

Demographic Characteristics of Academic Advisors for Intercollegiate Athletics of NCAA D-I Member Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This investigation examined selected demographic factors of National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (NAA) professionals. A 23 item self-reported questionnaire was mailed in Spring 2001. A non-experimental descriptive exploratory design was implemented utilizing the field survey format. Research variables investigated were individual primary & secondary characteristics. Results indicated 2/3 (67.4%) of advisors were likely to be 39 years or less in age and 1/3 (32.6%) were 40 years or older. Cross-tabulations implied male and female advisors were likely to have earned degrees at the same levels. White females were more often employed as academic athletic advisors in NCAA D-I institutions than male or females of other ethnic minority groups collectively.

INTRODUCTION

The largest entity of sport within this nation is college sports. There are more people viewing, attending, and buying into college sport than ever before. "Intercollegiate athletics in the United States is a huge, complicated, demanding, and controversial enterprise" (Abney & Parks, 1998, p. 119). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing organization comprised of over 1,000 institutions with membership at separate divisional levels, I, II, III. Abney and Parks (1998) expressed a perspective concerning individuals at different institutions with the same position title very possibly were performing different duties and those performing the same duties may have different titles. Academic reform has been a major focus and discussion for nearly the last twenty years at the NCAA annual convention and the member institutions' leadership provided more than 'mere lip service' attempting to address this concern. During the past decade, the NCAA Manual was revised and mandated by the membership, to require academic progress towards degree attainment. This NCAA by-law (14.4) forced many member institutions to monitor the academic progress of their student athletes. In some cases, institutions had to provide academic support for their student athletes. At selected departments, this meant hiring professional staff, peer tutors and mentors, while other institutions had such staff personnel already in place.

The employment field of academic advisement, specifically for student athletes, has grown and dramatically changed since the 1975 creation of the professional association presently known as the National Association of Academic Advisors for

Athletics (N4A). Academic support professionals responsible for providing assistance to student athletes are commonly referred to as academic counselors. This critical division of intercollegiate athletics has been strongly emphasized during the last decade. The obvious growth in hiring paid professionals within this unit of intercollegiate athletics supports this premise. The purpose of this investigation was to describe select primary and secondary diversity characteristics of professional individuals employed as academic advisors for student athletes of NCAA Division I institutions during the 1999-2000 academic year. Moreover, to determine relationship among age, gender, race and educational levels. Little empirical evidence exists about the characteristics of academic advisors of intercollegiate athletics programs.

Research examining each intercollegiate athletic position should be conducted, and currently only the athletic director position has been thoroughly investigated. This investigation is another step towards a clear understanding of college athletics specifically, and sport management in general. The faculty athletic representative, the compliance personnel, the fundraising/external affairs staff are each vital components to the success of any intercollegiate athletics program. This study is merely a part of this huge research agenda. Prior to investigating various tasks and duties of these staff positions, it would be prudent to know about these professionals and their background, so a closer myopic view may be applied.

The objective of this research was to yield descriptive knowledge of population parameters (i.e., age, gender, race, educational levels) of academic advisors of intercollegiate athletics programs. This level of description also reveals relationships or associations between the variables; however, it will not show that one variable causes another.

This study attempts to illustrate some important trends in the field of academic athletic advisement. Individuals considering employment within this unit of intercollegiate athletics will gain selected insight concerning career planning options as an academic athletic counselor including that of upward mobility and educational level expectations based upon the measure of current advisors.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This investigation was guided by the dual conceptual approach to diversity that was coined by Loden and Rosener (1991). According to this concept, people possess two basic diverse characteristics: primary diverse characteristics and secondary diverse characteristics. *Primary diversity characteristics* refer to human differences that are inborn and cannot be changed or modified during a person's life such as age, race, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities, and sexual orientation (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994). These categories are further supported by Arredondo (1996) who outlined generic characteristics, which affect an individual's socialization and sense of self as primary, while those characteristics in life, which are attained and learned, should be considered secondary. *Secondary diversity characteristics* are human differences that are inherited from the environment and can be changed or modified during a person's life such as educational level, work experience, income, marital status, religious beliefs, geographical location, parental status, behavioral style, etc. (Loden & Rosener, 1991).

