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The Athletics Behind the Academics: The Academic Advisor's Role in the Lives of Student Athletes

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The Athletics Behind the Academics: The Academic Advisor's Role in the Lives of
Student Athletes

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

College athletics is a mainstay in the United States entertainment market. The public will often recognize the names of high-profile college athletes as they move from college sports to professional sports. However, while they are in college, sports is not the only focus of their attention. Student athletes are in college to get an education. The academic advisor is someone that works with the student to better facilitate the academic aspects of college. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I find out how an academic advisor views their formal and informal roles and responsibilities and how they accomplish them. Among prior research in the areas of both college athletics and academic advising, the academic advisor for student athletes has been ignored as a population, despite being as unique as the student athletes they work with. Within the interviews, I found that the academic advisors for student athletes, through having intrusive access to their student athlete's academic record and through relationship building practices are able to gain wholistic insight into who their student athletes are. In doing so, the academic advisor can better empower their student athletes to find motivation to succeed not only in their sport but also academically as well. Finally, this thesis aims to educate those that have not thought of the role of an academic advisor for student athletes and informs them of just how important these people are to the success of student athletes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

College athletics has captivated the United States since its creation and has since exploded in popularity thanks to television broadcasts, and in recent history college sports has flourished into a major revenue generator. During the course of the 2016-17 school year, the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) amassed over one billion dollars in revenue (Rovell 2018), primarily from the Men's College Basketball Tournament, and to a lesser extent ticket sales and marketing rights. NCAA revenues are generated by competitions between student athletes. Universities compensate student athletes for their talents via college scholarships in effect trading players' athletic prowess for higher education (Van Rheenen 2012; Eitzen 1987). Research has suggested that the institutions have not held up their end of the bargain by failing to adequately educate student athletes by knowingly placing student athletes into specific majors and courses that fit into the athletic schedule and allow for easier maintenance of eligibility standards, and by extension hurting the overall academic integrity of the institutions (Benford 2016; Van Rheenen 2012; Eitzen 1987). The group of faculty members that have a large say in the major and course selection of students are the academic advisors. A substantial amount of literature has focused on the student-athletes themselves as well as educators when examining the subject of the

academic life of this special group of students, but not the academic advisors responsible for the academic decisions of the student athletes.

Student athletes publicly come into contact with a variety of people who impact their academic and athletic experiences including coaches, teammates, professors (Comeaux 2011; Comeaux & Harrison 2007; Comeaux, Bachman, Burton, & Aliyeva 2016; Rubin & Moses 2017). This exploratory study focuses on a group of people who privately impact the lives of student athletes, and that group is that academic advisors. This study is exploratory in nature because there has been no research done on this group of individuals and how they ultimately impact the student athlete's college lives. This study will set out to answer the following questions:

1. How do academic advisors define the formal and informal roles they play in the lives of student-athletes?
2. How are academic advisors fulfilling their roles in the academic and athletic lives of the student athlete?
3. How do the roles and responsibilities of athletes in revenue and non-revenue sports differ and how do these differences impact expectations of academic advisors for these sports?
4. How can athletic departments and academic departments work together to improve student athlete academic outcomes?

From these questions, I believe that an under researched aspect of college athletics will be shown to play a large role in the lives of student athletes and open a new dialogue about the improvement of the relationship between college athletics and the high level of academics that the universities strive for.

Literature Review

Student Athletes

NCAA Expectations. At present, the NCAA has guidelines that students at an institution for higher education who participate in any of the NCAA sanctioned sports at that institution must follow to maintain eligibility to participate in their respective sports. The sports that fall under NCAA guidelines include big-time revenue sports which are defined as sports at a university that bring in the highest revenue for the NCAA and the universities, traditionally football and men's basketball. However, this could vary depending on region and specialties of the school, such as ice hockey being a revenue sport in northeastern universities, as well as non-revenue sports which are college sports that do not attract large sums of revenue, and typically benefit from the funds drawn in by revenue sports. In total, the NCAA regulates 26 sports (National Collegiate Athletics Association [NCAA], 2018a) at 1,115 schools including men's and women's divisions of most sports (NCAA 2018b). One of the primary guidelines is the progress-toward-degree requirements used for Division I universities, "designed to guide student-athletes toward graduation" (NCAA 2016). These guidelines require that student-athletes meet certain benchmarks, referred to as progress-towards-degree requirements, each year up to the start of their fifth year, in which they are expected to have completed their degree and are no longer eligible for college athletics. Student-athletes must complete a minimum number of credits every term and completing 40% of credits required to graduate by the end of the student-athletes' second year and increasing to 60%, 80%, and 100% after subsequent years. Students must also maintain a minimum grade point average (NCAA 2016). Kulics, Kornspan, and

Kretovics (2015) found in a study of 1027 NCAA Division I student-athletes that the majority of the students surveyed were able to maintain eligibility under these standards. However, while generally student-athletes maintained the standards, they were often unable to change their declared majors to maintain the NCAA's progress-towards-degree requirements. Women student-athletes often felt confined in their major while male student-athletes largely maintained the ideology that any degree is fine as long as they get said degree.

Despite these efforts, NCAA sanctions for poor academic performance have no significant impact on the institutions or their athletic programs (Smith 2015). Institutions do not suffer significant reductions in application rates, nor do they face damage to their academic reputation as a result of the sanctions. The athletic programs do not suffer either. The most common sanction is loss of scholarships available for that program and pose no harm immediately (Smith 2015). With no significant reasons to avoid receiving a penalty for poor academic performance by athletes, the schools and athletic programs have no deterrent from poor academic practices in exchange for better athletic performances.

