-athletes also have different experiences and insights about their academic and social experiences as athletes. A significant amount of research on the impact of college athletics on students' experience and academic success is based on students participating or transferring to a 4-year university. The study investigated the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges and explored the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree.

Background of the Problem

Community colleges are open-door institutions that provide access to higher education, and serve nearly half the undergraduate population in the United States (Bailey et al., 2015). According to Bailey et al. (2015), nearly 80% of entering community college students indicated they wanted to earn a bachelor's degree; however, within 6 years, only 15% of students who started at a community college earned a bachelor's degree (Shapiro et al., 2012). In addition, Bailey et al. (2015) noted less than 40% of students who enter college complete any degree or certificate within 6 years. Crosta and Kopko (2014) stated the "expected pathway for community college students seeking a bachelor's degree includes earning an associate degree" (p. 1). Unfortunately, students who attend a community college do not have to obtain an associate degree to transfer to a university.

Shapiro et al. (2013) found students who transferred with an associate degree or certificate had a higher transfer completion rate of a bachelor's degree—72% compared to transfer students who did not obtain a degree or certificate at 56%. Costa and Kopko (2014) also found earning an associate degree positively impacted students earning a bachelor's degree. The authors found students who transferred with an associate degree within 4 years were 49% more likely to earn a bachelor's degree, and within 6 years, 22% were more likely to earn a bachelor's degree.

Athletics in colleges and universities play an important role in providing access to higher education for many students, especially at the community college, because of their open enrollment policies and reduced academic requirements for athletes. Mendoza et al. (2012) noted athletics could make the difference between a student attending a community college and not going to school at all. In addition, attending a community college allows student-athletes to

improve academically and athletically to pursue transferring to a 4-year university and receive a scholarship (Horton, 2009a; Kissinger & Miller, 2007). Horton (2009a) noted, “Athletic programs at the community college offer a valuable experience for student participants and facilitate the continued desire to pursue academic endeavors beyond sports” (p. 25).

Understanding why athletes choose to participate in sports at the community college level can help faculty and staff better understand student-athletes’ needs, and provide academic plans and institutional support (Kissinger & Miller, 2007).

To manage competition and rules for intercollegiate sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2022), the largest sport’s governing body in the United States, was formed in 1973 to oversee athletic competition at the university level. To be eligible to compete at an NCAA school, certain academic requirements must be met, such as graduating from high school, completing a minimum of 16 core courses, earning a minimum grade point average (GPA), and earning qualifying test scores on the ACT or SAT (NCAA, 2022b). Students who do not meet these requirements still have the option to continue their pursuit of athletics at the community college. According to Storch and Ohlson (2009):

NCAA policy changes in 2008 have resulted in an increase in the number and types of coursework required for incoming prospective freshman student athletes to matriculate to four-year institutions. These NCAA policy changes are influencing four-year institutional eligibility for prospective student athletes and will likely result in continued growth in the enrollment of collegiate student athletes at the community college level. (p. 76)

In addition to academic eligibility requirements, the NCAA also tracks student-athlete retention and graduation rates. Due to low student-athlete retention and graduation rates, the NCAA (2021) took action to create policies and reforms to hold institutions accountable for their

student-athletes' academic progress. The NCAA created a formula for measuring graduation rates called the Graduation Success Rate, which accounts for eligibility and retention of student-athletes each term and is applied to student-athletes who receive athletically related financial aid (NCAA, 2015). In 2021, the graduation rate for a Division I university was 89%, Division II reported 76%, and Division III reported 88% (NCAA, 2021).

The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA, 2022) is an intercollegiate governing body established in 1938. The purpose of the NJCAA is to provide student-athletes with opportunities to compete in athletics while attending community colleges. The organization has over 500 member schools in 44 states, and over 3,400 teams compete in 28 sports annually. NJCAA's (2022) mission is to foster a national program of athletic participation that supports equitable opportunities that align with each college's educational objectives to allow student-athletes to compete and pursue a 2-year degree. To be eligible to compete out of high school, a student-athlete only needs to have graduated from high school and does not have to meet course, ACT or SAT, or GPA requirements to participate in athletics (NJCAA, n.d.-b). Once a student-athlete is enrolled in the college, they must meet additional requirements to maintain their eligibility for competition. Student-athletes must be enrolled full time in a minimum of 12 credit hours. In addition, to be eligible to play in a second season, a student-athlete must have earned 24 credit semester hours with a minimum 2.0 GPA (NJCAA, 2019). The eligibility standards focus on full-time enrollment and GPAs for participation, but lack an emphasis or enforcement on degree completion at a community college.

Four-year universities have improved their policies, made reforms, and made efforts to increase academic performance for student-athletes; however, community college athletics have yet to be held to the same standards or given the same attention regarding student-athletes

academic performance and the impact of athletic participation on student success (Horton, 2009b). Student-athletes are a heterogeneous group with diverse backgrounds and academic levels, and it is necessary to explore retention and persistence in the group rather than considering all student-athletes compared to non-student-athletes (Mendoza et al., 2012).

Community colleges serve a diverse student-athlete population, and student-athletes choose to attend community colleges for various reasons. Horton (2009a) explored the academic planning and success of students participating in athletics at community colleges. The author found students chose to attend a community college because of the lower cost of tuition, the ability to stay close to home, wanting a small university, reservations about being prepared for a university, and the opportunity to continue playing sports. Burgess and Cisneros (2018) found similar results and noted community colleges provide students with the opportunity to save money, live at home, stay close to family and friends, and adapt to college life.

The NCAA (2022) defined a student-athlete as a student enrolled in a college and participating in intercollegiate athletics. Being a student-athlete requires competing time restraints between the demands of being a student and an athlete (Gaston Gayles, 2009; Huml et al., 2019; Parsons, 2013). Student-athletes are required to balance attending classes, their academic workload, practices, and athletic competitions (Parsons, 2013).

Community college athletes' experiences, specifically female student-athletes, are critical to understand due to the challenges these athletes face, so staff can figure out how to support them as both a student and an athlete. The focus of student-athlete research has been at the university level (Horton, 2015; Mendoza et al., 2012), and there has been limited research focusing on the academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at community colleges. The experience of female student-athletes at community colleges is critical because

they face unique academic and social experiences that can influence their retention and degree completion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree.

Research Questions

The primary questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges?
2. What experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges contributed to obtaining an associate degree?

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure assisted in better understanding the potential factors contributing to female student-athletes' academic, social, and emotional experiences at a community college. College students drop out of higher education for many reasons. Tinto developed a longitudinal model for interactions that would lead to a student persisting and getting a degree or dropping out. Furthermore, understanding college retention factors, such as students' background characteristics, motivational attributes, goals, and academic and social integration, needed to be considered when analyzing student retention and completion (Tinto, 1975).

Conceptual Framework

Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes was the conceptual framework for this study to address student-athletes' academic and social experiences and integration at community colleges. This conceptual model was influenced by Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure and based on Tinto's idea of the factors that influence a student's academic success and completion in higher education. Comeaux and Harrison's conceptual model directly addresses the distinct nontraditional group of student-athletes. According to the authors, student-athletes have unique campus involvement patterns, and this model addresses how a student-athlete sport commitment and environmental characteristics (e.g., sports participation, coaches demand, grades) influence their academic and social experiences and integration, ultimately, resulting in completion or dropping out. The conceptual model was used to inform and align the interview questions with the research questions.

Alignment Table

A table was developed that provides an overview depicting how the elements in the study align. The alignment table includes literature findings, research questions, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology, and interview questions. The alignment table can be found in Appendix A.

Methodology

This study used a phenomenology research design. According to Peoples (2021), "A phenomenological research study is used to answer the question, "what is it like to experience a certain phenomenon?" (p. 30). This methodology was appropriate for understanding female student-athletes' lived experiences at community colleges in Texas. The data for the study were

collected through semistructured one-on-one interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim to allow analysis and organization of the data into themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Delimitations and Assumptions

The study was delimited to female student-athletes who have graduated with an associate degree from 2018–2023 and participated in a minimum of 1 year of athletics at a NJCAA community college in Texas. The study was conducted in 2023–2024 and the researcher identified 15 female student-athletes who meet the criteria to participate.

The study was based on two assumptions. First, it was assumed that participants of the study were honest and forthcoming in their responses to the interview questions and provided detailed information about their experiences. Second, it was assumed that all the participants graduated with an associate degree from a Texas community college.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to add to the existing literature on female student-athletes and to provide important information to aid coaches, athletic administrators, advisors, and faculty in designing best practices for the retention and persistence for female student-athletes. In addition, understanding the experiences of female student-athletes may inform policy and support systems specially designed to help female college student-athletes.

Definitions of Terms

Community college refers to a 2-year college that awards associate degrees.

Degree attainment refers to graduating from a community college with an associate degree.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2022) is the largest intercollegiate sport's governing body in the United States that provides guidelines, policies, and rules for

athletics. There are three athletic divisions for sport participation and each division has its own legislation and rules. Division I institutions have the largest athletic budgets and award full athletic scholarships. Division II institution athletes receive partial scholarships. Division III institutions focus on academic success and do not offer athletic scholarships.

National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA, 2022) is a intercollegiate governing body established in 1938 to provide student-athletes the opportunity to attend a community college and participate in athletics. They provide best practices, rules, and policies for athletic competition.

Student-athlete refers to a student who is enrolled in a college and participates in intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2022a).

JUCO is an abbreviation used by athletes to describe a junior or community college.

Summary

Student-athletes face the challenging demands of being both a student and an athlete. The demands of being a student and an athlete influence a student's athletic, academic, and social experiences. Female student-athletes' experiences are important to understand to provide them with the support needed to be successful in their respective sport, academics, and social integration at the community college. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the problem, background information, purpose of the study, and research questions. The chapter then presented the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the alignment table, and the methodology and concluded by outlining the delimitations and assumptions, the study's significance, and essential terms.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 introduced the background of the problem and explained how the study would be organized. Chapter 2 is the literature review that analyzes the research problem, which establishes justification for the research. Chapter 3 describes the methodology appropriate for the problem, research questions, and the purpose of the study. Chapter 4 reviews the analysis of the collected data and presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the findings and further recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The student-athlete population is an important subgroup of students. Student-athletes have different experiences and encounter different challenges than nonathletes who attend college. Student-athletes, unlike nonathletes, must balance academic, social, and athletic demands while attending college (Gaston Gayles, 2009). Much of the research on student-athletes has been based on 4-year university athletes; therefore, there is a need to explore and understand the experiences of community college student-athletes to best support their success (Burgess & Cisneros, 2018). Within the athlete subgroup, male and female student-athletes have different experiences, levels of academic success, and social experiences. Female student-athletes also face the pressure of social comparison and self-evaluation (Gummelt, 2017).

This chapter provides an overview of the current research related to student-athletes' academic and social success and research on female student-athletes at the university and community college levels. This chapter begins with the literature search and theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Then, the literature review is organized using Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) academic success for student-athletes' conceptual model with the following structure: goals and commitments, academic system and integration, social system and integration, and gender differences of student-athletes' academic and social experiences. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Literature Search

The information in the literature review chapter was gathered using various sources from the Kansas State University library databases. The databases used to conduct the literature review were ProQuest, EBSCOhost, ERIC, and Google scholar. This chapter presents a review of the literature to provide context and information using peer-reviewed journal articles,

dissertations, books, reports, and articles. The literature search focused on student-athletes at 4-year universities and community colleges.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework was based on Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure, which emphasizes the major factors for students leaving their institution without completing. The conceptual framework for this study was based on the framework by Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) academic success for student-athletes' conceptual model, which uses many of the same components and concepts as Tinto's model of institutional departure; however, Comeaux and Harrison's incorporated factors that play a significant role in student-athlete retention and completion rates. Additionally, the model explains how athletics can impact student-athletes' academic success in higher education.

Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure

Tinto's (1975, 1993) institutional departure model helped establish the context for students' persistence and retention in higher education. Tinto (1975) first developed the longitudinal model to explain the "process of interaction between the individual and the institution that lead to differing individuals to drop out from institutions of higher education" (p. 90). Tinto's (1975) model is based on individual characteristics that influence a student's goals, institutional commitments, and institutional characteristics and how they are linked to various forms of persistence or departure. The theoretical model addresses the interaction between individual characteristics and the institution and emphasizes the importance of integration in a college's academic and social systems. According to Tinto (1975), "Given individual characteristics, prior experiences, and commitments, the model argues it is the individual's

integration into the academic and social systems of the college that most directly relates to his continuance in that college” (p. 96).

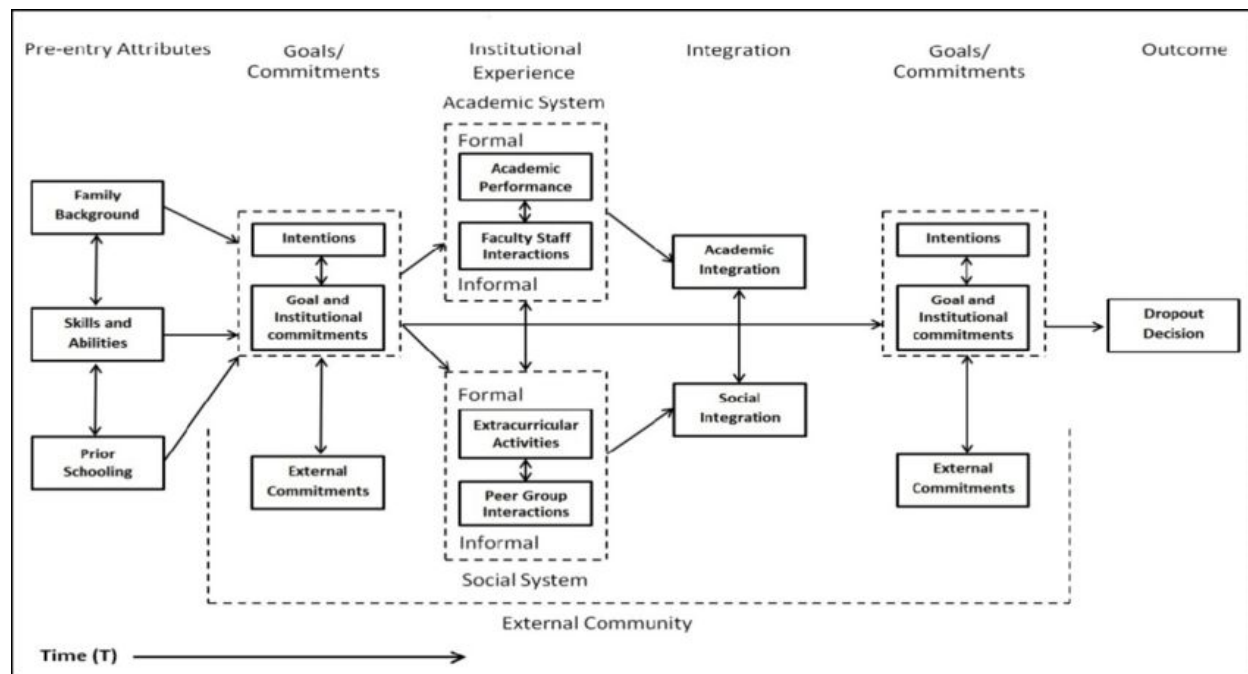
Tinto (1993) discussed Van Gemnep’s rites of passage, which was based on the successful navigation of separation, transition, and incorporation which gives context for successful integration into a college’s academic and social systems. The first part of the rite of passage is *separation*. This is the ability for students to disassociate themselves from some of their past norms and behavior patterns typically associated with family, high school, and their community. The second is the *transition*, in which students separate themselves from these norms and patterns but have not assumed new norms and behaviors appropriate for the college setting. Finally, *incorporation* happens when students have the norms and patterns associated with the college community. Persistence in college can be a process of interactions between the student’s peers and faculty members due to student experiences in the academic and social systems at the college. These experiences lead to integration and can influence the commitment to completion and college (Tinto, 1975).

According to Tinto (1975), academic integration can be measured in grade performance and intellectual development, which aligns with the standards of the academic system. Social integration into the college primarily occurs through peer groups, extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and administrators. Successful interactions provide friend and faculty support and integration into the social norms of the college. Conversely, insufficient social interaction can lead to withdrawal (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1993) built on the academic and social integration concepts, and identified the formal and informal academic and social areas of integration. The formal academic experiences describe the student’s abilities and skills to meet the academic demands of the college. The informal academic experiences are the interactions

between the student, faculty, and staff of the college inside and outside the classroom and the integration of the college's values.

Formal social integration is reflected in extracurricular activities that students are involved in on campus. The informal social integration is the interaction and relationships of peer groups. Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure (see Figure 2.1) consists of (a) preentry attributes, (b) goal/commitments, (c) institutional experiences, (d) integration, (e) goals/commitment, and (d) outcome. According to Tinto (1993), "The model seeks to explain how interactions among different individuals within the academic and social systems of the institution and the communities which comprise them lead individuals of different characteristics to withdraw from the institution prior to degree completion" (p. 113).