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The documented literature on this sub-group of athletic administrators continues to be extremely sparse. Kurpius and Rose (1982) discussed the "big name" institutions and their initial hiring practices of advisors for student athletes. Brennan (1983) conducted a quantitative study illustrating the slow but inevitable change within the academic community concerning athletic advising, but it was Mand and Fletcher (1986) that investigated the background and characteristics of the 1986 N4A conventioners employed full-time as academic advisors. This research project was prompted by the noticeable institutional differences among N4A professionals after the N4A Silver Anniversary Convention. These differences included, but were not limited to ages, gender, educational degree attainment, and salary ranges of association members. Numerous researchers have examined other athletic administrative positions and most often presented the demographic data pertaining to career paths (Terry, 1988), career characteristics (Hartfield, Wrenn, & Bretting, 1987), leaders of historically black colleges and universities athletics departments (Quarterman, 1992), in addition to intercollegiate athletic conference leaders (Quarterman, 1999).

METHODS

Design

The research design was an exploratory descriptive non-experimental investigation. DePoy and Gitlin (1994) stated that the purpose of descriptive is to "yield descriptive knowledge of population parameters and relationships among those parameters" (p.78). The researchers of this investigation employed field survey procedures for data collection. This design is based in a priori theory, a category of research regularly utilized in human services (DePoy & Gitlin, 1994).

Study Population

The target population for this study was the academic advisors of NCAA Division I member institutions listed as professional members within the directory of the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) during the 1999-2000 academic year. The study population consisted of 457 academic athletic advisors and of this amount 252 (55.14%) were females and the remaining 205 (44.86%) were males. The researchers deemed this investigation as exploratory and therefore wanted to offer the entire association membership the opportunity to participate. Thus, the concept of using a sample of the professional membership would therefore have been inappropriate.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was a self-administered 23-item questionnaire previously developed by Quarterman (1992; 1999). It contained research variables indicating individual, self-reported primary and secondary characteristics (ethnic background, gender, age, educational preparation, and years of experience in employed position). Of the 23 items, 11 (47.8%) were open-ended questions and the remaining 12 (52.2%) were closed-ended.

In reference to validity, content validity was employed in the current investigation. A draft of the questionnaire for the current study was sent to two faculty members in sport management programs, two doctoral students (ABD status) of sport management programs and two athletics administrators. None of these professionals were part of the study population. Based upon their recommendations, the questionnaire was slightly modified to address the degree of measuring the items it was designed to measure.

Data Collection Procedures

In the Spring of 2001, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study was sent to each of the advisors. The participants were informed within the cover letter that the completion and return of the mail questionnaire signified consent to participate in the study. Each survey informed the potential respondent that their personal and institutional anonymity would be protected and un-identified. The participants were also informed the survey results would be published in an academic and scholarly journal. All data were coded for computer analyses using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 10.0.

Data Analysis

The responses from 213 questionnaires were coded and included in the SPSS computer analysis. Not all participants responded to all items; as a result, the sample sub-totals varied from 202-213. Based on the purpose of this investigation, the descriptive statistical analysis was utilized employing the three measures of central tendency (mean, mode and median), two measures of condense data (frequency count, histogram), and one measure of variability (range). The data was displayed showing the frequency of the relationship between dependent and independent variables via cross tabulation procedures. The data for the primary and secondary characteristics were measured on a ratio scale, therefore, the mean scores were the most appropriate (Malhotra, 1999). The reader must be aware that the mean is sensitive to extremely small or extremely large scores, therefore scores for the median, mode, and range were reported.

Results of the Study

Data were collected from a sample of academic advisors of NCAA Division I member institutions who were listed as members in the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) during the 1999-2000 academic year. Of 457 questionnaires mailed, 213 (46.61%) participants returned the questionnaire in its completed form.