The college sports reform movement was critical of the deemphasis of academics to move forward with commercial goals by college athletics as a whole. The over commercialization of the college sports where institutions often become involved in competitions to create the largest and best facilities, hire the best coaches with large sums of money, and support the best athletic programs via the lucrative sources of revenue created by increased commercialization of the sports teams, student athletes, and facilities. This interaction between the university and the entertainment industry is

commonly referred to as the “edutainment” industry (Benford, 2007). The combination of the two feeds into the problem of commercialization by further expanding the market of a university’s sports teams through the media. This spotlight on being at the pinnacle of athletics ultimately harms the academic integrity of higher education as more and more emphasis is placed on being the best athletically rather than academically. This pertains to a several aspects of academia, including clustering of student athletes into majors that are easier to maintain eligibility, surrogate paper writers, and the ostracization of whistle blowers who confront this issue (Benford 2007; Fountain & Finley 2009). Going further, is the exploitation of athletes where student athletes are left out of any profit that the NCAA or the universities collect from their efforts and are given subpar education, via scholarships, in comparison to the superb education they are promised due to the need to focus on a rigorous athletic regimen (Benford 2007; Van Rheezen 2012). There is also harm to non-athletes. This is when non-athletes, typically young women, are used to attract prospective athletes to a university. This also includes, according to Benford (2007), a propagation of rape culture within athletic departments through a sense of entitlement for student athletes. College athletics has a history of not having a focus on academics, and sometimes even places academics in a secondary role for the student athletes where they do not even have to put a significant effort into getting their degree.

Racial and Gender Disparities. Racial disparities are easy to notice in college athletics. Whether it be the high percentages of Black students on football and men’s basketball teams compared to the Black student populations (Gayles, Comeaux, Ofoegbu, & Grummert, 2018) or the typical power and privilege differences seen in

society mirrored in higher education environments (Lee, 2018), there is undoubtedly an effect of race on student athletes. One of the more problematic interactions between race and college athletics that has been found is the apparent exploitation of student athletes. While some believe all student-athletes are exploited to some degree, Van Rheenen (2011) found that Black student athletes perceived themselves as being more exploited compared to the rest of the student athletes regardless of sport. As Edwards posits, "...developments at the intersection of race, sports, and education have over the years generated a situation wherein increasing numbers of black youths have focused their efforts on athletic achievement only to find themselves underdeveloped academically and unable to compete in the classroom" (Edwards 2000; 10). The Black body has become a commodity as they continue to be overrepresented in the largest revenue producing sports for the NCAA, football and men's basketball (Gayles et al, 2018). Additionally, as black student athletes are pushed further and further to focus on athletics rather than an academic career, they lose the opportunity of having a "plan B" if their athletic career fails without a strong degree as the "plan B" (Edwards 1979). As these two sports continue to have a disproportionate representation of Black students athletes compared to the number of Black students in the general student body at a given university, and the revenue produced by those two sports continues to be a large source of revenue for higher education institutions, this issue will continue to be commonplace in the discourse on racism in college sports.

Research has noted that students of color receive subpar advising (Lee, 2018). Many advisors do not have the knowledge of the racialized experiences of students of color, which can hinder the advisor-advisee relationship. In addition, power and privilege

within a higher education environment can potentially create an ineffective relationship between student and advisor. The potential for a disconnect resulting from racial differences between the knowledge of the advisor and the problem of the student may prevent the best possible outcome for the advisee. Harris (2018) finds that both prescriptive and developmental advising work well; however, students who received developmental advising were more satisfied with their experience. These results may have been skewed by the overwhelming number of students receiving developmental advising compared to prescriptive, regardless Harris's (2018) conclusions are reasonable considering a developmental advising model would allow for the advisor to better understand the experiences of students of color and create solutions to problems by including the student's input in the discussion. This is consistent with Museus and Ravello (2010), who found that minority students at predominantly white institutions performed better within a humanized, holistic, and proactive approach to advising, all of which can be accomplished through a developmental model of advising.

A gender difference was found between student athletes, specifically in academic achievement (Dilley-Knoles, Burnett, & Peak 2010). Of course, there are some obvious separations between men's and women's sports, as well as having sports that are exclusive to one or the other. For example, most universities have two basketball teams, one for men and one for women. Then some exclusive sports include football being exclusive to men and beach volleyball for women, where available. However, these gender distinctions do not directly explain the difference in academic achievement. While Dilley-Knoles, Burnett, and Peak (2010) speculated that these differences may be a result of a "one size fits all" model for supporting student athletes

academically, I believe there is also reason to suspect that there are differences between the course loads of different sports resulting from different majors, impacts from a sport's practice regimen, and of course the aptitude of the student athlete to succeed in college (Eitzen 1987; Fountain & Finley 2009). Stanley Eitzen (1987) found that preparation for a college education plays a big role in the academic success of student athletes. In particular, he found that female student athletes were overall better prepared and as a result performed better than male student athletes. Similarly, Rankin et al (2016) also found that women student athletes had greater levels of academic and athletic success, but lower athletic identity compared to men's student athletes. This they found are a result of a higher level of interaction with the rest of campus and having a greater awareness of what is going on outside of the athletic department.