Figure 2.1. Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure



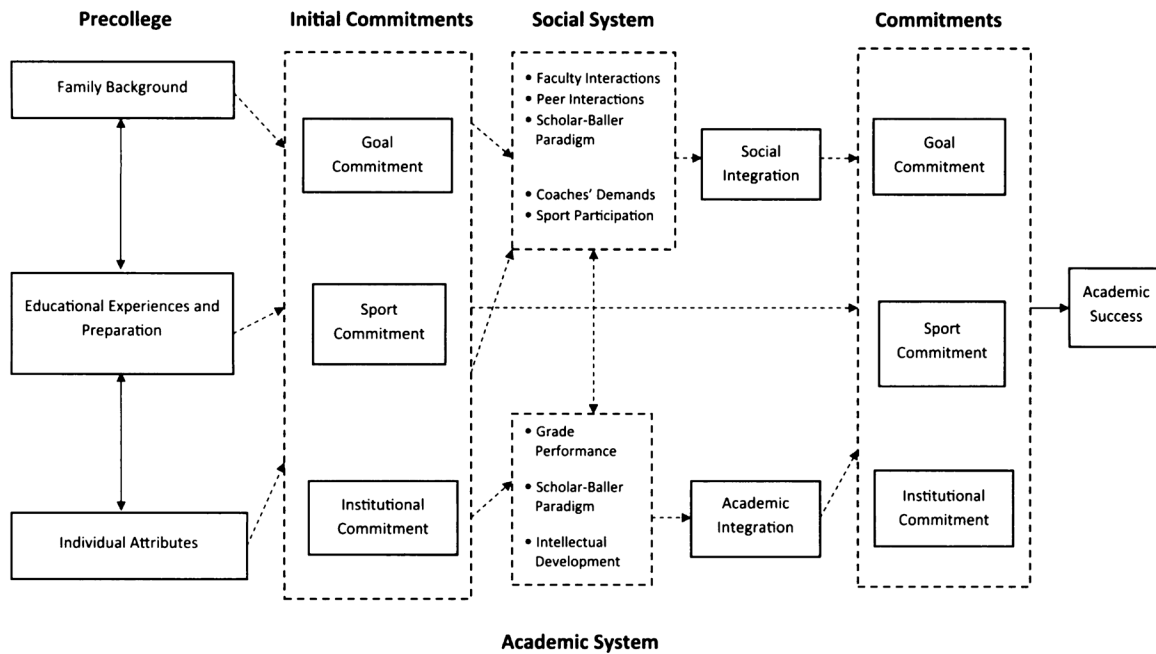
Note. Adapted from *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, by V. Tinto, 1993, University of Chicago Press.

When students enter college, they have different backgrounds, personal attributes, financial resources, and precollege academic experiences. According to Tinto (1993), the commitments of a student factor in a student's intentions, individual goals, institution commitment, and external commitments. These commitments help to determine the conditions for interactions with members of the institution. The interactions between peers, faculty, and other members of the institution impact their social and intellectual integration. If the interaction is positive, then this enhances a student's commitment to their goals and increases the likelihood of persistence and degree completion.

Comeaux and Harrison's Academic Success for Student-Athletes' Conceptual Model

The academic success for student-athletes' conceptual model was developed by Comeaux and Harrison (2011) using many of the same concepts discussed in Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure, highlighting the similarities and differences between student-athletes and their nonathlete peers. Therefore, Comeaux and Harrison's model emphasizes factors that contribute to student-athlete retention and completion and explains how athletics influence student-athletes' academic success in higher education (see Figure 2.2). To understand student-athletes' academic success, multiple characteristics of the cumulative process must be examined and connected to a set of individual attributes and college environment characteristics (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Figure 2.2. Comeaux and Harrison’s Academic Success for Student-Athletes Conceptual Model



Note. Adopted from “A Conceptual Model of Academic Success for Student-Athletes,” by E. Comeaux and K. Harrison, 2011, *Educational Researcher*, 40 (<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X11415260>).

Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) model of academic success for student-athletes’ consists of (a) precollege characteristics, (b) initial commitments, (c) social and academic systems, (d) integration, (e) commitment, and (f) academic success. The model begins with the precollege characteristics representing student-athletes’ individual attributes, family background, and educational experience. These characteristics are what the student-athletes’ bring with them to college, and they influence the student-athletes’ academic success in higher education because they can influence a student-athletes’ initial goals and commitment to the institution and their sport.

A student-athlete's initial goals and commitments characterize the behaviors the student-athlete brings to the college, and how they will interact in the campus environment (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The commitments in the model develop and change over time and are represented twice: (a) starting with student-athletes' initial commitments and (b) then later after the student-athlete has interacted with the campus, peers, athletics, and academics. The institutional commitment for this model is the student-athletes' educational expectations and importance of completing a degree at the institution (Tinto, 1975). According to Comeaux and Harrison (2011), academic success could be more likely with a student-athlete with a high institutional commitment. Furthermore, a student-athletes' goal commitment can consist of long- or short-term educational goals student-athletes have when they enter college. The sport commitment in the model represents the time and energy a student-athlete dedicates to their sport. Sport commitment is an important part of the student-athletes' experience and can influence their academic and social integration into the college. These commitments are essential for predicting how student-athletes may interact with the college environment and succeed academically (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). For example, suppose a student-athlete has clear career goals or the goal to attend graduate school. In that case, they could be more committed to their academic success than a student-athlete with a high sport commitment. On the other hand, they could be less engaged or have a lower institutional commitment impacting their degree completion (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Student-athletes' integration into the academic and social systems of the college environment plays an important role in their academic success. Student-athletes integrate into the campus environment differently based on their experiences and individual characteristics, and how they respond to their environment is essential to their academic and social success. The

more time students devote to learning, the more they engage academically and socially with the college environment the greater their success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). According to Comeaux and Harrison (2011):

Accounting for precollege characteristics and commitments, the model posits that it is the student-athletes' integration into the academic and social environments of college that is strongly associated with varying forms of success. Hence, it is conceivable that the more frequent the interactions of student-athlete with his or her environment, the greater the commitment will be to the institution and to college success. (p. 239)

Student-athletes' academic success is influenced by social integration in the institution's environment. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) posited, "Social interaction occurs primarily through student-athletes' engagement in campus extracurricular activities (other than their sports), interactions with faculty, and interactions with peers other than teammates" (p. 241). These interactions and relationships with faculty and peers are related to academic success through support and communication regarding student-athletes' personal and academic goals.

Academic integration for students is a critical component of student-athletes' academic success and is measured in grades and intellectual development (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model is specific to student-athletes and explores multiple factors that affect academic achievement and degree completion in higher education. This model was developed for NCAA Division I institutions and can be applied to different levels of athletic participation in higher education, including community college athletics. Understanding community college student-athletes' academic experiences and need for academic support may differ from NCAA Division I athletes (Brouwer et al., 2022). According to Brouwer et al. (2022), "The work that has been done examining the relationship between academic achievement

and athletic participation lacks the athlete's perspective and what they believe benefits them academically" (p. 124). By using Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual framework, a better understanding was gained about the experiences of female student-athletes. This framework provided a way to examine the "voices" of community college female student-athletes, helping to better the understanding of the factors that contribute to their academic and social integration within the college environment. Ultimately, this understanding could increase community college athletes' persistence and degree completion. This framework was originally created for NCAA Division I student-athletes and was relevant and applicable to community college athletes.

Goals and Commitments

Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) academic success for student-athletes conceptual model begins with student-athletes' precollege characteristics such as family background, individual attributes, and their previous educational experiences. These prior experiences can shape the athletes' level of commitment in three areas: (a) the institution, (b) athletics, and (c) academic goals (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). For the literature review, the first section discusses precollege characteristics and the second section reviews reasons for why student-athletes decide to attend a community college and their goals.

Precollege Characteristics

Student-athletes enter college with different precollege characteristics that are based on family background, prior educational experiences, and skills and individual attributes that can influence their college experience (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). In the study by Johnson et al. (2013), the authors looked at demographic, academic, and athletic variables to better understand first-time, 1st-year student-athletes at an NCAA Division I university. The results from the study

indicated the distance from home was a significant factor in predicting retention, and the farther away student-athletes were from home, the less likely they were to be retained. Another important result from this study was that high school grade point average (GPA) was a predictor of retention, and student-athletes with a high GPA in high school were less likely to drop out during their 1st year in college (Johnson et al., 2013).

According to Weiss and Robinson (2013), personal reasons (e.g., financial issues, not being satisfied with their academic program, wanting to transfer to a better situation) were significant factors for players leaving their sports teams. The study results were supported by Scoggin and Styron (2006), who found students who withdrew from community colleges selected personal reasons as the highest reason for leaving, followed by financial concerns and having to work. In another study, Melendez (2006) administered a self-reporting questionnaire focused on college adjustment called the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). The SACQ assesses academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, and goal commitment/institutional attachment. The SACQ was used to compare college adjustment for athletes and nonathletes at a Division I university. Melendez found athletic participation influenced college adjustment, and athletes reported higher scores on institutional and academic adjustment than nonathletes.

Reason for Attending a Community College and Goals

In higher education, GPA, degree attainment, and transfer rates are used to measure student success. The factors contributing to student-athlete retention and academic success are essential to understand to provide the support and resources needed for athletes to succeed in the classroom and on the athletic field. According to Huml et al. (2019), student-athletes face significant challenges that impact their commitment and academic performance during their

college experience. Adler and Adler (1987) found most athletes entered college with optimistic attitudes about their future academic careers; however, students felt overwhelmed by the demands of athletics, were socially isolated from non-student-athletes, and had a gap between their academic abilities and the college's expectations. Thus, students' athletic, social, and classroom experiences often contributed to their disengagement from academics (Adler & Adler, 1987).

Bryan (2018) found student-athletes' initial goals were to attend a 4-year university after the community college. Nevertheless, the student-athletes agreed community college was an appropriate starting place and a right fit due to the ability to participate in their sport, class size, and affordability. In addition, attending community college contributed to their persistence to obtain a bachelor's degree. Horton (2009a) noted, "Regardless of the reasons given by students for attending a community college, students perceived their time spent at their respective institutions to be a valuable learning experience and a foundation for their personal growth" (p. 22).

Meulemans et al. (2019) studied factors that influenced college choice for student-athletes that attended a community college. The study comprised of 107 male and female student-athletes from 19 community colleges in the Midwest region that competed in the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). Using a survey, student-athletes were asked about their academic and personal goals entering college. The authors found 7% wanted a 2-year degree and an overwhelming 79% reported their goal was to ultimately earn a bachelor's degree from a university. The authors concluded "that the majority of student-athletes at two-year colleges have the goal of competing at NCAA institutions" (Meulemans et al., 2019, p. 5). In addition, the five most significant factors used for selecting to attend a community college

were (a) athletics, (b) cost, (c) coaching staff, (d) degree offerings, and (e) location of the college. Horton (2009a) had similar findings and found the reasons for attending a community college by student-athletes were based on living at home while going to college, lower cost, smaller institution, not feeling prepared for a university, and the ability to continue playing sports in college.

Potuto and O'Hanlon (2006) found athletic participation positively influenced time management skills and work ethic. Further, student-athletes felt athletic participation instills values and enhances the overall college experience. Chen et al. (2010) also found sports involvement helped students develop a work ethic, self-esteem, and confidence. These precollege and early experiences are important and can influence their academic integration.

Academic System and Integration

Student-athletes face many challenges due to the demands of collegiate athletics and academic expectations which often can influence student-athletes' academic success and the quality of their experience in college. The college environment incorporates the academic system and how student-athletes successfully integrate academically into the college (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). In this section of the literature review, athletic influence of academic experiences, impact of grades, and academic support resources are discussed.

Athletic Influence on Academic Experiences

Student-athletes in college face significant challenges that can influence their commitment and academic performance (Gaston Gayles, 2009; Huml et al., 2019). Student-athletes are expected to perform well and earn passing grades to maintain eligibility for sports participation. Athletic and academic demands can be difficult for student-athletes who must balance the time constraints of both (Gaston Gayles, 2009). Students must balance being both an

athlete and a student, which can influence how they see themselves. Student-athletes' identities and identity conflicts can depend on the situation in which student-athletes use different roles for interacting with different groups or situations (Di Lu et al., 2018). For student-athletes' academic success at NCAA Division II institution, Brouwer et al. (2022) found time management was important for student-athletes' academic success. Being organized and finding a balance between being an athlete and a student affected students' academic success. They face additional responsibilities than nonathletes with time commitments such as practices, travel, and events.

Athletic identity has been defined as the “degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). Numerous studies have found athletic identity can negatively impact the academic and personal development of student-athletes (Gaston Gayles, 2009; Huml et al., 2019; Watson, 2016; Watson & Kissinger, 2007). When students, for example, are more focused on their athletic identity, this can negatively impact their academic performance and commitment. This can lead to student-athletes neglecting their academic responsibilities, and also impacting their major choice to pursue a more manageable course load that is not aligned with their career goals (Huml et al., 2019).

Adler and Adler (1987) found after 1 year in college, students realized the difficulties in maintaining their academic and athletic roles due to time conflicts with practices and other athletic functions. Students reported feeling overwhelmed with their athletic role, and their academic identity became less important over time due to their athletic demands. The role strain discussed by Adler and Adler aligned with Hatteberg (2020), who found student-athletes' training schedules and athletic role obligations took up an extensive amount of time and had less time available to meet academic demands. Hatteberg (2020) suggested, “Findings presented here contribute to the literature by suggesting that athletes, both men and women participating in

different sports, still struggle with how institutional and role-related strains impact their academic growth and engagement” (p. 24).

Adler and Adler (1987) also found if a student-athletes’ peer group valued athletics as their main priority this influenced other student-athletes to prioritize athletics over academics. This influence provided a lack of academic encouragement and reinforcement. Watson (2016) found student-athletes invested more time and energy in their athletic demands the more they identified with their athlete role, which in turn, tended to impact their college experience and academic pursuits. Watson also found athletic identity was a significant predictor of stress.

According to Tudor and Ridpath (2019), the nature of athletics in college can pressure student-athletes to focus on athletics, which could lead to a reduced commitment to academics. Di Lu et al. (2018) noted student-athletes who strongly identified with one identity over the other experienced frequent identity conflict. In the study, student-athletes with a strong athletic identity felt conflicted and distracted by completing their academic requirements. Student-athletes with a strong student identity were conflicted with wanting to be strong students and meeting the demands of athletics. The authors also found student-athlete’s identity was impacted by positive reinforcement of the role with which the student identified. Positive academic performance was a predictor of student identity salience. These findings supported Adler and Adler (1987), who found students’ poor grades may have negatively influenced their student role. On the other hand, in a study at an NCAA Division III institution, the student-athletes felt their love for the sport was a factor in their persistence, and their student-athlete identity and participation in their sport provided a positive environment (Bryan, 2018).

Grades

Kanter and Lewis (1991) found athletes generally completed more credit hours, but had slightly lower GPAs and completed fewer units per year than nonathletes. Male student-athletes of color earned higher GPAs than students of color in the general population. Carr et al. (1992) found similar results when the authors examined athletic participation of Black male students at community colleges. They found over 4 semesters, 100% of Black male athletes participating in basketball persisted, and 67% of all Black male athletes completed 4 semesters of college. For the general population, only 33% of Black male students persisted in 4 semesters.

However, in a more recent study on community college student-athletes' credit hour completion and GPA, Horton (2009b) studied persistence and academic success at community colleges in Florida. The author explored the transfer and degree completion rates of student-athletes and non-student-athletes, GPA, and credit hours completed. Horton found athletic participation at a community college positively influenced student GPA and the number of credit hours earned. Student-athletes had higher GPAs and earned more credit hours per semester than nonathletes. Female student-athletes, student-athletes of color, and student-athletes from lower socioeconomic status earned higher GPAs than nonathlete students with the same backgrounds, inferring athletic participation positively impacts academic performance. However, Horton found athletic participation alone did not have a relationship with increasing completion or transfer rates. Student-athletes were significantly less likely to graduate within 3.5 years of their initial enrollment at the college. The study concluded by suggesting several students go to community colleges for athletics, but do not persist to degree completion or transfer to a university. Mendoza et al. (2012) also explored the impact of athletic participation on student retention in community

college student-athletes. The study's results supported Horton's (2009b) findings student-athletes have higher GPAs than nonathletes.

Grades are a way for students to measure how much was learned and a way to attain personal success. Grades serve as a self-evaluation measure to determine academic success in the classroom. According to Brouwer et al. (2022), external motivations for grades were personal goals, GPA to compete, serving as a role model, and going to graduate school. Internal motivation for grades were internal rewards such as self-fulfillment, self-enjoyment, and learning regardless of the grade was valuable. Umbach et al. (2006) found, on average, student-athletes are as engaged in academic activities as their peers.

Academic Support Resources

Storch and Olsen (2009) noted, "one of the most effective practices for the recruitment and retention of student-athletes is a strong student support system" (p. 76). The authors proposed that community college support services need to provide services that help student-athletes graduate and transfer to a 4-year institution. Support services must focus on academic advising, tutors, peer mentoring, study skills, career exploration, and life management skills.

Hendley (2012) studied the perception of female student-athletes' academic and support systems at a Division III college. The author found coaches and teammates were the primary sources of academic support. The female athletes in the study noted they could go to their coaches when they had academic questions, needed advice, or had personal issues. When needing academic help, the student-athletes in the study went to their teammates and faculty before using other services. Teammates and coaches were consulted when determining which academic and support services to use, such as tutoring.

Social Systems and Interaction

Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model highlights the importance of social interactions for student-athletes that can be facilitated through extracurricular activities and interactions with faculty and peers. Social integration plays a key role in student-athletes' success and belonging on a college campus. The way student-athletes navigate these challenges and develop positive social interactions can lead to a more successful experience. In this section of the literature review, athletic influence on social experiences, athletic influence on peer and campus involvement, faculty perceptions and support, and sport type and scholarships are discussed.