The results of this investigation are reported in Tables I through IV and Figures 1 through 3. Table I provides a summary of the primary and secondary diversity characteristics of the responding advisors by gender. Table II presents a cross-tabulation of race and age by gender and Table III shows a cross-tabulation of two secondary characteristics (i.e., educational characteristics) by gender. Figures 1-3 provide cross-tabulated histograms of selected work status characteristics by gender.

A Summary of Primary and Secondary Diversity Characteristics by Gender:

As portrayed in Table I, 212 of the advisors responded and of that amount 83 (39.3%) were males and 129 (60.7%) were females. The average age of the respondents was 36.9 years and they ranged in age from 23 to 66 years (median age 34; mode age 29). Annual mean salaries of the advisors were \$40,956 and ranged from \$18,000 to \$96,000 (median salary \$39,000, mode \$30,000). The average salary for the male advisors was 8.45% or \$6,804 higher than the average salary for the female advisors. A similar trend was also shown for salary. The median salary for male advisors was \$42,000 and \$36,000 for female advisors. The difference in salary depicted an 8.57% or \$6,000 increase for the males than females.

In the third and fourth tiers of Table I, a summary of the advisor's *years in present position and years employed as an advisor* was examined. The participants were employed in their present positions an average of 5 years and ranged from less than one year to 26 years. The participant's average years of employment as an advisor were two years longer than the average years in their current positions.

TABLE I.

Summary of Primary & Secondary Diversity Characteristics by Gender of Academic Advisors for Athletics of NCAA D-I Members (1999-2000)

Primary and Secondary Diversity Characteristics	Gender Characteristics		
	Male Advisors	Female Advisors	Total Advisors
Age	(n=83)	(n=129)	(N=212)
Mean Age	36.58	37.10	36.89
Median Age	34.00	34.00	34.00
Mode Age	31.00	29.00	29.00
Range in Age	23-66	24-62	23-66
Salary	(n=77)	(n=127)	(N=204)
Mean Salary	\$45,192.53	\$38,388.41	\$40,956.64
Median Salary	\$42,000	\$36,000	\$39,000
Mode Salary	\$35,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Range in Salary	\$18,000-\$96,000	\$20,000-\$75,000	\$18,000-\$96,000
Years in Present Position	(n=83)	(n=129)	(N=212)
Mean Years	4.99	5.01	5.00
Median Years	4.00	3.00	3.00
Mode Years	1.00	1.00	1.00
Range in Years	0.50-21.00	0.00-26.00	0.00-26.00
Years as an Advisor	(n=82)	(n=130)	(N=212)
Mean Years	8.39	6.68	7.34
Median Years	7.00	5.00	6.00
Mode Years	5.00	3.00	3.00
Range in Years	0.50-28.00	0.00-26.00	0.00-28.00

A Summary of Race and Gender:

Shown in Table II are cross-tabulations for the association between gender and two select primary diversity characteristics (race and age) of the responding academic athletic advisors. With respect to race, both male and female academic athletic advisor groups were composed predominately of White Americans. Nearly two-thirds (61.3%) of the responding advisors were females and slightly more than one-third (38.7%) were males. When specifically looking at gender and race, the cross-tabulations show that White Americans (74.0 %) were more likely to be academic advisors in NCAA Division I member institutions than African Americans or other under-represented groups.

TABLE II.

Cross Tabulation of Primary Diversity Characteristics by Gender of Academic Advisors for Athletics of NCAA Division I Members

Primary Diversity Characteristics	Gender Characteristics					
	Male		Female		Total	
	Advisors		Advisors			
	#	(%)	#	(%)	#	(%)
Race (Primary)	(n=82)		(n=130)		(N=212)	
African American	25	(30.5%)	21	(16.1%)	46	(21.6%)
Asian American	3	(3.7%)	1	(0.8%)	4	(1.9%)
Hispanic American	1	(1.2%)	3	(2.3%)	4	(1.9%)
Native American	0	(0.0%)	1	(0.8%)	1	(0.5%)
White American	53	(64.6%)	104	(80.0%)	157	(74.0%)
Total	82	(100.0%)	130	(100.0%)	212	(100.0%)
Age (Primary)	(n=83)		(n=129)		(N=212)	
<30 Years Old	17	(20.5%)	42	(32.6%)	59	(27.9%)
30 to 39 Years Old	43	(51.8%)	41	(31.8%)	84	(39.6%)
40 to 49 Years Old	16	(19.3%)	26	(20.1%)	42	(19.8%)
>50 Years Old	7	(8.4%)	20	(15.5%)	27	(12.7%)
Total	83	(100.0%)	129	(100.0%)	212	(100.0%)