Academic Advising

Advising Overview. Academic advising plays an integral part of the college experience for all students and acts as a guide for students in navigating what classes to take to obtain their desired degree. Despite this seemingly simple outlook on academic advising, until recently there was not a universal definition of academic advising across literature on advising (Larson et al 2018). Prior researchers were working with different conceptualizations of the term, meaning different studies attributed different tasks or goals to advisors. To put together response data and formulate a definition, Larson et al (2018) formulated a concrete definition of academic advising using a survey administered at academic advising conferences, and the use of an AI research method. "Academic advising applies knowledge of the field to empower students and campus and community members to successfully navigate academic

interactions related to higher education” (Larson et al, 2018). This definition reflects where the current state of academic advising currently stands. Additionally, we can say that an academic advisor is a university faculty member that does exactly that, and for the purposes of this study academic advisors that work specifically with student athletes. Working off this understanding of academic advising, we can begin to look into where the current goals and tasks of academic advisors lie in the realm of higher education. First, the advisors primary focus should be on the academic, pertaining to their courses, degrees, and future career. This focus extends to factors that have a direct impact on the student’s academics including more personal issues of the student’s if the issue will affect the student’s academic outcomes. However, when the issue does not affect academics or falls into what the advisor is knowledgeable in, the academic advisor is not obligated to be the one to address with the issue. In this study, I will be looking at the responsibilities of these academic advisors, which I conceptualize as the actions that academic advisors take to guide a given student athlete through their college experience.

There are several models for advising, of which three are employed more frequently for student athletes. These models are the prescriptive, the developmental, and the intrusive models (Gaston-Gayles, 2003). Each model operates differently in the way that the advisor interacts with the student and the amount of interaction. In the *prescriptive model*, the advisor prescribes a solution to the advisee for their proposed dilemma that should be followed after little interaction or discussion. The advisor takes a position of authority in this model and removes the student from the decision-making process (Crookston, 1994). This type of advising is one way, where the academic

advisor assumes that their students will need to be helped or they will not succeed. The prescriptive model wants the student to succeed academically but does not try to build the student up and develop them as people by making them make their own decisions.

The *developmental model* entails a more engagement between the advisor and the student, especially in the decision-making process where the two formulate a plan for the student through discussion (Crookston, 1994). Additionally, it has been found that the developmental model is particularly important for working with student athletes (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Broughton and Neyer (2001) mention that the developmental model is key for providing academic services, however their understanding of the developmental model also includes tracking, which I would consider to be a part of the intrusive model. The ultimate goal of the developmental model is to get the student to feel good about their academic decisions and to be able to grow as people through making their own decisions based on advice given by the academic advisor.

Finally, the *intrusive model* is where the advisor intervenes in the student's academics at the first sign of difficulty, utilizing structured plans to motivate the student to seek help (Earl, 1998). This model revolves around the student's motivation levels to succeed. Gaston-Gayles (2003) found that intrusive advising appeared to be more favored by the academic support-program directors that were interviewed. This is because this model allows for the student to mature and be able to make decisions for themselves after being taught how higher education operates in the first two years of college. This model appears to have a similar approach to the developmental model, but instead of having a conversations on how to proceed they will let the student go free

from the beginning because they student will just not be interested in advising, but if the student's academics are not great the academic advisor then reaches out to the student to come for academic assistance.

Two of the factors that have a large effect on student athlete's graduation rates in Gaston-Gayles's (2003) research have to do with advising, one of which was intentional advising. The intentional advising described by Gaston-Gayles resembles the intrusive advising model, where student athletes that are in their first two years in higher education are closely monitored and are "handheld through the process" as one of the directors interviewed described it. The other advising central factor that Gaston-Gayles found was reporting line. The two lines most common from the advisor to the athletic director or the vice-president of academic affairs. The reporting line to academic affairs was more favorable because it keeps advising more in line with the rest of the campus community as well as having more direct access to faculty (Gaston-Gayles, 2003). For student athletes, this would mean that the expectations for them would not differ academically compared to the rest of the student body. While for academic advisors of student athletes, this means that the athletic department would have less influence on the advisor's job including pay, method of advising, and responsibilities.

Student Educational Experiences. While attending college, students in general will experience influences from a variety of outside sources ranging from family, friends, professors, and of course the university they are attending. However, the student athlete populations at the universities have additional authority figures (Harrison 2006; Comeaux & Harrison 2007; Comeaux 2011) as well as different experiences with the shared influencers, not to mention differing circumstances than the typical student as

well. Some of the more prominent sources that impact the student athlete's higher education experiences include their experiences with the education system, their experiences with academic centers specifically for student athletes, and their experiences with faculty such as their professors and coaches.

Of note, Eitzen (1987) found a significant difference between the student athletes in the revenue sports of football and men's basketball compared to other student athletes, where the revenue sports were worse off. Further, black student athletes were the worst off in terms of performance academically, who are often disproportionately represented in football and men's basketball. These findings are interesting when paired with findings of "major clustering", where high percentages (25% or more) of student athletes are often placed in certain majors, usually ones that are traditionally easier to get a degree in (Benford 2007; Eitzen 1987; Fountain & Finley 2009; Comeaux & Harrison 2011). In each of these studies or examinations of college athletics, there is reason to suspect that student athletes are being corralled into certain majors, especially if the student athlete is a member of a revenue sport, traditionally men's basketball and football. Fountain and Finley found that in 11 of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) universities, there was substantial academic clustering among football players at each of the schools, and notably the minority players were more clustered in a major compared to their white teammates. One of the more common academic major classifications that among football players was what Fountain and Finley (2009) termed "general studies". STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) had the least. Comeaux, Bachman, Burton, and Aliyeva (2016) found that five major themes influenced the successful completion of STEM degrees among

student-athletes. The themes include pre-college influences, an early understanding of career-goals, involvement in high-impact STEM activities, benefits of athletic participation, and emotional and physical isolation. Each of the student athletes in the study had known coming into college that a STEM degree was what they wanted and managed to do so despite the apparent clustering of athletes. Additionally, these students often did not have the support of their teammates and the services offered by the athletic department as athletic programs were more geared toward student athletes following the career path that was more flexible with their athletic schedule.