Athletic Influence on Social Experiences

Slaten et al. (2020) researched Division I female student-athletes experience of belonging on their college campus. Slaten et al. (2020) found "the importance of feeling connected to and being a part of their respective college sports team" (p. 14) positively impacted their sense of belonging on campus. The participants in the study noted the athletic culture (e.g., supportive relationships with their coaching staff and teammates) positively influenced their sense of belonging. Other reasons noted for their sense of belonging on campus were their positive connections to other athletes on campus, faculty who were flexible and supported them academically, and being a starter or having significant playing time. On the other hand, the authors found participants expressed their commitments did not allow them to be involved on campus as much as they would have liked, and they had challenges balancing their commitments and maintaining friendships with nonathletes. In addition, Bryan (2018) found that social connections with peers, teammates, coaches, faculty, and staff played an important role in the participants' persistence. Horton (2009a) also found student-athletes were supported by their coaches and institution.

Gaston Gayles et al. (2018) found student-athletes felt a strong sense of belonging when they felt accepted and engaged in the campus beyond just being seen as an athlete. Engaging in nonathletic activities (e.g., working with classmates on assignments or engaging with faculty) were positively associated with a sense of belonging. Additionally, the authors found student-athletes felt connected to the college when the campus and team climate were accepting and encouraging.

Athletic Influence on Peer and Campus Involvement

Lewis (2020) found, for student-athletes at an NCAA Division I university, formal social experiences were influenced by the coaches of their teams who recruited them to the college and developed strong connections and mentorship with them. The informal social influences occurred with their peer interactions with athletes and nonathletes at the college. The student-athletes had significant interactions with their athletic peers but lacked relationships and interactions with nonathletic peers outside the classroom. In addition, stress and the time commitment of being a student-athlete contributed to the student-athletes' lack of interaction when not in class.

Additionally, Gaston Gayles and Hu (2009) examined student-athlete engagement in educationally purposeful activities at an NCAA Division I university. The authors identified four areas of engagement and examined how student-athletes engagement impacted their academic success. The study focused on interaction with faculty, interaction with nonathlete peers, participation in campus activities, and participation in educational activities. The authors found student-athletes' engagement in educationally purposeful activities had a significant impact on college outcomes, and the student-athletes benefited from these activities similarly to nonathlete peers. In addition, Crawford (2007) studied student-athletes' undergraduate experience of

involvement on campus at an NCAA Division I college. The author found positive faculty and peer involvement enhanced their academic and athletic experiences.

Faculty Perception and Support

The stereotypes and perceptions of athletes influence their overall experiences in higher education. Horton (2011) argued, “In order to properly assist student athletes to be the best they can be, institutions must find ways to transcend the negative perceptions and stereotypes their student athletes are confronted with on a daily basis” (p. 28). Comeaux (2011) found faculty perceptions were consistent with the stereotypes that student-athletes have limited academic abilities and lack motivation. For example, when a student received an “A” in a class, faculty members were more likely to be surprised or suspicious, and they felt it was not appropriate for athletes to receive specialized support. These attitudes and low expectations were aimed at male student-athletes more than female student-athletes (Comeaux, 2011). In another study by Bailey and Bhattacharyya (2017), the authors found athletes’ academic performance received scrutiny from faculty, and athletes were perceived by faculty as less intelligent due to time commitments, low priority for academics, and the assumption that athletes receive special treatment from faculty. In a study by Simons et al. (2007), student-athletes reported 33% felt they were perceived negatively by faculty, and 62% reported a faculty member had made a negative remark about athletes during class. Huml et al. (2019) found similar results from college faculty who expressed concerns about student-athletes’ motivations for enrolling at an institution, being unprepared academically, and missing classes.

Although there has been research demonstrating the negative perceptions of student-athletes, Parsons (2013) found student-athletes had positive faculty perceptions and treatment and felt faculty cared about their academic success. Similarly, Brouwer et al. (2022) supported

positive faculty perceptions and found communication with faculty was evaluated positively. However, in both studies, the student-athletes expressed concern for faculty support and flexibility when missing classes for athletic participation and being able to make up work (Brower et al., 2022; Parson, 2013).

Horton (2009a) noted, “Opportunities for such student-faculty relationships are increased in a learning environment with small class size, such as that provided at the community college” (p. 22). Bryan (2018) studied Division III NJCAA student-athletes’ who persisted to a 4-year institution and found participants felt they received support from coaches and faculty who inspired them to succeed in the classroom and athletic competition. The student-athletes expressed that seeing faculty at their athletic competitions demonstrated they supported them in their athletics. The student-athletes also felt supported in the classroom because faculty were flexible and provided adjustments for assignments due to the athlete’s travel and athletic competition (Bryan, 2018).

Lewis (2020) found for student-athletes at an NCAA Division I university, the most significant influence on their formal academic success was their experience with the academic advisor and faculty members. The academic advisors and faculty helped contribute to their adjustment and feeling of belonging on campus. Horton (2009a) stated that being at a community college allowed them to interact and build positive relationships with faculty members. In the study, participants described how they felt that teachers cared about them and wanted to see them be successful. Lewis found faculty provided informal interactions outside of the classroom, which benefited the student-athletes’ positive academic experience.

Sport Type and Scholarships

Le Crom et al. (2009) examined retention factors of athletes at an NCAA Division 1 conference and found the type of sport played affected student retention. Student-athletes who participated in an individual sport had a higher retention rate than student-athletes playing a team sport. Johnson et al. (2013) found students who participated in revenue sports, such as basketball and football team sports, were significantly less likely to be retained than in nonrevenue generating sports. Lee's (2021) research supported Johnson et al.'s (2013) results and found nonrevenue and individual sport athletes were retained at a higher rate than revenue sport and team sport student-athletes.

Scholarship funding has also impacted individual and team sports athletes. Le Crom et al. (2009) found sport type was a significant predictor of retention. Students who participated in individual sports had a higher retention rate than team sport athletes. In addition, team sport athletes who received more funding were more likely to be retained than those receiving less. Conversely, for individual sports, student-athletes receiving less funding had a higher retention rate. Therefore, Le Crom et al. inferred male individual sport athletes receiving less scholarship money than team sport athletes could be more intrinsically motivated. The authors also noted female student-athletes had fewer opportunities to be professional athletes. So, they do not have the same earning power as professional male athletes, which could influence female athletes increased persistence as a student and an athlete, compared to men who may leave to pursue a professional sports career. Although Le Crom et al. examined three variables related to retention (i.e., scholarship support, sport type, and gender), other variables might provide important information about student-athletes retention (Johnson et al., 2013).

Gender Differences of Student-Athletes' Academic and Social Experiences

Athletics for female athletes changed in 1972 with the passing of Title IX. Title IX “prohibits gender discrimination in educational programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance” (Dent, 2022, para. 1). Before Title IX was enacted, women playing sports accounted for less than 300,000 in high school and 32,000 college athletes (Kennedy, 2010). In 2022, over 3,200,000 female high school athletes participated in sports (National Federation of State High School Association, 2022), and over 200,000 female athletes competed in college sports (NCAA, 2022). Although Title IX has increased the opportunity and availability of athletics for female athletes at the high school level and college, women still face gender inequity and stereotypes.

The stereotypes of women have contributed to gender inequity in society. For example, men are perceived as strong and athletic, whereas women are perceived as quiet and obedient (Rayburn et al., 2015). This social perspective can be seen in the sports realm: “Female athletes often have to prove themselves on the court to overcome barriers, stereotypes, and notions about their physical appearance and athleticism” (Rayburn et al., 2015, p. 28). However, even though there are negative stereotypes about female athletes' appearance and athleticism, female student-athletes have demonstrated they outperform male athletes academically (Horton, 2009b; Kanter & Lewis, 1991; Le Crom et al., 2009; Melendez, 2006; Schulz, 2007; Spry, 2017). Further, Melendez (2006) also noted women demonstrated a higher academic, social, and institutional adjustment score than male athletes. Therefore, in this section of the literature review the research focuses on goals and commitments, academic systems and integration, social systems and integration, and outcomes of female student-athletes in comparison to male student-athletes.

Goals and Commitments

Meulemans et al. (2019) found when comparing male and female student-athletes' male student-athletes reported a higher goal of earning a bachelor's degree at 80% compared to female student-athletes at 77% when they transfer. The authors also found the most important factor for both male and female student-athletes when choosing to attend a community college was the athletic program. However, male student-athletes in the study selected reasons for selecting a college was based on athletic reasons compared to female student-athletes who selected more academic related reasons. The female student-athletes choose cost, location, degree offerings, and the availability of financial aid as important factors for choosing a community college.

Academic Systems and Integration

To measure academic success, student-athletes' GPAs are often measured and compared. Specifically, when looking at gender and GPA several studies have been conducted. Kantar and Lewis (1991) studied 924 student-athletes at California community colleges who participated in athletics. The researchers found female athletes had a higher average GPA of 2.63 compared to male student-athletes' average GPA of 2.45. Schulz (2007) researched factors that impact community college student-athletes' academic achievement in Maryland. When comparing GPAs, the author found female student-athletes' GPA of 2.8071 was higher than male student-athletes at 2.1677, with a total difference of 0.6394. Horton (2009b) also concluded female student-athletes earn higher GPAs. In a more recent study by Spry (2017), the results supported Schulz's findings. The author explored student-athletes' GPAs and studied 533 student-athletes at three different community colleges in Alabama. Spry found the average student-athlete GPA was 2.641, and female athletes, on average, had a higher GPA of 2.841 compared to male student-athletes GPA of 2.497, with a total difference of .344.

Gaston Gayles (2004) examined 211 NCAA Division I athletes to determine if academic and athletic motivation was a predictor of academic performance using the Student Athletes Motivation Toward Sports and Academic Questionnaire with a 6-point Likert scale. The results of the study indicated women had a significantly higher academic motivation than their male counterparts, and men had higher athletic motivation. A similar study by Tudor and Ridpath (2019) supported the findings in Gatson Gayles's research through the analysis of the effects of gender on motivation toward academics and athletics of 310 NCAA Division I student-athletes. The authors found an athlete's motivation toward athletics and academics is influenced by gender. Women had a higher academic motivation than men, but women had a lower sport motivation (Tudor & Ridpath, 2019).

Stewart (2015) conducted a study on rural-serving community college student-athletes in Texas that focused on their academic and social college experience. The author found female student-athletes' social experiences, such as relationships with faculty, peers, and the coaching staff, are more important than male student-athletes to their academic and social experiences. These relationships had positive benefits, helped them to meet their personal and athletic goals, and leaned on each other to get through difficult periods. In addition, female student-athletes had higher levels of engagement with teammates and peers. Umbach et al. (2006) found Division III female student-athletes were more likely to receive support, expressed greater satisfaction with their college experience, and were more likely to be engaged in learning activities than Division I and II female nonathlete peers.

Rivera (2004) examined gender differences and found male student-athletes indicated that coach-player relationships and athletic satisfaction were significantly important to their

persistence at the college. However, female student-athletes indicated the importance of academic variables such as academic satisfaction on persistence.

Social Systems and Integration

Female athletes' experiences on their sports teams were related to how connected they felt to the college campus. If their experience on the team was positive, they felt connected, but if they had a negative experience on the team, they felt isolated on campus (Slaten et al., 2020). Crawford (2007) found female and male student-athletes interacted with their peers differently. Female student-athletes interacted with teammates and other athletes at a higher frequency, but male student-athletes interacted with nonathlete peers at a higher frequency.

Outcome

Retention, degree completion, and transfer rates of female student-athletes are important to discuss. Horton (2009b) found female student-athletes' degree completion and 4-year transfer rates surpass male student-athletes. Female student-athletes appear to be graduating at higher rates than their nonathletic peers, indicating athletic participation could influence athletes and their adjustment to college (Melendez, 2006). Spry (2017) also looked at retention rates and degree completion at Alabama community colleges and found retention for all student-athletes was 45%, which was below the three institutions' retention rates of 50% for all students. Lastly, the student-athletes' overall degree completion rate was 28.9%, which was greater than the graduation rate of 20% for all students at the three institutions in the study. Female student-athletes' degree completion was significantly higher at 38%, compared to male student-athletes at 22.3%; therefore, the author found gender was the study's most significant predictor of student success.

To understand the educational goal achievement of female student-athletes, Kanter and Lewis (1991) examined community college student-athletes and nonathletes. They found female athletes earned more credit hours than male athletes. Horton (2009b) also concluded female student-athletes accumulate more credit hours each semester than their peers.

Retention of student-athletes is also important to their academic success and degree completion. Le Crom et al. (2019) found Division I female student-athletes had higher retention rates than men. In contrast, Johnson et al. (2013) found gender was not a significant predictor of retention in first-time, 1st-year student-athletes at an NCAA Division I university. Mendoza et al. (2012) found female student-athletes were likelier to persist to a sophomore student in 1 year than men. According to Lee (2021), gender was a significant predictor of retention, with female student-athletes being retained at a higher rate than men.

Summary

The literature clarified that academic, social, and institutional adjustment for student-athletes is crucial to their success (Melendez, 2006). Female athletes face different experiences and have unique needs in higher education than male athletes (Gummelt, 2017). Female student-athletes carry dual roles in balancing their athletic and academic identities and spending a significant amount of time training and competing while fulfilling their academic requirements as a student (Slaten et al., 2020). A significant amount of research on female student-athletes has been focused on university athletes, with limited studies concentrating on female community college student-athletes. There remains a gap in the literature centering on how athletic commitments and participation affect female student-athletes' academic and social experiences at community colleges leading to obtaining an associate degree. Therefore, the study investigated the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community

colleges and explored the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. In Chapter 3, the methodology for this study is discussed in detail.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in this study. This chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study, research questions, how the theoretical and conceptual frameworks informed this study, and the alignment table. Then, the research design, study setting, study participants, and instrumentation used to conduct the study are presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with details on how the data were collected, the data sources, analysis of the data, the steps taken to provide a quality study, ethical considerations, and the study's limitations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree.

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges?
2. What experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges contributed to obtaining an associate degree?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework that informed this study was the model of institutional departure, which addresses factors linked to various forms of persistence or departure in higher education (Tinto, 1993). The model of institutional departure was most appropriate for this study

based on the model's academic and social integration components to explore the lived experiences of female student-athletes' academic and social experiences.

The conceptual framework of Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) academic success for student-athletes was used in this study to expand Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure to factor in the demands of being a student and an athlete, and how that can influence their academic and social experiences. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks focus on academic and social integration, which was used to develop the interview questions in the study to address the two research questions (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Tinto, 1993). The alignment of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks (see Table 3.1) is provided to give a comparison of the seven different categories that make up each framework.

Table 3.1. Alignment of the Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Category	Theoretical framework Tinto's model of institutional departure	Conceptual framework Comeaux and Harrison's academic success for student- athletes
Precollege attributes	Family background Skills and abilities Prior schooling	Family background Educational experiences and preparation Individual attributes
Initial goals and commitments	Intentions Goal and institutional commitments External commitments	Goal commitment Sport commitment Institutional commitment
Institutional experience	Academic system Formal – Academic performance Informal – Faculty and staff Social system Formal – Extracurricular activities Informal – Peer group interactions	Academic system Grade performance Intellectual development Social system Faculty interactions Peer interactions Coaches demand Sport participation
Integration	Academic integration Social integration	Academic integration Social integration
Goals and commitments	Intentions Goal and institutional commitments External commitments	Goal commitment Sport commitment Institutional commitment

Category	Theoretical framework Tinto's model of institutional departure	Conceptual framework Comeaux and Harrison's academic success for student- athletes
Outcome	Dropout decision	Academic success

Alignment Table

A table was developed that provides an overview depicting how the elements in the study align. The alignment table includes literature findings, research questions, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology, and interview questions. The alignment table can be found in Appendix A.

Research Design

Qualitative research “focus[es] on human experience as it occurs in social life and often seeks to make sense of the social practices” (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017, p. 93). Creswell (2014) described how a qualitative phenomenology research design is appropriate when exploring a phenomenon of a group of individuals to understand common experiences better. Peoples (2021) noted “the purpose of phenomenological research is to generate lifeworld experiences of a certain population” (p. 47). When considering the research design for this study, other qualitative methodologies explored were a case study, narrative, and an ethnographic design. Although a case study focuses on exploring a process and understanding the individual parts of a system and how those occur within a bounded system, it was not appropriate for the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). A narrative qualitative study approach, which focuses on how individuals make meaning of their experiences through stories, was considered but did not focus on the participants’ lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lastly, an ethnographic design approach focuses on participants’ cultural practices and patterns, which did not align with the purpose of the study (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). In this study, a qualitative

phenomenology research design was chosen to investigate female student-athletes' lived experiences. The researcher rejected other qualitative methodologies, such as a case study, narrative, and grounded theory, as they did not align with the purpose of the study.

Study Setting

The research study was conducted with female student-athletes from community colleges in Texas who were members of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). Member colleges are assigned a region which is based primarily on the geographic location of the community college. Each region has two directors and two assistant directors to serve on various boards. Each region within the constraints of the NJCAA constitution and bylaws adopt regulations, rules, and procedures for athletics (NJCAA, n.d.-a). Texas community college athletic programs are divided into two regions. Region 5 comprises New Mexico and Western Texas teams, and Region 14 includes schools from eastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana (NJCAA, n.d.-a). Female student-athletes from Region 5 and Region 14 were selected from institutions with at least one women's sports teams from a minimum of three community colleges in Texas.

The NJCAA (2023a) has three different athletic divisions of play guided by requirements outlined in the bylaws. The athletic division is assigned to each individual sport, not by the institution. There are three different types of divisions and rules for each. NJCAA Division I athletic departments offer the highest level of competition and provide athletic scholarships covering tuition, housing, and books. Additionally, scholarship recipients may be awarded an additional \$250 for required school supplies and transportation costs each academic year. NJCAA Division II athletic departments can award scholarships covering only tuition and books, plus the \$250 in required supplies each year. NJCAA Division III athletic departments may not

provide any scholarships or money to their student-athletes. Students from the study represented both Division I and Division III athletic programs.