When specifically considering females, nearly all of the advisors were White Americans (80%). Less than one fifth (16.1%) of the advisors were African American females. When looking at males nearly two thirds (64.6%) were White Americans and less than one-third (30.5%) were African American males. Other underrepresented groups (Asian, Hispanic and Native Americans) accounted for less than 5% of academic athletic advisors when gender was associated with race. The cross-tabulations indicated that White Americans, specifically females, were more likely to be academic advisors in NCAA Division I member institutions than African Americans or other ethnic minority groups.

In reference to gender and age, the cross-tabulations showed that two-thirds (67.5%) of the advisors were likely to be 39 years or less in age and the remaining third (32.5%) were 40 years or older. The largest number of advisors (39.6%) were associated with the 30-39 age segment. When specifically looking at the respondents by gender, it was found that half (51.8%) of the males were in the 30-39 age segment, however, less than one-third (31.8%) of the females were within this category.

A Summary of Educational Characteristics by Gender:

Shown in Table III are the cross-tabulations between gender and educational characteristics for the responding academic athletic advisors. Gender characteristics were considered as independent variables and educational characteristics (highest degree earned, and years since highest degree) as the dependent variables. Based on the results of the cross-tabulations, both male and female respondents primarily held master's degrees as the highest degree earned. Three-fourths of the males and females (74.7% and 80%) respectively, held the master's degrees. Less than 15% of the respondents held a doctorate as the highest degree. Less than 10% held the bachelor's as their highest degree. The cross-tabulations implied that both male and female advisors were likely to have earned degrees at the same levels.

TABLE III.

Cross Tabulation of Primary Diversity Characteristics by Gender of Academic Advisors for Athletics of NCAA Division I Members (1999-2000)

Primary Diversity Characteristics	Gender Characteristics		
	Male Advisors # (%)	Female Advisors # (%)	Total Advisors # (%)
Highest Degree Earned	(n=83)	(n=130)	(N=213)
Bachelors	7 (8.4%)	13 (10.0%)	20 (9.4%)
Masters	62 (74.7%)	104 (80.0%)	166 (77.9%)
Doctorates	14 (16.9%)	13 (10.0%)	27 (12.7%)
Total	83 (100.0%)	130 (100.0%)	213 (100.0%)
Years Since Highest Degree	(n=82)	(n=122)	(N=204)
< 1 Year	9 (11.0%)	25 (20.5%)	34 (16.6%)
2 to 3 Years	8 (9.8%)	23 (18.9%)	31 (15.2%)
4 to 5 Years	9 (11.0%)	21 (17.2%)	30 (14.7%)
6 to 7 Years	16 (19.5%)	6 (4.9%)	22 (10.8%)
8 to 9 Years	11 (13.4%)	12 (9.8%)	23 (11.3%)
≥10 Years	29 (35.3%)	35 (28.7%)	64 (31.4%)
Total	82 (100.0%)	122 (100.0%)	204 (100.0%)

Figures 1 through 3 present the cross-tabulations between years of work experiences and gender of the advisors.

A Summary of Years In Present Position:

When looking at the total group (N=212), two-thirds of the advisors (69.8%) had been in their present positions for five years or less and slightly more than half (52.3%) were in their position no more than three years (Figure 1). Nearly one-fifth (15.6%) of the advisors had ten or more years of experience in their present positions. Overall, there were no discernible differences in the years of work experiences of male and female advisors.