Contradictory to the findings regarding the clustering of student athletes into specific majors, Kulics, Kornspan, and Kretovics (2015) surveyed 1027 NCAA Division I student athletes at a large Midwestern athletic conference and found that the students athletes themselves did not believe that they were advised to select a major to meet eligibility requirements or choose a major to meet those requirements originally. A large percentage of those students also believed that their major matched their interests. However, there are complications for these results. The questions asked of the student athlete were focused strictly on the maintenance of eligibility, and it was noted that the majority of student athletes were not ineligible, meaning that they had no reason to alter their current academic path to adhere to the NCAA eligibility standards. In regard to the student athlete's interests, had the study looked at majors selected, there may have been evidence of clustering into majors of physical education, sport management, among other majors that are appealing to athletes.

Academic Centers. One of the more significant resources available to student athletes is the academic centers that are built specifically for student athletes and are

often a primary resource for player's academic needs (Rubin & Moses 2017). While these centers are meant for the improvement of students academically by offering tutors and advisors, the academic centers have been found to be a source of isolation for student athletes from the larger educational faculty and the rest of the student body (Rubin & Moses 2017; Comeaux et al 2016). While there is significant merit to having specialized resources, such as being able to accommodate to student athlete practice and game schedules, there are also significant issues. The first implication from having specialized academic facilities is the propagation of the isolation of student athletes from the rest of the student body. This has been found to create a situation that harms the overall socialization of student athletes because they often don't interact with the larger student body (Adler & Adler 1991; Rubin & Moses 2017). This isolation from the separation of student athlete focused facilities and facilities for the rest of the student body ultimately results in student athletes associating with other student athletes and the creation of a "... 'we versus them' mentality from faculty and the general student population" (Rubin & Moses 2017: 321) that pushes student athletes out of the academic realm of college life. Additionally, the isolation brings alienation where the student athletes are separated from the general student body and "labeled with the pejorative 'jock' image" (Adler & Adler 1991: 110), to which student athletes placed within the label reject. The athletic dorm, however, is often treated as a safe haven for student athletes where they can put down their act and engage in backstage behaviors among peers that experience similar frustrations as their own (Adler & Adler 1991). The other implication being the costs associated with creating structures for only a select group of students. The "college athletics arms race" (Edwards 1984; Benford 2007;

Zimmerman 2013) can be seen here as universities build larger and larger student athlete specialized academic centers in an attempt to appear more appealing to the parents of the student athletes (Dilley-Knoles, Burnett, & Peak 2010). As Harry Edwards (1984) put it:

With such riches at stake, division I colleges and universities have developed athletic programs with multi-million-dollar budgets and millions more invested in facilities and equipment (e.g. the University of Michigan with a 1983-84 academic year athletic budget of over eleven million dollars and a 100,000-seat football stadium; Stanford University with an athletic budget of 14.2 million dollars and an 86,000 seat stadium).

And it has not been just institutions that have stood to reap the rewards of big-time football or basketball preeminence. Indeed, in 1983, the highest paid college and university officials in the United States were not college presidents, university chancellors, or Nobel Prize laureates but head football and basketball coaches. (p. 5)

These funds could be better used toward the improvement of the educational experience of the student body as a whole and shifting the focus of the potential recruits and the public eye away from big flashy facilities and instead highlighting the academic achievement of a given institution.

Faculty. Finally, the faculty of the university, specifically professors, are the last impacting force on student athletes that will be discussed. Prior research has often found that professors do not hold student athletes in high regard, even rejecting them in extreme cases (Comeaux 2011; Comeaux & Harrison 2007; Rubin & Moses 2017).

Professors have made claims about their courses such as “it would be unlikely, impossible, and unexpected for a male revenue and non-revenue student athlete, or female student athlete to receive an A in their class” (Comeaux 2011: 80). Comeaux (2011) also found professors showed disdain about the media attention given to student athletes because they believe that that the media should be focusing on academic achievements, and more scholarships should be awarded for academics rather than athletics. However, while some professors take the position of being against student athletes, others are friends of athletic programs and would work to ensure that the student athlete passes their courses (Benford 2007). Even if this positive interaction with student athletes is founded on being on good terms with the athletic program rather than that student’s success, positive interactions between faculty and student athletes has been found to be a positive influence on the student athlete’s desire to learn and succeed (Comeaux & Harrison 2007). Athletic coaches also impact on the academic side of student athletes’ college experiences. Kulics, Kornspan, and Kretovics (2015) found that “20% of their student athlete sample was highly influenced by their coaches’ opinion when choosing a major” (10) and this stemmed from coaches becoming more and more involved with the academic side of student athletes on the basis of maintaining eligibility for athletics. They also note that head coaches also believe that student athletes would be encouraged to choose majors on the basis of maintaining eligibility rather than desired career path. The coaches have reason to keep their teams winning athletically and maintaining a high GPA, such as monetary bonuses (Carter, Dalton, Obaid-Chinoy, & Stoute 2018).