Study Participants

For this study, purposeful and snowball sampling were used to select and recruit participants. Peoples (2021) recommended using purposeful sampling. Creswell and Poth (2018) described purposeful sampling as a way to select participants based on specific characteristics and criteria because participants have had to experience the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Snowball sampling was then used to allow for participants to refer other potential peers that meet the criteria helping in the recruitment process (Peoples, 2021). The criteria for selecting female student-athletes were that they participated in a minimum of 1 year of athletics and graduated with an associate degree from an NJCAA community college in Texas from 2018–2023. The goal was to recruit participants from various sports, including team sports such as basketball, softball, and volleyball, and individual sports such as tennis, track, and swimming.

In qualitative research, the sample population size can vary depending on the research design and methodology adopted but can provide a guide for how many participants are needed (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). For a phenomenology study, the number of participants interviewed ranges from eight to 15 participants (Creswell, 2014; Peoples, 2021). The researcher interviewed 15 female student-athletes from community colleges in Texas for this study, aligning with the methodology chosen.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the researcher who gathers the information from the interviews is the instrument for the study (Creswell, 2014). Peoples (2021) recommended using a semistructured interview protocol “allowing students to construct interview questions relevant to

the research questions so that key aspects of the research study are sure to be covered while allowing for participants to discuss other information” (p. 51).

Using qualitative phenomenology as a guide for conducting interviews, one-on-one interviews were conducted with participants using a semistructured question approach (Peoples, 2021, see Appendix B). Semistructured questions are a general guide of specific questions for the interview with specific topics or ideas, provides the researcher with flexibility, can prompt in-depth insight into a phenomenon, and allows for clarifying questions. In addition, the questions served as a guide for the topics and ideas of the interview but allowed the researcher to approach the interview in a conversational manner (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017; Peoples, 2021). The interview questions (see Appendix C) were developed using Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) academic success for student-athletes, which focused on the academic and social experiences of the participants.

Data Collection and Data Sources

Due to the location of the participants, data for this study were collected from interviews using the online video platform, Zoom. Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes to allow for an in-depth interview. The interviews were audio and video recorded to provide a detailed interview record, which permitted the use of verbatim transcription analysis. All recordings and data were stored on an external hard drive in a secure location and will be stored in a safe location for the next 5 years.

Creswell (2014) developed a protocol for conducting qualitative interviews that included specific components researchers can follow for creating the interview protocol for the study. Using Creswell’s recommendations, a header to designate the date, place, interviewee, and instructions for the interview was created. The written instructions for the interview provided a

standard interview procedure. The questions included an icebreaker, questions for the interview, a concluding statement, and additional probing questions to elicit more detail and explanation during the interview. A final statement was included to thank the participants for their time. The semistructured interviews followed the protocol established in Appendix B.

The researcher contacted NJCAA participating community colleges with female sports asking permission from each college president to work with their athletic directors and coaches to identify participants (see Appendix F and Appendix G). An email or text message was sent to the female student-athletes who were referred and met the criteria for participation. Once the research participants were identified, they were asked to sign a consent form and scheduled a 60-minute interview, which was conducted on Zoom. The consent forms were signed and collected electronically before the interview and stored on an external hard drive. A Zoom invitation with the time, date, and link for their interview was then sent to the student-athlete. The protocol (see Appendix B) and the interview questions (see Appendix C) were followed and explained to the participants. For the female student-athletes' participation, they received a \$10.00 gift card and were entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Amazon gift card at the conclusion of all interviews.

Data Analysis

Using a phenomenology methodology, the hermeneutic circle provides insight for analyzing the interview data. The hermeneutic circle "is a description of the process of understanding" (Peoples, 2021, p. 34). Data analysis using this method is a nonlinear process that starts with examining the transcript, understanding the parts as codes or themes, synthesizing the information, and then reexamining the transcript as a whole. This process continues as the researcher develops new understandings and requires continual revision as the researcher learns

new information, which can lead to a change in their understanding of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021).

In addition to the hermeneutic circle, Peoples (2021) recommended six-step process for phenomenological data analysis: (a) read each participant's transcript and delete unnecessary words like "um" or "well;" (b) develop preliminary units that are focused on data that reveal an essential feature of the phenomenon; (c) using the meaning units themes are created for each interview question; (d) develop situated narratives, which involve direct quotes for each interview question; (e) create general narratives combining the participants' situated narratives providing a general description of all narratives; and (f) discuss the themes that were implied by all or most of the participants. Saldaña (2013) stated, "A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection" (p. 14). In addition, a phenomenology study describes "what" the participants experienced using verbatim examples and "how" the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Otter.ai (2024) was used to transcribe the audio from each interview session. Otter.ai generates written transcriptions of meetings and was chosen because of the ability to integrate the software with Zoom for the virtual interviews. The researcher listened to the audio while comparing it to the transcription three times to check for accuracy. Once the interview transcriptions were complete, filler words were removed and sent to each participant for member checking. This allowed the participant to make sure the interview transcription accurately reflected what was discussed in the interview.

Dedoose (n.d.), a secure, inexpensive, cloud-based, qualitative software program, was used to assist with the data analysis. Dedoose was chosen because it is appropriate to use for qualitative research and its intuitive design. This software system was used to assist with

organizing and sorting the interview data, as it contains features to help with coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the information was coded in Dedoose for each research question, an overall analysis was conducted following the hermeneutic cycle to identify themes.

Study Quality

Tracy's (2010) eight "big tent" criteria were used to establish trustworthiness and quality for a qualitative study. The eight areas are: (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. The eight "big tent" criteria table can be found in Table 3.2. The topic is worthy based on the importance of understanding female student-athletes' experience at a community college to improve retention and graduation rates.

Table 3.2. Tracy's (2010) Eight "Big Tent" Criteria

Criteria	Key areas
Worthy topic	Understanding female student-athletes' experience at a community college to improve retention and graduation rates.
Rich rigor	Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure and Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) academic success for student-athletes as appropriate framework
Sincerity	Qualitative research methods
Credibility	Reflexivity statement
	Thick descriptions of the findings
	Member checking
Resonance	Transferability
	Use of verbatim examples and generalizations from participants
Significant contribution	Contribute to literature to influence knowledge, practice, and policy
Ethics	IRP approval
	Obtain signed informed consent forms
	Confidentiality of participants
Meaningful coherence	Alignment table (see Appendix A)

The rich rigor of the study was demonstrated using Tinto's (1993) model of institutional departure and Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) academic success for student-athletes as appropriate frameworks, and qualitative research methods for the collection and analysis of the

data were followed. The researcher demonstrated sincerity and transparency by including a reflexivity statement to account for assumptions and bias. The study's credibility was demonstrated using thick descriptions of the findings and member checking, allowing the participants to review the results and check for accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A high-quality study needs to resonate with the reader, which was accomplished through transferability using verbatim examples and generalizations from the participants (Tracy, 2010).

The study contributes to the literature on the experiences of female community college student-athletes to influence knowledge, practice, and policy. The ethics in this study followed Institutional Review Board approval, obtainment of signed consent forms, and maintaining the confidentiality of participants. Lastly, the meaningful coherence of the study was maintained through an alignment table (see Appendix A), which organized and aligned the literature findings, purpose, research questions, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and interview questions.

Ethical Considerations

Evidence of following ethical guidelines was established by receiving approval from the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E). The standards and ethics of qualitative research to protect human subjects were followed throughout the research. The ethical issues in a qualitative study are related to the participants' privacy and consent, concerns to minimize harm, and equitable treatment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and informed consent was obtained (see Appendix D). Informed consent forms were provided to participants, which reviewed their rights, such as being able to withdraw from the study at any time, the confidentiality of their responses, and the risks and benefits of participating in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To minimize harm, the participants' identities were protected during and after the interviews. To protect the anonymity of the participants, each person was given a pseudonym identification (Creswell, 2014). Before the interviews, permission was also obtained to record the Zoom session via audio and video. All data will be kept on an external hard drive in a secure, locked location for 5 years.

Reflexivity Statement

A reflexivity statement is “the process of intentionally accounting for your assumptions, biases, experiences, and identities, that may impact any aspect of your research study” (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017, p. 95). In a reflexivity statement, the researcher reflects on their background, culture, and experiences shaping their background and the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The following is my reflexivity statement.

I have always been involved in sports, whether playing or coaching. Growing up, I wanted to earn a Division I scholarship to play basketball at a university. However, after high school, I did not receive a scholarship, so I went to a community college and played 2 years of basketball. As a student-athlete, I was required to attend weekly study hall sessions, obtain monthly progress reports, maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher, and pass a minimum of 12 credit hours each semester to be eligible to compete. My goal was to transfer to a Division I college, so it was important I maintained high grades and progressed through my courses to be eligible. In doing so, I was motivated to work hard academically and on the athletic field. Through hard work and a few extra summer classes, I received my associate degree in liberal arts and transferred to a university to continue my education and athletic participation. After 2 years at the university and competing in basketball, I graduated with my bachelor's degree in physical education. Upon graduation, my goal was to continue my education to receive a master's degree, so I could one

day become a community college professor and women's basketball coach. To gain experience, I started coaching at a local high school and eventually became an assistant coach at a community college.

As a community college coach, I worked to help athletes stay eligible through tutoring and mentoring them in their academics. My goal was to help them pass their classes so that they could stay eligible to participate and transfer to a university. The main motivator for me was that, unfortunately, throughout my time as an athlete and a coach, I saw many of my teammates and other athletes not graduate or have trouble staying academically eligible.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on the cancelation of games and practice that prevented student-athletes from competing and practicing in 2020, which could have contributed to their academic and social experiences. A second limitation was it may have limited transferability to a 4-year university setting as the research was based on community college student-athletes.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. This chapter reviewed the research design, setting and participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis design, and ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter concluded with details on how the data were collected, the data sources, analysis of the data, steps taken to provide a quality study, ethical considerations, and the study's limitations. Chapter 4 describes and presents the

analysis of the data collected and reviews the findings from the study. Finally, Chapter 5 reflects on the findings and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4 - Research Results and Analysis

This chapter provides an analysis of the collected data and research findings from interviews with female student-athletes. The chapter begins with a review of the research questions followed by the site and participant demographics that include type of associate degree, graduation year, and sport played. Then, the findings are discussed as themes and are arranged by the study's research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges?
2. What experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges contributed to obtaining an associate degree?

Site and Participant Demographics

The participants in the study graduated with an associate degree from a Texas community college between 2018–2023. Figure 4.1 delineates the associate degree awarded to each of the 15 participants. The majors reported by the participants were associate of science ($n = 7$), kinesiology ($n = 2$), economics ($n = 1$), health studies ($n = 1$), business management ($n = 1$), general studies ($n = 1$), associate of arts ($n = 1$), and psychology ($n = 1$). Figure 4.2 shows the year each of the 15 participants graduated with an associate degree from 2018–2023. The graduation years reported by the participants were 2018 ($n = 2$), 2019 ($n = 3$), 2020 ($n = 3$), 2021 ($n = 1$), 2022 ($n = 3$), and 2023 ($n = 3$). Figure 4.3 shows the four sports represented by the 15

participants: (a) softball ($n = 3$), (b) tennis ($n = 1$), (c) volleyball ($n = 8$), and (d) basketball ($n = 3$).

Figure 4.1. Type of Associate Degree Earned by Participants

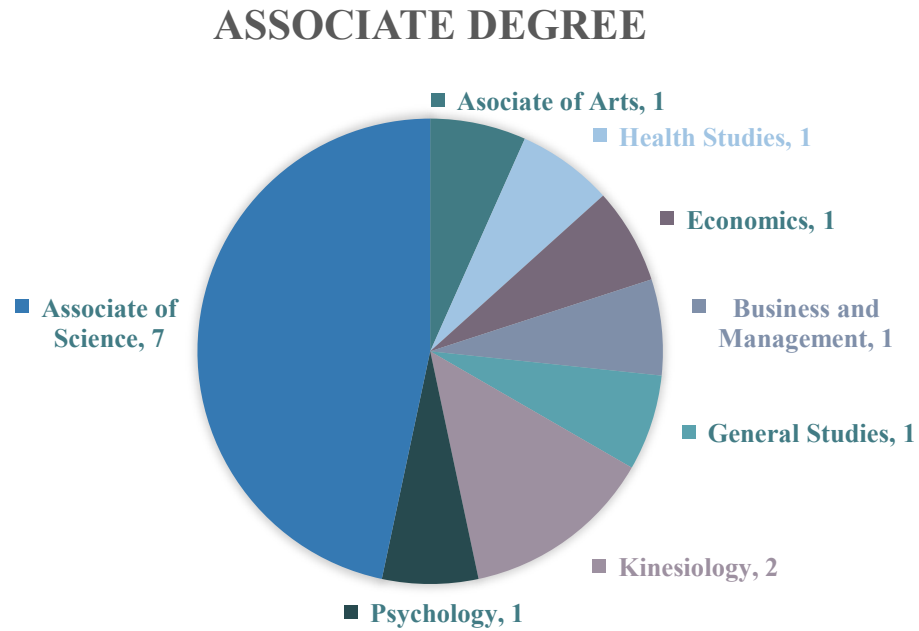


Figure 4.2. Graduation Year of Participants

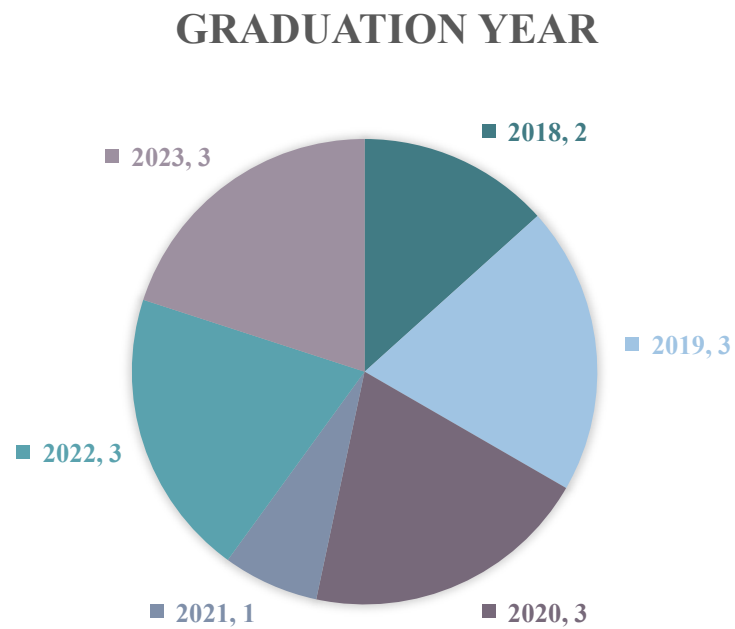
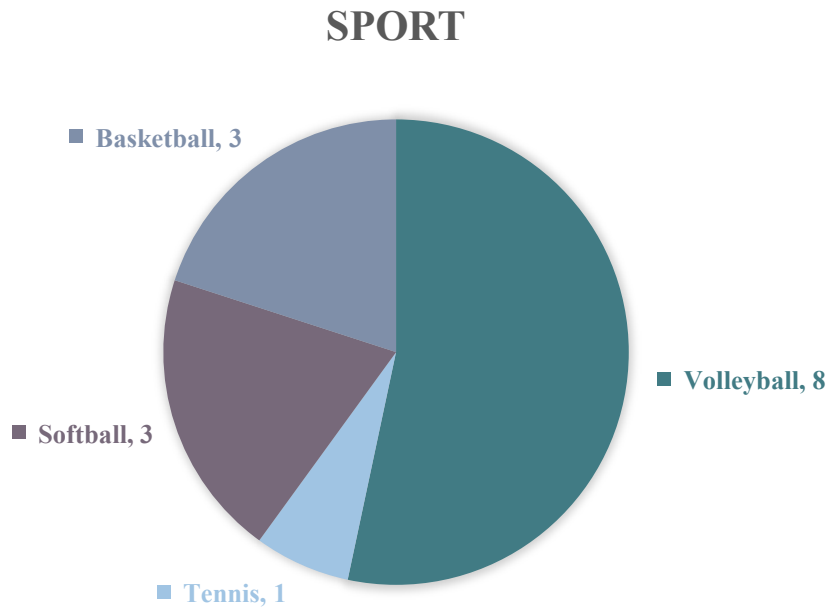


Figure 4.3. Sport Played by Participants



Findings

Throughout the interviews participants described their experiences and provided examples and information regarding how participating in athletics at a community college influenced their academic and social experiences and what contributed to obtaining an associate degree. The researcher followed steps suggested by Peoples (2021) to develop themes by generating meaning units from each interview question and then combining the participants' narratives to provide a general description, leading to themes. Through this process, six total themes emerged: (a) Classroom Champions, (b) Campus Belonging, (c) Athletic Family, (d) Faculty Role, (e) Value of the Associate's Degree, and (f) Overcoming Challenges.

Research Question 1

The first research question of the study was: What are the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges? The themes that addressed participants academic and social experiences were (a) Classroom Champions, (b) Campus

Belonging, (c) Athletic Family, and (d) Faculty Role. In the following section, each theme is discussed, and participant examples are provided.

Classroom Champions

Female student-athletes' athletic commitments were found to positively affect their academic experiences. Throughout the interviews, participants expressed the importance of doing well and prioritizing their academics. Being an athlete gave the participants motivation and accountability to succeed in the classroom. Participants described how eligibility, grades, and transferring to a university positively contributed to their academic goals and accomplishments.