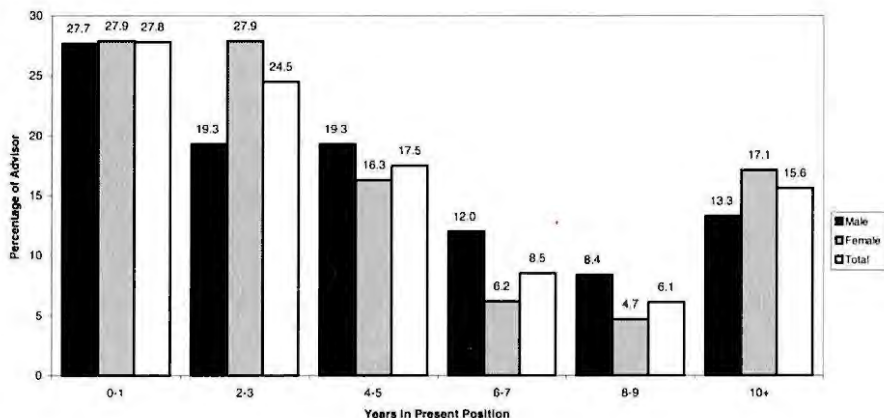


Figure 1. Years in Present Position

A Summary of Years as an Academic Advisor:

As shown in Figure 2, the largest number of advisors had been in that position for nine years or less. This includes two-thirds (65.9%) of the males and three-fourths (72.3%) of the females. The cross-tabulations show that a larger number of males (63.4%) had been advisors for six or more years and nearly half (47.7%) of the female advisors served for this same amount of time.

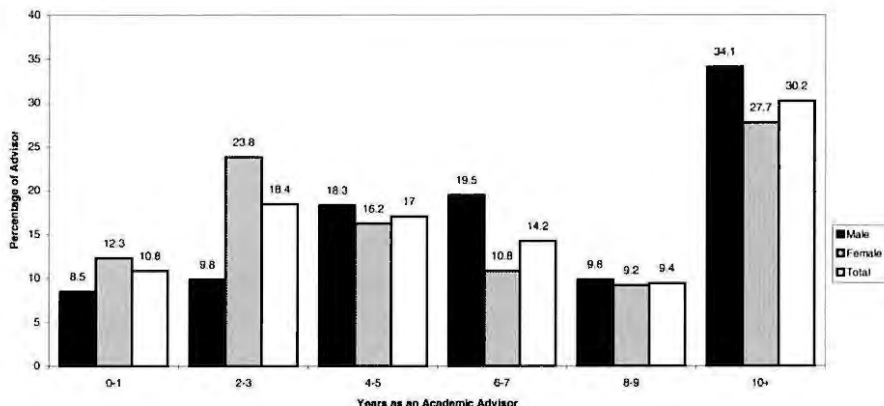


Figure 2. Years as an Academic Advisor

A Summary of Years in an Administrative Position:

As shown in Figure 3, the cross-tabulation analysis revealed that a larger percentage of males had more experience in administrative positions than did females. Over three-fifths (62.0%) of the males had 6 or more years of administrative experience and less than half (44.71%) of the females had 6 or more years of administrative experience. Overall, there were considerable differences between male and female academic athletic advisors in reference to both years as an academic advisor and years as an administrator. The male respondents were associated with longer years in each category.