Methods

The questions to be answered from this study are:

1. How do academic advisors define the formal and informal roles they play in the lives of student-athletes?
2. How are academic advisors fulfilling their roles in the academic and athletic lives of the student athlete?
3. How do the roles and responsibilities of athletes in revenue and non-revenue sports differ and how do these differences impact expectations of academic advisors for these sports?
4. How can athletic departments and academic departments work together to improve student athlete academic outcomes?

This study is based on in-depth interviews with five academic advisors at three Division I universities in Florida. The universities were of interest because they were Florida universities that are in the NCAA's Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). Division I schools are regarded as some of the top schools in athletics in the country and are regarded highly in academics as well. As a result, the schools considered for this study should be similar in academic and athletic structure so comparisons could be made between universities. Additionally, the schools I was primarily interested in all have student populations between 30,000 and 60,000. Each offers a wide variety of degree programs, at least 100 at each. The universities all have at least 15 NCAA sports teams cumulatively between men's and women's sports. These schools will likely pull new students from a similar pool of students. Additionally, Florida schools were

used to allow for potential ease of access to these universities because I am doing my research out of a Florida based university, as well as ease of travel to each location if necessary.

Sample

To be considered for this study, potential participants must have been an academic advisor that worked with student athletes. They must have worked at a large division I Florida based university. Any amount of experience in the field was acceptable. They may have worked at other universities prior to their employment at the time of the interview but having experience at multiple universities was not a requirement. They may have worked with any NCAA sanctioned sport. There was no requirement for how many student athletes they work with.

Each of the academic advisors in my sample had at least 5 years' worth of experience advising, some had spent time working with non-student athletes, but all were currently working with student athletes at their universities. Each advisor, except for one who was responsible for a single sport, were responsible for multiple sports, including one who has had a long career in advising student athletes had changed their sports at some point. Overall, there was a decent variation of sports they are responsible for, however there was a lack of major revenue sports. For revenue sports, I was able to interview two football advisors and one women's basketball advisor. Women's basketball is typically not a revenue sport, however due to exceptional performances in the current season, they are being categorized as revenue for the purposes of this study. The non-revenue sports include advisors in men's and women's swimming and diving, gymnastics, men's and women's track and field, men's and

women's cross country, baseball, men's and women's soccer, and women's tennis.

Three of the five academic advisors have worked at more than one university. Three of them were athletes at some point during their life, but only two of them specified that they were student athletes while attending college.

Recruitment

I contacted each advisor via their university email using a structured email following USF Institutional Review Boards recruitment email standard (the e-mail used is included as Appendix A). The recruitment email was sent out to 24 individual athletic academic advisors at 4 division I Florida based universities. Each individual was sent the email at maximum 3 times if no response was received. Two of these emails were sent back due to the academic advisor not working at that university anymore, so they were removed from the potential sample, making the final potential sample 22 athletic academic advisors. If a reply was received, a date and time for the interview was set up optimizing convenience and availability for the advisor. A few hours prior to the interviews over phone, the informed verbal consent document (the informed verbal consent document is included as Appendix B) and the interview guide (the interview guide is included as Appendix C) were provided via email so that the interviewee may follow along if necessary. Interviews conducted in person were given the documents at the start of the interview.

Interview

These interviews were conducted between November 2019 and February 2020. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the other three were conducted via phone call. The interviews conducted were semi-structured interviews. This allows for

the interview to follow the guide and get at the concepts that I wish to discuss, but also allow the interviewee to be able to elaborate on their answers and go into other relevant topics of discussion if applicable to the larger discourse on student athlete advising.

At the start of each interview, informed verbal consent was received from each participant. Simple demographic questions will be asked at the beginning to identify the advisor's sport(s), how long they have been in the role of academic advisor, and an approximation of how many student-athletes they advise. The following items are some of the primary questions that were asked during the interviews:

- Describe a typical workday of an academic advisor for student athletes.
- What are your responsibilities as an advisor of student athletes?
- How do you accomplish those responsibilities?
- Describe a positive and a negative advising interaction you have had with a student athlete, if able.
- What policies or procedures pose the greatest challenge to your work, and how would you change them if you could?

The interviews were recorded on a Sony PX Series Digital Voice Recorder. Field notes were also taken as the interview took place. Upon completion, the interviews were transcribed via transcribing software. I listened to the playback from the interview and re-read the transcript the software provided to make sure it was accurate. The interviews were then coded using Nvivo 12, a qualitative data analysis application. The coding process was deductive. During a second re-read of the transcript I used a codebook I had prepared prior to code the interviews. The codebook (the codebook is included as Appendix D) used was created based on my research questions, prior

research, and some of the early themes that appeared within the interviews that I noticed during the accuracy check.

The Advisors

This section includes brief descriptions of each academic advisor's background as well as assigning an arbitrary gender-neutral pseudonym for reference when drawing comparisons later on, as well as to make identification of the academic advisors as difficult as possible.

Avery. Avery is an academic advisor for women's basketball and men's and women's swimming and diving. They have been in the field of academic advising since 2013 and graduated undergraduate with a degree in broadcast journalism and a minor in English. In high school they, participated in several sports as well as band. In their seven-year career advising students, they have worked at two universities and have experience working with both student athletes and non-student athletes.

Riley. Riley is currently an academic advisor for men's and women's swimming and men's track and field. However, over the course of their long year career advising student athletes, they have previously worked with football and gymnastics. They are a former student athlete themselves and is highly dedicated to their university, having spent their entire career there.