Being an athlete positively influenced several of the participants' academics and made them work hard and stay disciplined to do well in school. Tessa said, "It [athletics] made me try a lot harder in academics because you have to be good in academics in order to play." Harlee had a similar experience, saying, "It [athletics] definitely made me like push a lot harder to do better in school." Kimberly worked hard to be a good student academically, stating, "I cared about school, but I never worked hard to get those perfect grades, perfect marks. But when I got here, after the 1st semester, I was just, why don't I grind, grind, grind." Zina's academics were also influenced by her participation in sports; she said, "I guess it kind of helped me stay disciplined. I was also valedictorian in high school. So, academics kind of always came first to me."

The participants expressed how eligibility to participate in athletics was a motivating factor in prioritizing their grades. The participants wanted to maintain their eligibility to continue to compete. Cora, described how eligibility was important to her, saying: "I would say it made me work harder. Because I knew the consequences that would come with me slacking and not getting my stuff done. Not putting school first." Harlee also had a similar response, stating:

It definitely made me push a lot harder to do better in school, because learning stuff is kind of hard for me. Being in athletics, you have to maintain good grades in order to play. If you would fail a class, or you were failing, you couldn't play for at least a week. And that's not something I wanted to do because I constantly want to be playing anytime that I could. It definitely makes you stay on top of your work and be organized and do what you're supposed to do.

Coaches also reinforced the importance of maintaining eligibility and meeting academic requirements. Coaches closely monitored the participants' grades and academic progress through a study hall. All participants except one mentioned having to attend study hall monitored by their coaching staff. By implementing study hall, time was dedicated for them to focus on their academics, receive tutoring, and study together. Felicity noted, "We had mandatory study hall hours. And there's no way out of it. Like, they [coaches] come in the computer lab and check on you and make sure were doing work." Haisley had study hall as well and said, "We had study hall. And every single sport had to do that." Jordon discussed her mandatory study sessions, saying, "We did have mandatory homework sessions, study sessions. Those helped. We had to sit there for an hour and find something to do." Kimberly had study hall weekly; she said, "We had to go to study hall every single day Monday to Thursday."

Additionally, coaches monitored the participants' academics through grade checks. Grade checks helped the participants, and their coaches, monitor and track their grades. If a participant was struggling or not meeting the requirements of the course, the coaching staff could connect them with the appropriate resources, such as tutoring. Grade checks required participants to get their professors to provide them with a current grade or progress report for the class. This would help the coaches keep track of student-athletes who were doing well and student-athletes who

needed extra support. Felicity noted, “The coaches did grade checks, and I want to say for grade checks, I can’t remember if it was individual punishment, or team punishment. It was a big accountability factor there.” Jordon also had grade checks; she said, “They did check our grades every once in a while, because if we didn’t have a certain grade point average, we were not playing.”

In response to several questions, the participants mentioned their grades and overall grade point average (GPA) were important to them. Several participants gave examples of the importance of having good grades, staying on top of their schoolwork, and being motivated to do well in the classroom. Jordon shared her experience, saying, “I had to, to make good grades for myself. And then on top of that, somebody else was expecting good grades from me in order for me to play.” Zina mentioned how grades motivated her to do well, saying, “I kind of set the bar for myself really early and tried to stay either on that or on top of that since.” Megan described her focus on academics and grades, commenting, “Coming from high school where I was pretty much an ABC student coming into junior college, I really focused all of my time onto grades and athletics. I really wanted to do well academically.” Cora strived for good grades; she said, “I mean, I got very good grades there. I will say that it increased, like a positive experience, or put a positive experience in me.” Brittany mentioned being consistent and not falling behind, which helped her be successful academically while still managing her other commitments. On top of that, two participants talked about being motivated to be a National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) academic scholar athlete or making the dean’s list for their grades. Megan described her experience becoming an academic scholar athlete, saying:

I had to make sure I had all my grades up. But not even just that we had the NJCAA scholar athlete of the year. I wanted to make sure that I was trying my best to get onto that list, like being someone who earned it.

Participants valued their academics and understood the importance of doing well in school to meet their educational, career, and athletic goals. Athletics also helped a few of the participants who had struggled early on in their academics to make improvements and overcome challenges in the classroom to improve their GPA. Overall, athletics played a significant role in motivating participants to prioritize their grades.

Campus Belonging

Athletics provided the participants with several opportunities to get involved on campus, make friends, and interact with faculty and administration outside the classroom. Participants expressed positive interactions with their teammates, athletes, and other peers on campus. These opportunities helped the participants socially integrate into the college campus, providing a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Being a student-athlete allowed the participants to be involved on their college campuses, and they expressed their coaches and teammates encouraged and supported their involvement. The participants mentioned several opportunities to be involved on campus, such as attending college-wide events, volunteering, or attending sports functions and games. With a busy schedule, the participants expressed their involvement on campus was determined by their availability. Harriet was involved in different activities on campus; she said, “There was a lot of fun opportunities like big cookouts and cultural day events.” Felicity recalled, “I think participating in athletics definitely helped me socialize.” Haisley stated, “It [athletics] definitely keeps you out of your little hole in your room. It keeps you social, it keeps you around people.”

Being student-athletes gave many participants recognition on campus from other students, athletes, faculty, and administrators. Participants commented on how people just knew them because they were athletes. A few participants felt athletics opened doors for them, and they were invited to a lot of events on campus just because they were involved in athletics. Jordon gave an example of her experience, saying, “I think it [athletics], greatly impacted my experience. I think it [athletics] opened a lot of doors for me to participate in student activities at school.” Other participants played on winning teams or won a national championship, giving the athletes recognition and acceptance on campus. Rose described winning a NJCAA National Championship, saying, “We faced a lot of adversity; it was really fun. It was one of the best seasons I’ve ever played in for sure.” This recognition helped the participants feel valued and provided a sense of belonging on campus.

Furthermore, a few participants mentioned how administration was supportive and invested in their success by coming to games, and some even traveled to playoff games to show their support. Cora had administration support at games; she shared:

The admin of the school and the staff was super supportive of the sports teams there . . . two of them still reach out to me every now and then just to see how I’m doing. And I think it added on to the overall experience I had there.

And Harriet stated:

We had the president at a lot of our games and the president’s assistant at a lot of our games. And I met a lot of staff through being on the team just because everyone wants to come out and support the team.

Athletics influenced the participants social interactions with peers on campus.

Participants commented on making friends with their classmates or friends from campus clubs,

work, or being a part of an outside organization. One of the participants was the president of the Spanish club at her college, and the other found a church group that helped her meet other people and socialize outside of sports. Another participant, Cora, tried her best to interact with her classmates; she said, “With peers outside of my teammates, and other sports, I still tried to be involved as much as I could with my class groups taking the time to meet outside of class with them.” Rose tried to make friends; she shared, “I still tried to make friends with people in my class. It was definitely harder because I didn’t see them as much as I did athletic people.” Two participants were members of Phi Theta Kappa for their academic achievements. They were able to participate in events and meet peers through the organization. Overall, their social interactions were minimal with peers outside of athletics. Their friends were either on their team or other athletes at the college. Although the participants expressed they did not have a lot of friends outside of athletics, their teammates and other athletes provided them with support, people to hang out with, someone they could go to for help, and shared interests.

Athletic Family

Being on an athletic team positively influenced several aspects of the participants’ social and academic experiences. Teammates and other athletes were their main friend group and support. Having teammates helped the participants feel more comfortable on campus. Overall, the participants’ positive sport experiences helped the athletes feel connected to their team.

As participants entered their community college, they instantly had a group of teammates with which they could build friendships. Through athletics they were given the opportunity to bond and build positive relationships over their shared passion and experiences of being involved in athletics. All participants mentioned their positive interactions with teammates and the important role being an athlete played in their belonging on campus. Harriet expressed, “That

was just nice to have a built-in family and we did everything together. We lived together, we played together, we hung out together.” Many of the participants expressed how their teammates were their best friends and made socializing on campus easier and fun. Several participants also mentioned living with their teammates in dorms or off-campus housing, which helped them bond and provided the participants with the opportunity to hang out, socialize, and develop connections. Haisley described her experience, saying, “You basically already have friends [teammates] when you get there. And you don’t have to go searching for them. I look at the people who don’t play sports and I don’t know how they make friends.” Tessa expressed a similar experience, saying, “All of my friends were just the athletic team.” There were also two participants that mentioned people just knew them because of sports. Ellie shared, “People just knew who I was because I played sports, and then it’s easy to make a lot of friends at the college because I was in athletics. It was just easy to talk to people.” Harriet was friends with teammates and other athletes on campus. She shared:

It was the best. That’s how I met all my people. . . . We [would] go to each other’s houses and hang out. I didn’t really talk to many people in my classes, necessarily, but I always talked to the athletes. That was a built-in friendship family type thing. If I wouldn’t have played sports, I don’t really know if I would have had many friends in college because they were like my built-in besties basically.

The participants described how athletics influenced their social experiences by providing an opportunity to develop relationships with athletes from different sports at their community college. Participants were able to bond with other athletes over their shared experiences, similar schedules, and demands. Participants supported each other by attending games or sporting events. For example, Felicity expressed how she enjoyed going to support and watch other

sports, saying, “Just attending other teams’ games and stuff. That wasn’t even like a requirement for us. We wanted to go to the soccer game or to the football game.” There were also athletic events hosted by coaches that helped bring the athletes together. These types of interactions helped the participants build meaningful relationships outside the athletic playing field. Cora described her friendships: “I would say it depends because I feel like my social experiences with other athletes was everything I had. My teammates [were my friends], but we made friends with the other sports that were there.” Brittany recalled how she made friends, saying, “That’s all you really have, your teammates and the other sports, the other athletes that were there, that’s all you have. We all lived right next to each other; it was really fun.” Harriet shared her experience, saying, “We live in apartments there. We were really close with the basketball and the baseball teams, other sports basically. That was all of our friends, like our families.”

Coaches played a key role in building a positive and supportive environment through their relationships with the participants. Participants’ relationships with their coach and coaching staff were positive and important to their academic integration on campus. Having a supportive head coach and coaching staff helped the participants navigate the different challenges and demands of being a student and an athlete. Coaches supported the participants’ academic success by providing them with guidelines and expectations for being part of the athletic team. These expectations positively influenced the participants’ academic priorities and provided them with guidance and support. In addition, many participants expressed the head coach and coaching staff met with them and their teammates to help them discuss their goals and aspirations. In the meetings, the coaches would provide academic guidance and discuss degree options, career goals, transfer institution requirements, and review their academic progress. A few participants had their coach as their academic advisor, which they found helpful because their coach

understood their sports schedule and could help them pick courses and supportive faculty.

Coaches played a pivotal role in providing structure and accountability for academic success.

Several participants said they had a good relationship with their coaches and respected them. A few mentioned how they became close with their coaches and built a relationship beyond their time at their community college. Tessa explained her relationship, saying, “I always had good relationships with my coaches. And they were always very helpful in pushing us to get better so we could get to the next level.” Felicity stated, “I felt like I was fortunate to have a good relationship with her and the assistant coach. Like, it was very family oriented, but also, of course, sports.” Brittany talked about her relationship with her coaches, saying:

I actually did my work study with my coaches. I see my coaches more than a lot of my teammates did. Just getting to know them on a personal level was so much fun and understanding how they got into coaching. . . . I think having a relationship with your coaches off the floor is really important.

Participants gave examples of how their coach created a positive team culture and used the word “family” to describe their team and coaches. Some coaches went above and beyond and supported their athletes on and off the playing field. Participants could count on their coach if they had an emergency, needed help, or did not have anywhere to go for the holidays. Having coaches that were invested in them as people and cared about them outside of athletics was important to their success. Brittany described, “I didn’t go home for the holidays because it was just too expensive. Coach wouldn’t let us cook, he cooked for us for Thanksgiving.” Harriet also stated, “I mean, he was there for us for anything we needed. If we had a flat tire, we call coach, he’s going to bring his AAA, he’s there to help us out. You have nothing to eat? Call coach.”

Participants stated their coaches gave them guidance and helped them stay on track academically. The coach's guidance was helpful for Jordan, who did not know how college worked and had no one to help her, saying:

They helped a lot. I didn't know how anything worked for college, or nobody could help me that was closest to me. They sat there and would take their time to talk to us. . . They were a big help, guidance wise. They were a big hand in guiding me to the right direction. Megan said her coach assisted her with "helping [them] prioritize school over even athletics, making sure [they] had everything that [they] needed. Encouraging [them] to go to [their] tutors. Encouraging [them] to make study groups, things like that."

Participants reported their relationship with their coach and coaching staff positively contributed to their social experiences and integration into the college. Many participants described their head coach and coaching staff encouraging them to participate in campus activities, volunteer work, and provided opportunities for athletes to socialize with each other and other peers. The coaching staff overall provided them with support, guidance, and a sense of belonging as an athlete on campus. Harlee mentioned, "Our coach always made it a priority if the school did have an activity that [we] would always have to go there. I never really missed out on much like out of athletic activities." Lastly, Ellie described her relationships and the support she received with her head coach, saying:

I would say when we first came in, we had to sign a contract. He told us about how he runs his program and everything. The first thing he brought up was school is first, family second, faith is third, and then athletics last. So, he really made it a point to, like show that [athletics] was the last thing you should be worried about.

Participants discussed their relationship with their coach and how that influenced their athletic development. Rose described why having a good relationship was important, saying, “Whenever you have a good relationship with your coach, you’re going to want to get better because you respect them, and you trust them.” Tessa improved athletically at her community college; she said, “I think that’s what helped the most is the coaching during junior college, because that’s what really helped me improve to have the skill level I needed to get to the next level.”

Coaches also played an active role in making sure their athletes knew the requirements for potential transfer institutions and helped research what GPA or courses were needed at the next level. Zina was glad for her coaches’ help, saying, “He would look up all of the prereqs for different PT schools. He would sit down and be like, we offer this and this. He’s like, this is how we’re going to get you there.” Megan had a similar example; she said, “They were really good about if these are the schools you want to go into, these are the classes you need to take. This is what grades you need to maintain.”

Faculty Role

The participants throughout the interview described the important role that faculty played in their academic and social integration into the college. Faculty relationships were a significant factor for the participants’ academic success as they were challenged with a busy schedule and the demands of athletics. Being a part of the athletic program required student-athletes to travel for games, potentially leading to missing class or having less time to complete assignments. Therefore, their relationship with faculty could have influenced their academic success.

Participants had an overwhelming number of positive interactions with their faculty. Overall, the faculty were accommodating and allowed student-athletes to plan arrangements or

extend deadlines to meet their needs when they traveled for games. Participants felt their faculty were understanding, especially if they communicated with them beforehand about their schedules. Tessa described her interactions with faculty, saying, “The faculty was super helpful. Like I said before, I love the smaller ratio of students to professors, and I think also being part of athletics, it was such a big part of that school.” Haisley had a similar response, stating, “I will say that is one of the positives of my junior college, I don’t know how all the other ones are. But our teachers and admin for athletics are really helpful.” Megan talked about her experience, saying, “Something that I really loved about college was they [professors] did a really good job of being understanding while also pushing you to stay ahead of your grades as well.” Rose described communicating with her professors, saying, “If we gave them notice that we were going to be busy, they would help us and work around our schedule.” Ellie described her experience, saying, “On the first day of class, we have to come and introduce ourselves to the professor and tell them we play athletics, and tell them about our schedule before and sit in the front.”

A few participants gave examples of some faculty who were not as accommodating and required them to complete coursework at the same time as everyone else. However, participants did not note any negative interactions with faculty in the classroom. The biggest issue was having flexibility to turn in assignments or make up missed work.

The participants commented on their relationships with their faculty in and out of the classroom. In the classroom, participants noted that faculty were helpful and supportive. Some faculty would ask them about their games and talk to them about their different athletic experiences. To illustrate, Kimberly said, “All of them [professors] are always asking me, how is the team doing? How is the season? Like during the regular day.” Faculty showed interest in them as people, and this helped to build positive relationships which the participants appreciated.

Outside of the classroom many participants discussed how their faculty would come to their games to show support. The participants liked seeing their faculty at their games, which helped them feel valued and supported. Megan would invite faculty to games; she said, “We would always invite our professors to come watch and a lot of them came most of the time.” Harlee said, “Most of our faculty would come to our games all the time. There would be like a little section, and you would see like all of the teachers, like your professors . . . they would be there.”

Faculty were important to the participants’ academic success by providing them with academic support outside of the class designated time. A significant number of participants mentioned going directly to their faculty for academic questions, help with coursework, and for academic support. Brittany described reaching out to her professor, saying, “I would always just reach out to my professor, that was always the easiest thing for me because they’re the ones teaching it to you.” Harriet experienced academic help from her professors; she shared, “The professors were always great about ‘If you have any questions, you come see me or send me an email, we’ll go over this.’” Oakley gave an example:

A lot of our teachers would either come in early or stay in later if they knew we had a game and we were going to miss our class period, or they would allow us to come in during their lunch and during their personal time.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: What experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges contributed to obtaining an associate degree? The themes that addressed participants’ experiences contributing to obtaining an associate degree were (a) Value of the

Associate's Degree and (b) Overcoming Challenges. In the following section, each theme is discussed, and participant examples are provided.

Value of the Associate's Degree

Community colleges provide student-athletes with the opportunity to attend college to pursue their goals and help them receive the skills and knowledge they needed on their academic journey toward a degree. Athletics had a positive effect on the participants reaching different educational milestones at their community college and participants described receiving an associate degree as an important step in their academic and athletic careers.

Several of the participants noted their reason for attending a community college was the opportunity to get recruited to play athletics at a university, notably a Division I university. Participating in athletics at a community college would allow them to improve their chances of playing at a Division I university while gaining more experience playing at the college level. Tessa decided to attend a community college to reach her goal of playing Division I athletics; she said, "I knew I wanted to play Division I eventually. I just started late in high school, so I decided to just go the JUCO route and then be able to transfer after." Felicity also wanted to play Division I athletics; she shared, "I just listened to my intuition and decided to go the JUCO route. And then hopefully, from there, go DI [Division I] because ultimately, that's everyone's goal. Everyone wants to be a DI [Division I] athlete." Haisley's goal was to get recruited; she said, "I would say yes, because junior college is a really good way to get recruited out. A lot of DI's [Division I] and DII's [Division II] like transfers."