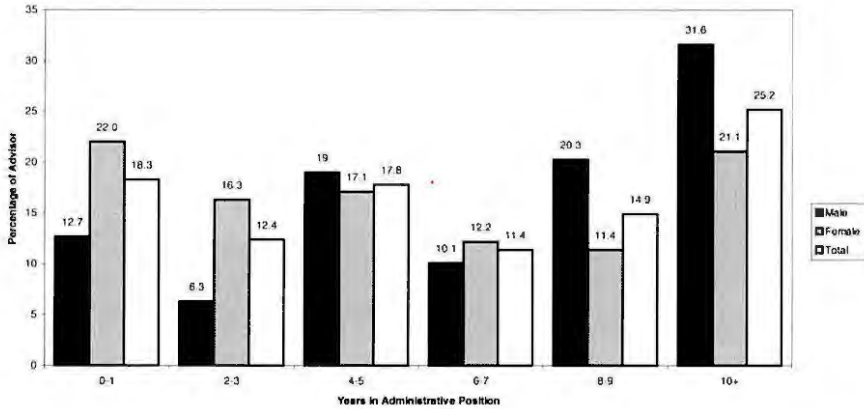


Figure 3. Years in Administrative Position

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to depict select primary and secondary diversity characteristics of professional individuals employed as academic athletic advisors of NCAA D-I institutions during the 1999-2000 academic year by gender. In this current research, attention must first focus to the inclusion of a conceptual framework by Loden and Rosener (1991) that provided a clear foundation and perspective into this investigation. This framework identified the primary characteristics that people have no control, which included age, gender, race and sexual orientation, and secondary characteristics as the assorted peripheral influences initiated by practices and society.

An interesting comparison can be between the current study and the Mand and Fletcher (1986) study. They also (1986) found male academic athletic advisors to be older by age, generally employed longer, and more educated in terms of highest degree earned than female advisors. The results of this study indicated that in the year 2000, female academic athletic advisors are slightly older, equally educated, yet, still making less money than their male counterpart. The employment trend of hiring more females in this division of intercollegiate athletics was identified sixteen years ago with only signs of more of the same ahead.

The investigation from which these data were derived affords the limited foundation of literature a solid springboard for future research on intercollegiate athletic academic advisors. This paper addressed the professionals employed within the intercollegiate experience designated to assist and support the primary product, the student athlete.

Career planning and vision of upward mobility are but two of the benefits generated from this study. Clearly females are hired at a greater rate, even though the nation's higher education institutions have not yet met gender equity among their student athletes. The data indicated of the academic athletic advisors reporting, females were found to be employed in these positions slightly less than twice the rate of males. This study further indicated the males, using the mean average, were compensated nearly \$7,000 per year more than the average female academic athletic advisor. Clearly, White female Americans are more often employed as academic athletic advisors in NCAA Division I member institutions than male or females of other ethnic minority groups collectively. The NCAA (2001) reported the Division I intercollegiate athletics administrative staff breakdown in print and on the internet. Of the nearly 750 (100%) individuals employed as academic athletic advisors, 201 (26.91%) belong to an ethnic minority group. These percentages is ironically close to those professionals with membership in the NAA based upon this investigation ($n = 212$) and the number of ethnic minorities responding to this study ($n = 26.0\%$).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this investigation enhances the greater body of knowledge concerning intercollegiate athletics administration. Empirical research on the various units of intercollegiate athletic positions, their true functions, background and efficiency, with exception of the athletic director position, is extremely sparse. Academic athletic advisors have become so vital to the present system of major college athletics this paper should support the varied interests of not only academicians, practicing professionals, but the future career aspiring athletic academic advisor as well. They will have some data to examine concerning degree attainment within these types of athletic administrators, in addition to viewing the employment patterns thus far of these association members. Most academic athletic advisors are fairly new to the field, and this study identified the trend for continuous education and training to access the upward mobility ladder. Also, this study pointed out the salary disparities based upon gender, which if evaluated and controlled for years of experience and education may point to a continued disturbing trend of paying women less than men for the same job.

There are a few suggested directions for future research in this subject area. A thorough examination of each sub-unit comprising the multi-billion dollar industry, college athletics, should be conducted. This would provide a better understanding among all entities of the complexity created by and involved with intercollegiate athletics.

Further exploration into which sports are advised by gender and ethnicity should be examined to delineate possible sociological patterns in the management and academic success of specific intercollegiate sports. A thorough examination of the salary earnings of academic athletic advisors should be investigated to identify the potential earnings achieved within this unit of intercollegiate athletics. Future research could further identify institutional hiring practices for ethnic minority advisors compared with the population of minority student athletes on campus.

The question and status of academic athletic advisement among the Historically Black Colleges and Universities should also be addressed. A qualitative examination of selected academic athletic advisors by conference would also be most appropriate for future investigations of this surveyed population.

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