Taylor. Taylor is an academic advisor for the football team, particularly the black male student athletes. They have at least six years of experience working with student athletes across two universities. They graduated undergraduate with a major in psychology and continued on into graduate school with a focus on sports psychology. They are a former student athlete.

Payton. Payton is responsible for baseball, men's and women's track and field, and men's and women's cross country. They have 10 years of experience working exclusively with student athletes at 2 universities. They were an English literature major in undergraduate and went to graduate school for athletic administration.

Jordan. Jordan has five and a half years' experience in academic advising. Over their career they have experience working with both student athletes and non-student athletes. They are responsible for women's tennis and men's and women's soccer. They have a master's degree in student affairs which according to them includes student development theory and aspects of higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: PATHWAYS TO ADVISING

The Decision to Advise

There is not a singular career path that leads one into the field of academic advising, and there is no shortage of reasons for becoming one. Each of the academic advisors took a different pathway to becoming an academic advisor, different transitions into working with student athletes, different goals, and different outcomes they are seeking from being an academic advisor. Despite all of these differences, there is a primary commonality among them, the desire to work with unique student populations. Unique student populations being students that “face unique challenges to student success” (Jolly 2008, 146), this can include international students, transfer students, adult learners, and of course student athletes. However, not all of them were a member of a unique student population themselves as far as I have been made aware during the interviews, but two of them were student athletes during their time in college, Riley and Taylor. As a result, I am unable to pinpoint where this interest comes from. But for one of the advisors, Avery, there is a strong desire to empower students and help them understand their psychosocial identity and *“helping them to get a holistic growth while they’re [at] college more than just their academics, more than just, you know, getting*

that degree or walking across the stage, wanting to help them develop to be really the best in great leaders in this generation to come”.

A recurring theme that had appeared among the several of the advisors and was of importance to them in their advising goals, was the idea of empowerment of unique student populations. Empowerment, I believe, is a great benefit to the growth of student athletes while they are in college because they are often placed into the stereotype of “*dumb jock*” despite this not necessarily being the case. As Avery stated:

I've always really just wanted to empower students. And when I say that, I'm helping them really understand, like, their psychosocial identity, helping them to get a holistic growth while they're here college. More than just their academics more than just, you know, getting that degree or walking across the stage wanting to help them develop to be really the best in great leaders in this generation to come. So that was always my heart and it's like, man, where can I? Where can I have the maximum impact in that, you know? And it's funny, you know, athletics just happened to it almost happened to me more than I happen to.

Empowerment for students was a major impetus for Avery finding an interest in becoming an academic advisor. Avery later mentioned that empowering student athletes allows the student athlete to find an intrinsic motivation in their academics beyond their sport that will influence them and keep them going beyond college. Empowering students to become more than just a “*dumb jock*” in the eyes of their non-athlete peers. On a similar note, Taylor wanted to work with a specific portion of the unique population of student athletes, the black male student athletes. For reasons

similar to Avery, Taylor wanted the student athletes to break free of the restraints that have been put on them their entire life by people telling the student athlete that the only thing they are good at is their sport. Taylor wanted to help remediate the disconnect between athletics and life after college and not having a degree or professional athlete status. This has often been the case because of the historical exploitation of student athletes, particularly the black student athletes, where they often left college without a degree to make use of if professional sports do not work out.

For several, ending up working with student athletes just happened by chance through opportunities that opened up to them over time. Jordan originally started working with a different unique student population, low-income first-generation students, and then the opportunity opened up to them to work with student athletes through an internship because of the interest in unique student populations. Payton knew that they wanted to be involved in higher education in some way. Originally, they thought this involvement would be through tutoring, but they were introduced to student athletes through tutoring in the athletic department and then eventually transitioned into being an academic advisor for student athletes. Then there is Riley who exclaimed that they simply loved the college cohort, and despite being a former student athlete knew they didn't want to be involved as a coach, and their time spent at a job with a corporation, they eventually came back to college to again be involved with student athletes, and that their time as a student athlete made the transition to an academic advisor for student athletes "*natural*". So despite their differences in how they got to the same profession, they all share a similarity in that they wanted to work with some unique student population and for those that didn't have the student athlete experience

themselves athletics somehow or another ended up into their lives, while those that did have the experience of being a student athlete had a natural transition to continue working with them in some capacity that ended up being helping the students athletes grow beyond just their sports.

Advising Philosophy

Similar to their pathways into advising student athletes, the ways in which they actually do the academic advising varies somewhat between them. However, there are themes that are prominent in each of their methodologies that tie into how others do their advising. Of course, the most important aspect for the advisors is making sure that their student athletes are staying eligible for competition by making sure they are staying on track in their progress toward degree. This was prevalent in all of the interviews with the advisors, and for good reason. However, that was not the only common theme. One of the larger themes is building a relationship with the student athletes in their care, which appears in all of the advisor's methodologies. This building of relationships is useful in multiple ways. It allows the academic advisors to have good rapport with the students and develop trust between the two of them so that they can better produce an outcome that gives the student athlete the best possible outcome to maintain eligibility, be able to balance school and athletics, and of course enjoy the courses they take. As Riley put it, "...*generally student athletes are very cynical. They don't trust people because their whole life people try to get something from them. So, you build relationships and if you build relationships, your kids are going to trust you*". In order for academic advising to be effective, the student has to trust that the academic

advisor knows what they are doing and is going to advise the student in a way that has the student's desires and goals in mind.