To get recruited after playing at a community college, the participants understood the significance of doing well academically and progressing through their degree plan. Participants described many different reasons why getting a degree was important (e.g., not giving up, being

a role model to family, and receiving their first degree). Jordon, for example, said, “It would be the first degree that I received. And it was kind of the before I needed my bachelor’s.” Oakley shared, “It was important to me because I was the first one to go to college. So just showing my family and my younger siblings, like you can do it.”

Overall, participants felt it was an important achievement in their college journey. The participants used key words such as steppingstone, step, backup plan, and “in my back pocket” to describe why they decided to obtain an associate degree before transferring to a university. Zina described why an associate degree was important, saying, “To have that in my back pocket, which nowadays it’s not as important as a bachelor’s, but still something I have in my back pocket.” And Harlee provided a similar statement when she said, “I knew that was something good to have in my pocket. At least I have an associate degree.” Harriet said, “I think because that’s your first little degree you can get, it’s kind of a step.” Jordan expressed, “It was kind of the before I needed my bachelor’s. It was a steppingstone that I needed to receive my bachelor’s.”

Although many expressed getting an associate degree was not their end goal, they recognized the value of completing their degree requirements and having a backup plan as they continued their athletic journey. Cora provided an example of why getting a degree was important to her educational journey, saying:

It was a steppingstone for me. To figure out more of what I wanted to do after that degree. I knew I wanted to continue in college, but I feel getting through that first thing made me understand, okay, I’m not too far from the next step. And I’m not too far from the step after that . . . I feel like for me, if I didn’t get an associate first, it would have been like my gosh, I still have 3 more years to go until I get at least one degree. For me I

got to check something off the list and be able to count down how long it was to the next one. Every 2 years, I was getting another degree, which kind of encouraged me and motivated me a little bit more, because I was not that far off.

Several participants mentioned after obtaining their associate degree, they planned to continue to a bachelor's degree or had already graduated with their bachelor's degree at the time of the interview.

Ellie described her academic journey for a degree, saying:

It put my foot in the door of just being successful. Putting my foot in the door of just the real world. It really lifted a load off my shoulders too. It was why I finally got a degree. But it also drove me more like that wasn't too bad if you really just apply yourself even more. I can get my bachelor's degree. And that's what I'm working on right now.

Attending a community college for some of the participants was a feasible option compared to the cost of a university, and it allowed them to complete their basics and get a degree in their chosen field. A few participants mentioned how their athletic scholarship was important to their decision. Community college provided a good option for competing in athletics and getting a degree at a much lower cost than a university. Brittany, who supports herself financially, shared, "I chose the community colleges route to attend college because I financially support myself and no one in my family has actually been to college. I'm first generation." Jordon also expressed the cost of college as a reason for attending community college; she said, "Mostly because it was cost effective compared to going to a university my first 2 years." Additionally, two participants expressed they attended because they received a scholarship to play at the community college. Haisley expressed how a scholarship helped her, saying, "A big part of mine is honestly my scholarship. It was just all getting paid for and it was

in a good area, and they had my degree.” Ellie had a similar comment, saying, “They just paid me to play and paid me to go to college.”

A few participants noted receiving an associate degree was important in their educational journey because they wanted to transfer to a university and, in their opinion, it was easy to transfer their degree credits by completing an associate degree. Tessa noted:

I knew that I wanted to have a clean start at my next school and have that degree and then just be able to get on to my bachelor’s degree and have all those general classes done. . . .

I just learned that it’s better just to get the degree from the school you’re at and, and move on rather than transfer credits.

Another reason mentioned by the participants for attending a community college was getting recruited by their head coach to come to their community college to join the athletic team. Two participants talked about how they were recruited. Megan discussed her recruitment, saying, “I had our coach at the time, come up and talk to me after a volleyball tournament and offered me a spot to play there at the community college. And that’s really why I decided to go.” Ellie had a similar experience when deciding to attend her community college. She said, “They came and watched me play at one summer ball tournament. And I really enjoyed the coaches and how they talked about the program, talked about the school, and then talked about their players.”

Even though there were several different reasons and motivations for why participants attended their community college, the participants found value in getting an associate degree. Their overall experiences academically were positive, and many were able to reach their goals of successfully completing their degree and transferring to continue to participate in athletics.

Overcoming Challenges

A degree can be challenging to complete due to the various obstacles students encounter on their educational journey and participants expressed several different challenges they had experienced at a community college. Participants mentioned academic challenges such as getting their homework done, staying focused on academics, time management, procrastination, stressing over grades, and scheduling hard classes during the season. Other challenges worth noting were the COVID-19 global pandemic, personal issues, fear of disappointment, distractions, financial challenges, and having to work. However, even though several different types of challenges were presented, the participants persisted and obtained an associate degree, expressing it was an important milestone for their future.

An important challenge mentioned by participants was managing their time. Several participants mentioned the importance of managing their responsibilities and using appropriate time-management skills to complete important tasks. Cora reflected on her biggest challenge, saying, “I would say time management, like prioritizing what was important.” Ellie had a similar experience; she said, “Time management for sure . . . I thought I had time to go play basketball with my friends, but I didn’t. I should have studied.” Tessa mentioned, “The hardest thing was balancing athletics and school,” and Harlee expressed the same concern with “balancing the athletic and academic stuff.” Participants mentioned using different time-management skills such as organizing their tasks, prioritizing their studies, minimizing distractions like studying in the library, being proactive, and not waiting until the last minute to complete assignments or study for a test.

Another important challenge was balancing school, athletic activities, and commitments. The participants mentioned the importance of being proactive and staying on top of their

academics because of their challenging schedules. Harlee stated, “It definitely makes you stay on top of your work and, be organized and just do what you’re supposed to do.” Rose expressed, “I think that it definitely allowed me to multitask, and time manage for sure. I think it helped me understand how to manage my time a lot better.”

Some of the participants were already strong students as they entered college and were able to complete their studies and manage the demands of their sport easily. Others had to put more effort into creating time to complete their studies or did not do well initially in some of their courses and had to work hard to improve their GPA. The participants discussed how, at times, grades could be a challenge depending on the course or what they had going on in their personal life, but athletics pushed them to do better in the classroom to improve their grades. Several participants discussed getting a lower grade or grades than expected, which motivated them to work harder to improve their GPA. Brittany talked about her experience having a “B” grade, saying, “My grades were at first, were a little wonky. My whole life I’ve been a pretty straight A student . . . now, what do I need to do to work harder to get this to be an A.” Haisley had a similar experience; she shared, “I never cared about grades in high school. And then I came into college and my very first B was art. And I was livid.” Harriet struggled academically during her 1st year of college but was able to improve; she said, “Luckily, I was able to do dual credit in high school, because that saved me. Once I realized, like, okay, you got to get it together.”

The participants discussed the different support systems that were provided at their college. Besides study hall and grade checks that were required by their coaches, the college and athletic department provided and promoted other resources such as tutoring, computer labs, designated advisors, counselors, faculty, and using coaches. Many of the participants used these

resources or at least knew they were there in case they needed help. These services are important and provide student-athletes with additional academic support, so they can successfully pass their classes. Megan mentioned the library as a good place to study, saying, “Going to the library, not being either at home or like around a lot of distractions.” Tessa used the library as well; she said, “All students had access to the library too. The library was really big. You could always find a quiet space there.” Harriet talked about the tutoring services, saying, “We had tutoring that we could go to, and it was available in the library, and you just pick what subject you needed.” Megan also used tutors and said, “I would be in the library until 11:30 at night and there would be someone there helping me and especially with my math classes, that’s what I struggled in.” Three participants answered there were computer labs they could use that helped them with their academics.

Summary

This chapter started with a review of the research questions, site and participant demographics, and the findings. The findings were arranged in the following themes: (a) Classroom Champions, (b) Campus Belonging, (c) Athletic Family, (d) Faculty Role, (e) Value of the Associate’s Degree, and (f) Overcoming Challenges. The themes were supported by quotes from the participants providing examples of their experiences. Chapter 5 reflects on the findings and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter reviews the problem overview, the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology, and data collection analysis. Then, the discussion and findings related to the literature are presented based on the themes from the study. Chapter 5 concludes with the unexpected findings, implications and recommendations, future research recommendations, and a summary.

Problem Overview

Student-athletes face different challenges in higher education due to the time commitment required to meet the demands of athletics and being a student (Gaston Gayles, 2009). A significant amount of research on the impact of college athletics on students' experiences and academic success has been based on male students participating or transferring to a 4-year university. Male and female student-athletes have different experiences and challenges regarding their academic and social experiences as athletes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study explored the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree.

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges?
2. What experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges contributed to obtaining an associate degree?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical framework for this study was Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of institutional departure, which provides an understanding of the student college experience and what factors lead to completion or dropping out. Tinto (1975) explained the theoretical model attempts to "explain the process of interaction between the individual and the institution that leads differing individuals to drop out" (p. 90). The model focuses on identifying college retention factors, such as precollege characteristics, goals and commitments, institutional experiences, and academic and social integration (Tinto, 1993).

The conceptual framework used to guide the study was Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes. This model built upon Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of institutional departure to better understand the process and characteristics that affect student-athletes' academic success. This model factors in the unique characteristics of intercollegiate athletics and how student-athletes adjust socially and academically, resulting in completion.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative phenomenology research design. According to Peoples (2021), "Phenomenological research is strictly aimed at understanding experiences as lived" (p. 3). Therefore, the methodology was appropriate for understanding female student-athletes' lived experiences at Texas community colleges. The data for the study were collected through semistructured one-on-one interviews and the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data Collection

The data were collected through recruitment of participants from Texas community colleges that offered female sports. The researcher contacted the president or chancellor of each

community college through email. The researcher received permission from the president or an Institutional Review Board application was submitted and approved. With approval, the researcher collaborated with athletic directors and coaches to provide contact information for female student-athletes who had graduated with an associate degree from 2018–2023. The participants were contacted, and interview dates and times were determined. The participants were sent a consent form and they returned them, signed, before the interview. The interview was audio and video recorded on Zoom and the audio was transcribed using Otter.ai. A completed transcript was sent to each participant for member checking to ensure accuracy of the transcript. All transcripts were uploaded and coded using Dedoose.

Discussion of Themes Related to the Literature

The study investigated the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges and explored the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. The themes were developed by coding each research question, and then an overall analysis was conducted following the hermeneutic cycle to identify themes from the participants experiences and responses (Peoples, 2021). The themes were organized to address each of the research questions from the study. The findings from the research were organized into the following themes: (a) Classroom Champions, (b) Campus Belonging, (c) Athletic Family, (d) Faculty Role, (e) Value of the Associate's Degree, and (f) Overcoming Challenges. The study's themes are discussed in relation to the existing literature on student-athletes. Additionally, the themes are discussed in relation to Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual framework in the subsequent section.

Classroom Champions

The participants' athletic involvement positively affected their academic experiences and success, based on the findings. Due to their athletic commitments, participants had to prioritize their academics to remain eligible to compete and have the requirements to transfer to a university, which positively motivated their academic achievements. Participants described how remaining eligible to compete in athletics was a significant and positive factor for motivating them to do well academically.

Being academically eligible required participants to maintain a 2.0 GPA and complete a specific number of credit hours. If a student-athlete does not meet these requirements, they would be ineligible and would have to sit out and miss the season. Horton (2009a) and Brouwer et al. (2022) found student-athletes were committed to their academics because of their desire to remain eligible to compete. These results aligned with the findings from the participants who discussed the importance of eligibility as a positive academic motivator. Horton (2009a) also found student-athletes described being more disciplined and motivated to succeed in the classroom due to sports.

A key factor that positively influenced the participants' academics were their grades and overall GPA. Many of the participants understood the importance of their grades and GPA for eligibility, graduation, transferring to a university, and personal fulfillment. These findings were supported by Brouwer et al. (2022), who found external motivations for grades were personal goals and grade point average (GPA) to compete.

Campus Belonging

Participants' athletic involvement positively influenced their social experiences and peer interactions on campus. Athletics provided the participants with opportunities to interact with

their peers through different campus events and even gave some participants recognition on campus. With a busy schedule, the participants had to prioritize their time commitments but were able to still be involved on campus and make friends.

Participants were encouraged by their coaches and teammates to be involved on campus whenever possible. Many participants mentioned attending campus events, other athletic games or events, volunteering, or engaging in a campus group. Although these opportunities were limited due to the student-athletes' availability, these occasions were significant to participants' social integration into the college campus. Mixed research findings on the importance of peers on campus have been found. Slaten et al. (2020) found athletic culture, such as supportive relationships with their coaching staff and teammates, positively influenced their sense of belonging on campus, which aligned with the findings from this study. Gaston Gayles and Hu (2009) found student-athletes' interactions with nonathlete peers had significant impact on college outcomes. However, participants in this study described not having a lot of time to make friends outside of the classroom, but despite this, they were satisfied with their friends and social circle.

Athletic Family

Coaches were a significant factor in the participants' academic and social integration into the college. The environment the coach created influenced participants commitments, goals, and persistence. The participants described their coach as being supportive and providing rules and guidelines for success. Having a strong connection with the coach and coach staff was important and participants noted how their personal relationships were positive. Positive relationships with coaches aligned with Lewis (2020), who found formal social experiences influenced by the coaches developed strong connections and mentorship with them. Horton (2009a) found student-

athletes were supported by their coaches. In addition, Hendley (2012) found female student-athletes went to their coaches when they had academic questions, needed advice, or had personal issues. The author also found coaches were also consulted when determining which academic and support services to use, such as tutoring.

The participants reflected that most of their friends were either teammates or other athletes on campus. Having teammates and other athletes as friends positively influenced their social experiences. Teammates and other athletes helped the participants to feel accepted and provided a sense of belonging on campus as they had support and were able to make connections. Being involved on a sports team provided a positive environment and the opportunity to bond with others. These findings aligned with research from Lewis (2020) who found athletes interacted significantly with athletic peers but lacked relationships with nonathletic peers outside of the classroom due to their time commitments of being a student-athlete. Furthermore, Slaten et al. (2020) found belonging on campus was due to student-athletes' positive relationships with other athletes on campus. Bryan (2018) also found social connections with teammates played a role in the participants' persistence demonstrating the importance of their friendships and support on campus.

Participants described being connected to their sports team and the positive influence it had on their academic and social integration. This finding was supported by Slaten et al. (2020), who found when student-athletes are connected to their sports team, the connection positively impacted their sense of belonging on campus. The authors also noted the athletic culture, such as supportive relationships with their coaching staff and teammates, positively influenced their sense of belonging.

Faculty Role

The participants expressed, in general, faculty were supportive and understanding of their schedules. The participants did not mention faculty treating them unfairly or having any negative conversations or perceptions about them being student-athletes. A few mentioned faculty were not always willing to work with their schedules and did not provide extended deadlines, but their interactions with faculty were positive overall. The findings aligned with other research that found student-athletes had positive faculty experiences. Parsons (2013) found student-athletes felt faculty cared about their academic success and had positive faculty perceptions and treatment. Similarly, Brouwer et al. (2022) found faculty perceptions and communication with faculty were positive. Horton (2009a) found being at a community college allowed student-athletes to interact and build positive relationships with faculty members. The student-athletes described that faculty cared about them and wanted to see them be successful. Crawford (2007) found positive faculty involvement enhanced their academic and athletic experiences. Although research has supported the findings that participants had positive interactions and experiences with faculty (Brouwer et al., 2022; Horton, 2009a; Crawford, 2007), several research studies have suggested faculty perceived student-athletes as having limited academic abilities, lack of motivation, missing class, and perceiving them negatively (Bailey & Bhattacharyya, 2017; Comeaux, 2011; Huml et al., 2019; Simons et al., 2007).

The participants conveyed that many of their faculty extended deadlines or made adjustments for assignments to accommodate their athletic schedule. Having supportive faculty who were understanding and flexible was essential to the participants. This finding aligned with Horton (2009a) who found community colleges student-athletes felt supported in the classrooms due to faculty being flexible and provided adjustments for assignments. As mentioned, a few

participants discussed isolated instances in which faculty were not as flexible with allowing for extensions. Parson (2013) and Brouwer et al. (2022) found some student-athletes expressed concern for faculty support and flexibility when missing classes for athletic participation and being able to make up work.

Value of the Associate's Degree

Community college provides an environment for athletes to continue their pursuit of playing at a university while having the opportunity to receive a degree. The participants described reasons for why they choose to attend a community college such as to play sports or to get recruited to a university. Athletics was reported to have had a positive effect on participants' degree attainment and success at their respective community colleges.

Participants' primary reason for attending a community college was to continue to play sports. This finding was supported by Meulemans et al. (2019) who found the most important factor for both male and female student-athletes when choosing to attend a community college was the athletic program. Other reasons for why participants chose to attend a community college were the chance to transfer to a university, getting recruited, head coach, degree offerings, and lower cost. Meulemans et al. (2019) had similar findings and reported other than athletics, female student-athletes choose a community college based on cost, location, degree offerings, the availability of financial aid, and coaching staff. Horton (2009a) also found student-athletes' choices to attend a community college was based on their ability to live at home while going to college, lower cost, smaller institution, not feeling prepared for a university, and the ability to continue playing sports in college.