Another big theme that is present among most of the academic advisors is having the student athletes take ownership of their academics. Meaning that the student ultimately makes the final decisions on what classes to take, what major to pick, and actively trying to succeed academically. Avery refers to it as a "*partnership*" where they are "*more of a person who recommends and...allow them [the student athlete] to make a choice*", because at the end of the day, it is the student's decision to take a class, and be accountable for their decision to take that class. Like Avery, Jordan and Taylor both give their student the choices available to them and lets them know of the pros and cons of each of the choices available, but lets the student decide what they want to do. Again, this is a way for students to take ownership of their education by being the one with the final say on what classes they take. This process is made easy by academic advisors with a large information pool of the majors and classes offered by a university by being there an extended period of time like Riley. Since Riley has spent their entire 32-year career at a single university, they know the curriculum of their university and are better able to make recommendations to the student that will be of most benefit to their goals. According to Payton, it is the student athlete's personal choice whether they want to succeed or not. This mind set of having the student athlete take control of their education is very important in my opinion for several reasons. The first being that it helps protect the academic advisors, because when reflecting on an experience with a student athlete, Taylor had a student complain about them to the rest of their team and their coaches about the classes that they claimed Taylor had put them in, which was not

the case as the student was the one that picked out the classes. The process of having the student be the one to pick out their classes protected Taylor in this situation because the truth eventually came out that the student was the one that had picked the classes and they were projecting their academic struggles as well as some non-academic issues that had been weighing on them as well. Another reason is that, using Avery's word, it "*empowers*" the student to strive for academic success the same way that they strive for athletic success, because the student has to back up their decisions and prove that they made the right ones for themselves. Finally, it also helps the student athlete start to become more independent and be able to show that they are able to handle the responsibility that comes with balancing an education and athletics, the responsibility to, as Jordan put it, "*take ownership of their education and go above and beyond what they are mandated to do*", this is indicative of an overall interest in more than just athletics, and when one is interested in their education, they are far more likely to succeed.

There is some degree of intrusiveness that some of the advisors mentioned. This follows more of the traditional methods of advising, being the prescriptive, developmental, and intrusive (Crookston, 1994; Earl, 1998; Gaston-Gayles, 2003). From how each of the advisors described and talked about their advising process and philosophy, all of the advisors report that they believe they fall within the intrusive model due to each of the advisors reporting that they have a great deal of access to the student's academics. However, for reasons that do not follow the way it was explained within the research, I agree with the academic advisors' assessment of their model, although there are themes of the developmental model included as well. The

combination of which aligns with the holistic academic advising approach discussed by Museus and Ravello (2010), where academic advisors make themselves aware of student problems and make sure the student gets support they need. This approach was said to be more effective for racial and ethnic minority students at predominantly white institutions, but this appears to be commonly used among the athletic academic advisors as well.

The intrusiveness into the student athlete's lives that the academic advisors have includes having access to student athlete grades, syllabi, professor announcements, attendance, and their past academic records. Some advisors such as Avery, use this access to do extensive tracking of their students through spreadsheets and formulas for almost everything, which Avery mentioned they were responsible for creating and disseminating to their colleagues at their prior and current universities to make their job more fluid and easier. These spreadsheets are there to ensure that the student athlete is making adequate progress toward degree and is on track during the semester to pass their courses. Similarly, Taylor makes checklists for their student athletes. These includes making sure that the students are checking their emails, have there been any announcements in athletics or in their classes that affect them, what assignments do they have that are due, what is going on in their calendars to make sure that there is nothing that the student athlete and the advisor is unaware of. This deviates from the mindset of having student athletes take control of their academics by taking away student agency in keeping track of their own academics, but some students may need extra assistance to stay on track, especially those that are teetering on not being eligible to participate in athletics. Others, such as Riley, do keep tabs on their students through

their access but try not to do hardcore tracking like Avery, as they believe that communication is just as important, if not more so, than the tracking.

While each of the advisors utilize the intrusive model, some of them also demonstrate the developmental model as well. Specifically, Payton and Jordan both employ a highly intrusive method partnered with the developmental model because it is important to give the student athletes the support they need to manage the intense schedule of a student athlete and properly advising them so that they do not fall behind in their progress towards a degree, but at the same time not sacrificing their development as a person. As Jordan states,

So, I think a lot of, like, if you look at advising philosophies the two that come to mind for me are the intrusive advising and then developmental advising. And so, I think that my student athletes specifically, I can't speak for all athletics advisors, but I think mine get a mix of those two, where they definitely do get more support and intention than the traditional student might, but I also am very adamant about focusing on their development as a person and figuring out ways to assist them with that.

Payton gave a specific reason for the success of intrusive advising, they said *"I think the generations that are coming through [college] now are very, very used to having people, family members, teachers have access to their stuff, they just are...So those high schoolers are coming to us and they are very accustomed to having us all in their stuff. And so I actually think it's more comforting to them to have people who can give them information..."* I think that the potential for that comfort is big in the transition for first year students because, they are coming from a high school education where their family

is there to make sure they are on track and they did not have an especially rigorous athletic schedule on top of their academics, and now they are coming into college and would otherwise be on their own to balance a new and potentially harder academic system and a more intense athletic regimen all on their own. So, having that person behind them with high levels of access helps keep them on track and accountable for staying on track with their education.

Overall, despite some variances, each advisor operates in a similar manner where they all have high levels of access to their student athlete's academics to ensure progress towards degree, but also ensuring that the student athlete develops as a person and takes accountability for their education by developing a trusting relationship with the student athlete and communicating with them to get the full scope of what is going on around the student athletes and their lives.