Participants discussed their goal of transferring to a university; or, that they originally wanted to go to a university and not a community college. Student-athletes' goals of playing at a

university aligned with Bryan (2018), who found student-athletes' initial goal was to attend a 4-year university. Nevertheless, the student-athletes agreed community college was an appropriate starting place and was a right fit due to the ability to participate in their sport, class size, and affordability. In addition, attending community college contributed to their persistence in obtaining a bachelor's degree. Horton (2009a) found students perceived their time spent at a community college was a foundation for personal growth and an important learning experience as they navigate through higher education.

Overcoming Challenges

Motivation and persistence were demonstrated as participants faced several challenges in their community college career. Participants acknowledged challenges such as time management, procrastination, and balancing school and athletic commitments. Despite these challenges, the participants showed determination and persistence by finishing their academic and athletic journey at a community college. According to Comeaux and Harrison (2011), student-athletes' ability to navigate and respond to the continuing encounters in the college environment plays a vital role in determining their integration into the college and, ultimately, their academic success.

Student-athletes can face challenges balancing their time commitments that can influence their academic performance (Gaston Gayles, 2009; Huml et al., 2019). Participants felt the demands of being a student and an athlete were challenging but found several different ways to be successful by applying strategies to help them manage their time commitments. Using time-management skills such as being organized, prioritizing academics, minimizing distractions, and being proactive in their studies, helped student-athletes' balance their commitments. This aligned with Brouwer et al. (2022) who found time management and being organized were important to student-athletes' academic success. Potuto and O'Hanlon (2006) noted athletic participation

positively influenced time-management skills, work ethic, instilled values, and enhanced the overall student-athlete experience. Chen et al. (2010) also found sports involvement helped students develop a work ethic, self-esteem, and confidence.

Participants expressed their academics were a priority and important to their success and future goals. The participants in the study did not mention athletics being more important than academics. This finding contradicted Tudor and Ridpath (2019), who found the nature of athletics in college can pressure student-athletes to focus on athletics, which could lead to a reduced commitment to academics. In addition, Huml et al. (2019) found, because of the demands of academics and athletics, student-athletes often chose athletic demands over academics. Unlike these findings, participants did not mention that athletics were more important than their academics and did not identify themselves as athletes first and students second.

Support systems provided by the coaches and college were important for students' academic success and helping them reach their goal of obtaining a degree. Some of the participants used services such as tutors, computer labs, faculty office hours, and attending study hall sessions. Storch and Olsen (2009) found strong support systems are needed to help in the recruitment and retention of student-athletes. The authors suggested that community colleges must provide services that help student-athletes graduate with a focus on academic advising, tutors, peer mentoring, study skills, career exploration, and life management skills. Furthermore, Hendley (2012) found coaches, teammates, and faculty were the primary sources of academic support. When needing academic help, the student-athletes in the study went to their teammates and faculty before using other services.

Discussion Related to the Conceptual Framework

Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model examined how academic and social integration leads to student-athletes' completing their degree requirements and successfully graduating. The model was developed to predict behaviors and outcomes based on the unique patterns and characteristics of student-athletes. Several findings aligned with Comeaux and Harrison's conceptual model. The participants prioritized their grades and were supported by faculty, which were critical components of academic integration. Interactions with coaches, faculty, teammates, and other athletes positively influenced participants' social integration, helping them feel like they belonged at the college and had opportunities to interact on campus. In contrast to Comeaux and Harrison's conceptual model, the findings from this study suggested that female student-athletes could socially integrate into the college without being involved in extracurricular activities or having many friends outside of sports. The conceptual model does not address the coach and athlete relationship, which was a significant factor in the participant's social and academic integration and success.

According to Comeaux and Harrison (2011), academic integration is influenced by student-athletes' grades and classroom experiences. In this study, participants described the importance of maintaining good grades to meet their goals, being eligible to compete, and transferring to a 4-year university. Athletics motivated them to prioritize their studies and provided support through study hall, and grade checks that helped the participants stay accountable for their grades. This finding aligned with Comeaux and Harrison's conceptual model on the importance of grades for academic integration.

Social integration in the model is another important factor for student-athletes' success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). In this study, the participants described their positive interactions

with coaches, faculty, teammates, and other athletes at their college. Due to the demands of academics and athletics, many participants had limited interactions with nonathlete peers outside of the classroom but were satisfied with their friend group. Through their interactions with coaches, faculty, teammates, and other athletes, the participants felt like they belonged at the college and had opportunities to interact through different campus events and received recognition on campus due to their involvement in athletics.

Comeaux and Harrison (2011) noted, “Social integration occurs primarily through student-athletes’ engagement in campus extracurricular activities (other than their sports), interactions with faculty, and interactions with peers other than their teammates” (p. 241). The findings from the study suggested female student-athletes were able to socially integrate into the college without being involved in extracurricular activities or having a lot of friends outside of sports. Many participants described being involved on campus through campus events, volunteer work, and watching other sports teams compete, which provided them the opportunity to interact with peers. However, their main source of friendships and activities were around athletics.

Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) conceptual model focused on faculty and peer relationships but did not specifically mention other relationships that could influence female student-athletes’ integration into the college. The participants described how a specific person at the college, outside their peers and faculty, played a pivotal role in helping them navigate college. Participants mentioned particular people (e.g., an administrator, a financial aid officer, a librarian, or a cafeteria worker), who positively influenced their experience and helped them feel supported and important. Zina described her experience with college staff on campus, saying, “It was my first time being away from home. I was kind of homesick and you know being home

sick kind of affects basketball, affects school sometimes and for some reason the lunch ladies were my home there.”

Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) conceptual model focused on faculty and peer relationships but did not address the coach and athlete relationship. In the model, the authors included coaches’ demands but did not incorporate the coach’s relationship with their athletes and how that contributed to their academic and social integration into the college. Participants described their personal experiences and relationships with their coaches as being positive. Participants described having a supportive head coach who helped them navigate the challenges of being a student-athlete. Coaches provided guidelines and expectations for academics and encouraged them to be involved on campus. A few participants described how their coach could be counted on in an emergency or they could go to them for help. Having coaches that were invested in them as people and cared about them outside of athletics was important to their success.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

In considering practical implications and recommendations, a common thread among the findings was the influence of the relationships with coaches, teammates, and faculty had on female student-athletes’ academic and social experiences. All the participants in the study were able to navigate the demands of being a student and an athlete as they overcame different challenges on their way to obtaining their associate degree. The following discussion focuses on the implications and recommendations derived from the findings.

This study’s implications include the potential to improve female student-athletes’ retention and persistence through effective policies. Tracking graduation and transfer rates are two standard benchmarks that measure retention and persistence rates. Graduation and transfer

rates are valuable information for student-athlete success, and other governing bodies, such as the National College Associate of Athletics (NCAA), use these benchmarks. The NCAA developed a formula called the graduation success rate that tracked student athletes' graduation rates over 6 years. The graduation success rate results are published annually to hold colleges accountable for their athletic programs' graduation results (NCAA, 2014). The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) provides athletic programs with by-laws, policies, and procedures to oversee athletic competitions. The NJCAA's adoption of a similar mandatory policy and formula for tracking student-athlete graduation rates would provide accountability for athletic programs. The NJCAA would publish a report on student-athletes' graduation rates each year, and high-performing schools could be recognized. Another policy for implementation would be to create a way to systematically track transfer rates for student-athletes to establish how many students are matriculating to a university after competing in athletics at a community college.

Participants expressed their desire to start their career at a university; however, they attended a community college for various reasons such as needing to improve athletically, academic reasons, lower cost to attend college, and being recruited. Although playing at a community college was not the participants' goal, they expressed how much they enjoyed their experiences and were glad they decided to play at a community college. Attending a community college allowed participants to improve their athletic skills or academics and complete an associate degree while still being able to pursue their goal of playing athletics at a university. This study demonstrated how community college athletics positively influenced female student-athletes' academic and social experiences and was the right choice for their athletic career. The results can inform college presidents and administrators about the experiences of female student-

athletes and why athletics is essential at the community college level. Athletic directors and coaches should also highlight the positive academic and social experiences community colleges offer when recruiting potential female student-athletes.

College administrators and athletic directors have an opportunity to develop effective ways to support female student-athletes. A critical component of the participants' success was the coach–player relationship. Participants noted how their coaches contributed to their academic and social integration into the college and provided support when needed. Several participants reported having a positive relationship and feeling supported by their coach. Athletic directors and coaches should work together to develop best practices that can help create a positive environment and strategies to improve and reinforce positive engagement with athletes.

The NJCAA has an opportunity to provide and mandate professional development opportunities for coaches. The NJCAA's continued investment and support of female student-athletes through specific policies and coaching best practices have the potential to enhance female student-athletes' participation in athletics at Texas community colleges. Specifically, the NJCAA can focus on creating mandatory training for community college coaches. Information could cover various topics, including player-coach relationships, academic support systems, gender equity, student-athletes' well-being, and how to create a positive team climate and culture.

Participants reported that having positive relationships with faculty members positively contributed to their academic and social integration into the college. As noted in the literature review, there can be negative faculty perceptions about athletes: (a) they are lazy, (b) they do not work hard, or (c) they are underprepared (Bailey & Bhattacharyya, 2017; Comeaux, 2011). Faculty's ability to be flexible and work with female student-athletes' schedules improved their

experience and helped the participants succeed in the classroom. The findings showed female student-athletes had positive faculty interactions and support, crucial to obtaining a degree. Coaches communicating with faculty and administration about players' schedules and demands are important for their student-athletes' success. For example, coaches could have their female student-athletes invite faculty to a team practice to allow players and the coaching staff to meet and build relationships. Furthermore, positive relationships between coaches and faculty can facilitate effective communication about female student-athletes' academics and any concerns or questions faculty have. Building positive relationships with faculty can help to provide the support female student-athletes need to successfully navigate their academics when they have to miss travel or competitions.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges and the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. Several opportunities exist to expand this research and contribute to the body of knowledge on female student-athletes. Future research examining the differences and similarities of the three athletic divisions at the community college level would provide insight into the experiences of female student-athletes' at each division. The NJCAA has three different athletic divisions guided by specific requirements and what levels of financial support the college can provide. For example, an NJCAA Division I athletic program can provide scholarships and housing assistance, but an NJCAA Division III institution cannot offer athletic scholarships. The experiences of female student-athletes could differ based on the division the student-athletes' competed in. In addition, another focus could be to compare the experiences of female student-athletes who lived on campus with female student-athletes who

lived off campus. Student-athletes could have different experiences and needs based on whether they lived in dorms or off-campus housing.

This study was delimited to Texas colleges governed by the NJCAA, and conducting similar research from different geographic areas would provide additional insights into the experiences of female student-athletes. Replicating this study, in different states or in different NJCAA regions outside of Texas would add to the body of literature on female student-athletes academic and social experiences. For example, California has its own athletic governing body that determines the by-laws, policies and procedures for athletic competitions, that potentially differ from the NJCAA. This different outlook offers a diverse perspective and would add additional information on the female student-athlete experiences and the support or resources that are needed for success.

As noted earlier, Shapiro et al. (2013) and Costa and Kopko (2014) found students who transferred with an associate degree had a positive impact on students earning a bachelor's degree. Therefore, future research could compare the experiences of female student-athletes who received an associate degree before transferring to a university with those who transferred without completing a degree. The study could look at factors such as comparing the length of time for completing a bachelor's degree or interviewing individuals to compare their experiences based on if they received an associate degree or not. This comparative study could provide valuable insights into the potential value of an associate degree toward receiving a bachelor's degree for community college athletes and could have significant implications for future community college female student-athletes.

A recommendation for a future study on the experiences of female student-athletes would be to focus on how name, image, and likeness (NIL) affects their academic and social

experiences. The NIL is a new rule that allows student-athletes the ability to make money based on their personal brand by promoting products through endorsements (NJCAA, 2023b). This new rule has the potential to have a drastic impact on community college athletes as it is a way for them to make money and support themselves while still maintaining their eligibility in college. For example, the NJCAA has partnered with Opendorse to provide a platform for community college athletes to connect to NIL opportunities to receive deals and compensation (NJCAA, 2023b). Now that community college athletes can make money in college through NIL deals, studying how the new rule impacts the student-athlete experience is vital. The NJCAA, community college presidents, athletic directors, and coaches need an understanding of how the NIL rule impacts the student-athlete experience to provide guidelines and resources that help student-athletes' be successful both in the classroom and on the athletic playing field.

A final recommendation would be to conduct a case study about an institution that excels in graduating female student-athletes before transferring. Although not mandatory, there are some community college athletic programs that track graduation and retention rates. A case study focusing on an institution that has a high rate of female student-athletes' graduating, could provide additional knowledge and understanding of the female student-athlete experience and what contributes to the high graduation rates of female student-athletes. By selecting a case study, data would be gathered using interviews or focus groups and examining quantitative data such as surveys or an analysis of records like graduation rates.

Summary

The researcher investigated the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community college and explored the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. The findings indicated that community colleges in

Texas are an essential option for female student-athletes to continue participating in athletics and obtain a degree. Their relationships with coaches, faculty, teammates, and other athletes positively influenced their experiences at Texas community colleges. In addition, being part of an athletic program provided the participants with accountability, support, and resources to help them complete an associate degree. College administrators, athletic governing bodies, and coaches can implement policies and best practices to enhance female student-athletes' participation and retention. The themes from this study were (a) Classroom Champions, (b) Campus Belonging, (c) Athletic Family, (d) Faculty Role, (e) Value of the Associate's Degree, and (f) Overcoming Challenges.

References

- Adler, P., & Adler, A. P. (1987). Role conflict and identity salience: College athletics and the academic role. *The Social Science Journal*, 24(4), 443–455. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0362-3319\(87\)90059-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0362-3319(87)90059-0)
- Bailey, S., & Bhattacharyya, M. (2017). A comparison of academic and athletic performance in the NCAA. *College Student Journal*, 51(2), 173–182.
<https://projectinnovationaustin.com/college-student-journal>
- Bailey, T. R., Jaggars, S. S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Harvard University Press.
- Brewer, W. B., Van Raalte, L. J., & Linder, E. D. (1993). Athletic identity: Hercules' muscles or Achilles heel? *International Journal Sport Psychology*, 24, 237–254. <http://www.ijsp-online.com/journal>
- Brouwer, M. A., Johanson, J., & Carlson, T. (2022). College athletes' views on academics: A qualitative assessment of perceptions of academic success. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*, 4(2), 122–138. <https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.04.02.01>
- Bryan, H. C. (2018). *A transcendental phenomenological study of persistence among national junior college athletic association of Division III student athletes* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Liberty University.
- Burgess, J., & Cisneros, J. (2018). The semester of struggle: Male junior college transfer student-athletes' experience. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 11, 266–286.
<https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1165&context=jiia>

Carr, P., Kangas, J., & Anderson, D. (1992). *College success and the black male* [Report #128].

San Jose City College. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED348100.pdf>

Chen, S., Snyder, S., & Magner, M. (2010). The effects of sports participation on student-athletes' and non-athlete students' social life and identity. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 3, 176–193.

<https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=jiia>
_176_193_Athletic%20Identity.pdf

Comeaux, E. (2011). Examination of faculty attitudes toward division I college student-athletes.

College Student Affairs Journal, 30(1), 75–87. <https://www.sacsa.org/page/CSAJ>

Comeaux, E., & Harrison, C. K. (2011). A conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes. *Educational Researcher*, 40(5), 235–245.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X11415260>

Crawford, K. T. (2007). *Intercollegiate athletic participation and undergraduate student engagement* (Publication No. 32687666) [Doctoral dissertation, Washington State University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Creswell, W. J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, W. J., & Creswell, W. J. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, W. J., & Poth, N. C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Crosta, M. P., & Kopko, M. E. (2014). *Should community college students earn an associate degree before transferring to a four-year institution? Working paper No. 70*. Community College Research Center. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/associate-degree-before-transfer.pdf>
- Dedoose. (n.d.). *What makes dedoose different?* <https://www.dedoose.com/>
- Dent, G. (2022). *NCAA kicks off title IX at 50 celebration*. NCAA. <https://www.ncaa.org/news/2022/1/25/media-center-ncaa-kicks-off-title-ix-at-50-celebration.aspx>
- Di Lu, L., Heinze, L. K., & Soderstrom, S. (2018). Playing multiple positions: Student-athlete identity salience and conflict. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 11(2), 214–241. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jis.2018-0034>
- Gaston Gayles, J. L. (2004). Examining academic and athletic motivation among student athletes at a division 1 university. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(1), 75–83. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2004.0005>
- Gaston Gayles, J. L. (2009, Winter). The student athlete experience. *New Direction for Institutional Research*, 144, 33–41. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.311>
- Gaston Gayles, J. L., Crandall, R., Morin, S. (2018). Student-athletes' sense of belonging: Background characteristics, student involvement, and campus climate. *The International Journal of Sport and Society*, 9(1), 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2152-7857/CGP/v09i01/23-38>
- Gaston Gayles, J. L., & Hu, S. H. (2009). The influence of student engagement and sport participation on college outcomes among Division I student athletes. *Journal of Higher Education*, 80(3), 315–333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2009.11779015>

- Gummelt, S. G. (2017). The emotional needs of women in sports: An exploration of self-efficacy, self-compassion, and self-conscious emotions. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, Special Issue, 57–71. https://csri-jiaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/JIAA_2017_SI_04.pdf
- Hatteberg, S. (2020, Fall). “There’s no way I can do all of this”: The perceived impacts of stress exposure on the academic development of collegiate athletes. *Journal of Issue in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 7–28. http://csri-jiaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/SI_2020_01_01.pdf
- Hendley, B. (2012). *An examination of the perceptions of collegiate female athletes on academic and support services* (Publication No. 3537308) [Doctoral Dissertation, Northcentral University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Horton, D. (2009a). Class and cleats: Community college student athletes and academic success. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 147, 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.374>
- Horton, D. (2009b). *Comparative study of the persistence and academic success of Florida community college student-athletes and non-athletes students: 2004 to 2007*. [Unpublished dissertation, University of Florida]. https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/UF/E0/02/43/21/00001/horton_d.pdf
- Horton, D. (2011). Developing an institutional culture toward degree attainment for student-athletes. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 155, 27–31. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.455>
- Horton, D. (2015) Between a ball and a harsh place: A study of Black-male community college student-athletes and academic progress. *Community College Review*, 43(3), 287–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552115578168>

- Huml, R. M., Bergman, J. M., Newell M. E., & Hanock, G. M. (2019). From the playing field to the classroom: The academic challenges for NCAA division I athletes. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 13(2), 97–115.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2019.157860>
- Johnson, E. J., Wessel, D. R., & Pierce, A. D. (2013). Exploring the influence of select demographic, academic, and athletic variables on the retention of student-athletes. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 15(2), 135–155.
<https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.15.2.a>
- Kanter, M., & Lewis, M. (1991). *A study of the academic performance of student-athletes in California's community colleges: California Community College Fund for Instructional Improvement* (ED332763). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED332763>
- Kennedy, L. C. (2010). A new frontier for women's sports (Beyond Title IX). *Gender Issues*, 27, 78–90. <http://jvllone.com/sportsdocs/titleixNewFrontiers2010.pdf>
- Kissinger, B. D., & Miller, T. M. (2007). Profile of community college athletes in selected sports. *The Community College Enterprise*, 13(2), 51–60.
<https://www.schoolcraft.edu/pdfs/cce/13.2.51-60.pdf>
- Le Crom, L. C., Warren, J. B., Clark, T. H., Morolla J., & Gerber, P. (2009). Factors contributing to student-athlete retention. *Intercollegiate Athletics*, 14–24.
<https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=jiia>
- Lee, E. J. (2021). *Factors predicting student-athlete retention and attrition in higher education: A meta-analytic investigation* (Publication No. 284123210) [Doctoral Dissertation, Washington State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

- Lewis, A. D. (2020) *A qualitative study of division I student-athletes' academic and social experiences* (Publication No. 27960059) [Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Charlotte]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Lochmiller, R. C., & Lester, N. J. (2017). *An introduction to educational research connecting methods to practice*. SAGE Publications.
- Melendez, M. C. (2006). The influence of athletic participation on the college adjustment of freshmen and sophomore student athletes. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 8(1), 39–55. <https://doi.org/10.2190/8GLY-G974-V7FM-E1YD>
- Mendoza, P., Horton, D., & Mendez, P. J. (2012) Retention among community college student-athletes. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 36(3), 201–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668921003677183>
- Meulemans, N., Lim, J., Romsa, B., & Romsa, K. (2019). Factors influencing the college choice decisions of community college student-athletes. *International Journal of Sports and Physical Education (IJSPE)*, 5(3), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-6380.0503001>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2014). *Why the GSR is a better methodology*. <https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2014/10/28/why-the-gsr-is-a-better-methodology.aspx>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2021). *College athletes continue to graduate at record highs*. <https://www.ncaa.org/news/2021/12/2/general-college-athletes-continue-to-graduate-at-record-highs.aspx>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2022). *NCAA guide for the college-bound student-athlete 2022–2023*. Retrieved on August 5, 2023 from, https://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility_center/Student_Resources/CBSA.pdf

- National Federation of State High School Association. (2022). *High school athletes' participation survey*. https://www.nfhs.org/media/5989280/2021-22_participation_survey.pdf
- National Junior College Athletic Association. (n.d.-a) *Organization of NJCAA regions*. https://www.njcaa.org/member_colleges/Organization_of_NJCAA_Regions
- National Junior College Athletic Association. (n.d.-b). *NJCAA eligibility requirements*. <https://www.njcaa.org/compete/faqs#:~:text=Requirements%3A,approved%20high%20school%20equivalency%20test>
- National Junior College Athletic Association. (2019). *The national junior college athletic association eligibility pamphlet opportunities start here*. https://d2o2figo6ddd0g.cloudfront.net/p/q/u03t6snbpv3bdu/2019_-_2020_NJCAA_Eligibility_Pamphlet.pdf
- National Junior College Athletic Association. (2022). *Introduction NJCAA handbook*. https://d2o2figo6ddd0g.cloudfront.net/y/w/zyo461swlv8lpd/NJCAA_Handbook_-_Introduction_08-01-22.pdf
- National Junior College Athletic Association. (2023). *NJCAA handbook: Bylaws*. https://d2o2figo6ddd0g.cloudfront.net/9/o/1sia40fomogub4/NJCAA_Handbook_-_Bylaws_07-31-23.pdf
- National Junior College Athletic Association. (2023). *NJCAA launches NIL marketplace powered by opendorse*. <https://www.njcaa.org/general/2022-23/releases/20230320nx6t6f>
- Otter.ai. (2024). *OtterPilot™ your meetings wherever they happen*. <https://otter.ai/transcription>

- Rayburn, B., Chen, S., & Philips, C. (2015). Female college athletes' perceptions on gender stereotypes and discrimination in collegiate athletics. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 6(5), 28–36.
https://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_6_No_5_May_2015/4.pdf
- Rivera, C. A. (2004). *The identification of key factors student-athletes perceived to be important to the college student athlete retention process* (Publication No. 3119680) [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Parsons, J. (2013). Student athlete perceptions of academic success and athlete stereotypes on campus. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 36(4), 400–416.
<https://journalofsportbehavior.org/index.php/JSB>
- Peoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation: A step-by-step guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Potuto, J. R., & O'Hanlon, J. (2006). *National study of student-athletes regarding their experiences as college students*. National Collegiate Athletic Association.
<https://www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/SARE06.pdf>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
<https://emotrab.ufba.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Saldana-2013-TheCodingManualforQualitativeResearchers.pdf>
- Scoggin, D., & Styron A. R. (2006). Factors associated with student withdrawal from community college. *The Community College Enterprise*, 12(1), 111–124.
<https://www.schoolcraft.edu/cce/>

- Schulz, L. K. (2007). *The impact of academic and athletic motivational factors on the academic achievement of community college student-athletes* (Publication No. 3258428) [Doctoral dissertation, Morgan State University]. ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global.
- Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Chen, J., Ziskin, M., Park, E., Torres, V., & Chiang, Y.-C. (2012). *Completing college: A national view of student attainment rates* (ED538117). ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538117.pdf>
- Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Ziskin, M., Chiang, Y.-C., Chen, J., Harrell, A., & Torres, V. (2013). *Baccalaureate attainment: A national view of the postsecondary outcomes of students who transfer from two-year to four-year institutions* (Signature Report No. 5). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport5.pdf>
- Simons, D. H., Bosworth, C., Fujita, S., & Jensen, M. (2007). The athlete stigma in higher education. *College Student Journal*, 41(2), 251–273. <https://projectinnovationaustin.com/college-student-journal>
- Slaten, D. C., Ferguson K. J., Hughes A. H., & Scalise, A. D. (2020). Some people treat you like an alien’: Understanding the female athlete experience of belonging on campus. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 37(1), 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/edp.2020.5>
- Spry, R. (2017). *Academic success among softball and baseball student-athletes in Alabama rural community colleges: An exploration of the relationship between demographic, socioeconomic, and academic background characteristics and student academic outcomes* (Publication No. 10256464) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

- Stewart, J. S. (2015). *A multiple case study analysis of student-athlete academic and social successes in rural-serving Texas community colleges* [Doctoral dissertation, Texas Tech University]. Texas Digital Library. <https://ttu-ir.tdl.org/handle/2346/62368>
- Storch, J., & Ohlson, M. (2009). Student services and student athletes in community colleges. *New Directions for Community College*, 147, 75–84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.379>
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89–125.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089>
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Tracy, J. S. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- Tudor, L. M., & Ridpath, D. B. (2019). Does gender significantly predict academic, athletic career motivation among NCAA division I college athletes. *Journal of Higher Education Athletics & Innovation*, 1(5), 122–147. <https://doi.org/10.15763/issn.2376-5267.2018.1.5.122-147>
- Umbach, P. D., Palmer, M. M., Kuh, G. D., & Hannah, S. J. (2006). Intercollegiate athletes and effective educational practices: Winning combination or losing effort? *Research in Higher Education*, 47(6), 709–733. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-006-9012-9>
- Watson, C. J. (2016). The effect of athletic identity and locus of control on the stress perceptions of community college student-athletes. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(9), 729–738. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2015.1072595>

Watson, J. C., & Kissinger, D. B. (2007). Athletic participation and wellness: Implications for counseling college student-athletes. *Journal of College Counseling*, 10(2), 153–162.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1882.2007.tb00015.x>

Weiss, S. M., & Robinson, T. L. (2013). An investigation of factors relating to retention of student-athletes participating in NCAA Division II athletics. *Interchange*, 44(1-2), 83–

104. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-013-9198-7>

Appendix A - Alignment Table

Literature findings	Research questions	Theoretical and conceptual framework	Methodology	Interview questions
Melendez (2006) noted women demonstrated a higher academic, social, and institutional adjustment score than male athletes. The relationship with the head coach, team success, personal and academic concerns, and player development led to retention or leaving athletics (Weiss & Robinson, 2013).	Research Question 1: What are the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges?	Tinto Comeaux and Harrison	In-depth semistructured interviews	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
Horton (2009a) found student-athletes earned more credit hours per semester and had higher grade point averages (GPA) than nonathletes but were less likely to earn a degree from a community college. Female student-athletes appear to be graduating at higher rates than their non-athletic peers, indicating athletic participation could influence athletes and their adjustment to college (Melendez, 2006).	Research Question 2: What experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges contributed to obtaining an associate degree?	Tinto Comeaux and Harrison	In-depth semistructured interviews	8,9,10,11,12, 13,14,15

Appendix B - Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location: Zoom

Participant:

Thank you for willingness to participate in my study by being interviewed today. I appreciate taking the time to meet with me to discuss your experience participating in athletics at the community college you attended. This interview is confidential, and no identifying information will be included in the study. Each participant will be assigned a fictional name. This interview is voluntary, and you can withdraw your consent at any time.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. This study is designed to add to the existing literature on female student-athletes and could provide important information to aid coaches, athletic administrators, advisors, and faculty in designing best practices for the retention and persistence for female student-athletes.

The interview should last about 60 minutes and I would like to record the audio and video of the interview to transcribe the interview accurately. I will also be taking notes throughout the interview.

Appendix C - Interview Questions

Icebreaker/Background Questions:

1. What community college did you attend?
2. What sport did you participate in?
3. How many years did you play your sport at a community college?
4. What year did you graduate and what is your degree?

Interview Questions:

1. Why did you decide to attend a community college and participate in athletics?
2. What were your athletic priorities and goals?
3. How did your participation in athletics influence your academic experiences?
4. How did your participation in athletics influence your social experiences?
5. How has your team's success and individual player development or playing time influenced your experiences?
6. What was your interaction with your coaches, and how did that influence your priorities?
7. How did your participation in athletics influence your interactions with peers and involvement in campus activities?
8. How did your interactions with faculty impact your academic experience?
9. How did faculty perceive and support student-athletes?
10. How did faculty or peers outside of the classroom affect your academic success?
11. How did your grades impact your academic experiences and persistence?
12. What academic resources and support were provided for student-athletes?
13. What was the biggest challenge or barrier to obtaining your degree?

14. What role did your coach and athletic staff play in getting a degree?
15. Why was graduating with an associate degree important to you?

Probing Verbiage:

1. Would you give me an example?
2. Can you explain that further?
3. Why? or How?

Thank you for taking the time today to share your experiences as a female athlete at a community college. Once the interview has been transcribed you will receive an email with the transcription to review to ensure accuracy.

Appendix D - Informed Consent Form

Note: This template is provided by Kansas State University.

PROJECT TITLE:

Female Student-Athletes' Social and Academic Experiences at Community Colleges

**PROJECT
APPROVAL
DATE:**

**PROJECT
EXPIRATION
DATE:**

**LENGTH OF
STUDY:**

1 hour

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Dr. Margaretta Mathis

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

Kristy Urbick

**CONTACT DETAILS FOR
PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:**

Dr. Margaretta Mathis
xxx@ksu.edu

**IRB CHAIR CONTACT
INFORMATION:**

Dr. Lisa Rubin
xxx-xxx-xxxx

PROJECT SPONSOR:

Not applicable.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. As a female student-athlete I would like to hear about your experiences participating in sports at a community college.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. The procedure for your interview will be one-on-one with semistructured questions. The interview will be audio and video recorded and conducted via Zoom. The researcher will also be taking notes. During the interview, you will answer questions regarding your academic and social experiences and perceptions as a female student-athlete at a community college. The researcher will protect your identity during and after the interviews. You will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your privacy as an identification. The Zoom recording will be saved to allow the researcher to create a transcription of the interview, and you will be allowed to review the transcription for accuracy. All data will be kept on a password-protected external hard drive in a secure, locked location for 5 years.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

Your identity will be protected during and after the interview. You will be given a pseudonym to protect your privacy as an identification. There are no expected risks involved in this research.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

For participation, you will receive a \$10.00 gift card and be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Amazon gift card. The anticipated benefits of participating in the study are your contributions to research on how female student-athletes' sports participation contributed to their academic and social experiences at a community college and their experiences of what contributed to their success in obtaining an associate degree. In addition, understanding the perceived experiences of female athletes may inform policy and support systems specially designed to help female college student-athletes.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your information and responses will be kept confidential. Your information collected as part of the research will not be used or distributed for future research studies. The data for the study will be secured on an external hard drive that will be maintained in a secure area for 5 years. To minimize harm, your identity will be protected during and after the interviews. To protect your privacy, you will be given a pseudonym for identification.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

The Principal Investigator will maintain a signed and dated copy of the signed consent form.

PARTICIPANT NAME:**PARTICIPANT
SIGNATURE:****WITNESS TO
SIGNATURE:
(PROJECT STAFF)****DATE:****DATE:**

Appendix E - Kansas State IRB Approvals



University Research
Compliance Office

TO: Margaretta Mathis
Educational
Leadership Manhattan,
KS 66506

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 02/19/2024

RE: Proposal #IRB-11602, entitled "Female student-athletes' social and academic experiences at community colleges."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #IRB-11602, ENTITLED, "Female student-athletes' social and academic experiences at community colleges"

EXPIRATION DATE: 03/22/2026

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 02/19/2024 2:52 PM ET

TO: Margaretta Mathis
Educational Leadership
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number IRB-11602

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human

Subjects DATE: 03/23/2023

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Female student-athletes' social and academic experiences at community colleges."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE:

03/23/20

23 EXPIRATION DATE:

03/22/2026

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 03/23/2023 3:26 PM ET

TO: Margaretta Mathis
Educational
Leadership Manhattan,
KS 66506

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 06/07/2023

RE: Proposal #IRB-11602, entitled “Female student-athletes’ social and academic experiences at community colleges.”

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #IRB-11602, ENTITLED, “Female student-athletes’ social and academic experiences at community colleges”

EXPIRATION DATE: 03/22/2026

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 06/07/2023 5:14 PM ET

Appendix F - Letter to College Presidents

Dear _____,

My name is Kristy Urbick, and I am currently in the Community College Leadership doctoral program at Kansas State University. As a doctoral student, I am conducting research on the experiences of female student-athletes, and I would like _____ to participate in my research study.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. This study is designed to add to the existing literature on female student-athletes and could provide important information to aid coaches, athletic administrators, advisors, and faculty in designing best practices for the retention and persistence for female student-athletes.

Your institution currently participates in _____ female athlete sports. I would like permission to contact your Athletic Director and female sports coaches to help identify female student-athletes who have graduated or will be graduating this year with an associate degree. All participants will be required to complete a consent form, and the institution and student-athletes' information will be confidential and will not be named in the study.

If you have any questions about the study or need more information, please contact me at xxxxx@ksu.edu or XXX-XXX-XXX.

Sincerely,

Kristy Urbick

Appendix G - Letter to Athletic Directors and Coaches

Dear _____,

My name is Kristy Urbick, and I am currently in the Community College Leadership doctoral program at Kansas State University. As a doctoral student, I am researching female student-athletes' experiences. I would like your help in identifying current or former female-student athletes that participated in a sport for at least one year, will be graduating this semester, or have graduated with an associate degree from 2018-2023.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree. Participation in this study is voluntary, and the female student-athletes can withdraw from the study at any time. Before the interview each participant will sign a consent form. I will interview each participant for 60 minutes on Zoom in a semistructured interview question format that will be audio and video recorded. The participants' information and responses will be kept confidential. Each participant will receive a \$10.00 gift card for participation and be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Amazon gift card.

If you have female student-athletes that are willing to participate. Please send me their contact information or contact me at xxxxx@ksu.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Kristy Urbick

Appendix H - Letter to Participants

My name is Kristy Urbick, and I am currently in the Community College Leadership doctoral program at Kansas State University. As a doctoral student, I am researching female student-athletes' experiences, and you have been recommended by your coach/athletic director. The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived academic and social experiences of female student-athletes at Texas community colleges. The study aimed to explore the experiences that contributed to their successful attainment of an associate degree.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews will be approximately 60 minutes on Zoom in a semi-structured interview question format that will be audio and video recorded. Your information and responses will be kept confidential. For your participation, you will receive a \$10.00 gift card after the interview and be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Amazon gift card.

If you would like to participate, please email me, and we will schedule a Zoom interview at your convenience. Also, if you have any additional questions, don't hesitate to contact me at xxxxx@ksu.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Kristy Urbick