Gauging Student Athlete Academic Interests and Goals

Getting an idea of what a student athlete intends to accomplish while in college is key for an academic advisor to do their job to the best of their abilities, especially early on in the student athlete's time at college. This is because if the academic advisor has an idea of what the student athlete is interested in academically, as a career outside of playing professional sports, or even just the general interests of the student athlete they can then better match the student athlete to an academic major that they will take an inherent interest in and be intrinsically motivated to succeed academically and discover their academic identity. There was some variation among the academic advisors as to how they go about this. Some simply listen to the student athletes as they naturally reveal their interests, some use their relationship with the student to figure it out, others

are not in a hurry to deal with setting a major, and others systematically address this before the student arrives at the university.

The relationships that the advisors build with the students over time allows the advisors to get good insight into what the student wants to do. Several of the advisors mentioned that early on their students come in with a career path in mind, such as nursing, but this is the career path that their parents or some outside influence put on them rather than the student athlete wanting to be a nurse or a doctor. They come in with an academic identity that is entirely contingent on the desires of those around them rather than something they are personally interested in doing. These advisors are smart, they know that if a student athlete were to enter a major that they are not personally interested in, they will not put in the effort required to get their degree. Avery mentions that they try to get their students to break away from what their parents told them to study, and instead find out what they are actually interested in, or what they value in life. Avery believes that the relationship building aspect of their role plays a big part in discovering what it is that the student athlete actually wants to do. Avery simply listens to their students as they meet with their them, and over time the student's interests reveal themselves naturally. Avery also gave an example of a student athlete they had that was in the nursing major, and that student thought they were completely interested in nursing. However, over time it was revealed that the student had more of a passion to work with children rather than as a nurse. So, Avery had the student athlete look at the child development major and explore it to see if they enjoyed it more than nursing, and that student athlete ended up changing their major because they enjoyed it so much more than nursing. In this case, just listening to the student talk and

paying attention to both what they are and are not saying, anything that the academic advisor can glean from the student's behavior that will help them figure out what the student athlete is truly interested in makes an enormous difference. Similarly, Taylor mentioned that the sometimes "*intimate*" relationships they have with the student athletes makes them privy to information that not everyone may be aware of, which can translate to trust, and allow the academic advisor to make better recommendations based on that information. Taylor also mentioned that they try to get their student athletes to have more self-awareness regarding their academics. This means having ownership of their academics as discussed in the previous section, but also the awareness to not study what their parents simply told them to study and instead knowing what that entails and being able to envision themselves doing something they are interested in and good at that may not necessarily be related to sports.

Payton starts with a similar approach to Avery by actively listening to what their students are telling them every time they see them, and finding out what they are strong in and then recommending that if they are strong in certain areas, then they might be good in a major that uses what they are strong in. However, Payton also mentioned that this is not something that has to be dealt with immediately upon the student athlete entering college, and "*a lot of what they do is try to take some of the pressure off of the 'what career do I want to have?' because when they're 17-18 years old, you don't know*" and sometimes there are jobs that are created during the student athlete's time in college that they just don't know about in their first semester that the student athlete would be a perfect fit for.

On a similar wavelength is Jordan, who admits that appraising a student athlete's interests is a process that varies from student to student for them. However, they always try to meet the student athlete where they are at. This means that if the student's only academic interest is to stay eligible to compete in their sport, then the academic advisor will focus on that, but use the developmental aspect of their methodology to try and get them more academically motivated and, like Taylor, envision what they want their life to look like if athletics does not play out and what they want to contribute to society then eventually build them up to that point during their college careers. Then continue to get their students to think more and more about their academics even if they don't have that interest so that they may eventually start to develop that intrinsic motivation to succeed academically.

Finally, Riley takes a more proactive approach and uses a vetting process before their student athletes even arrive at the university for their first semester. They simply ask them what their interests are in a letter and uses their extensive knowledge of their university's curriculum to find a major for them. At the same time, they are not simply picking something permanent for them early on. Riley asks for several of their interests so that if one falls through, there is a chance to switch. And because of the resources at the academic advisor's disposal, they can often get student athletes the support they need to see success and be satisfied with their academic choices. As Riley states,

So, we do, they do the strong vocational inventory to match your personality with different jobs, therefore I can look at, okay, you're interested construction manager, you're interested construction, you like to mess with it. Hey, we got a construction manager program. Let me go start you in a few classes there. And

then let me let you go talk to the advisor in construction management. So, again, it's very comprehensive and holistic and terms that we have a lot of people a lot of resources.

There are also shades of Avery and Taylor's method of listening, if the student reveals that they are particularly interested in video games they may be interested in pursuing a major in graphic design or computer science, if they are interested in reading then they may be interested in some kind of English or writing major. Riley also expressed that changing majors, is often not an issue for them even later in a student athlete's college career because of their knowledge of the university's curriculum allows them to know where different courses are applicable to make sure that they change to a major that will keep them eligible for participation in their sport.

Each of the advisors takes a different overall approach, but the result is the same in finding what it is that the student is personally interested in and not simply what they were told to study. The processes they use allows the student to discover their academic identity, envisioning their future, and take ownership of their academics. However, the goal of finding something that the student is personally interested in is to get them to be intrinsically motivated to succeed in their academics because it is something that they want to pursue outside of their athletic career.

This chapter makes is very clear that no two academic advisors for student athletes are the same. They all vary in how they got to their current positions, they all use different methodologies to advise their student athletes, and they all assess their student athlete's academic interests differently. Though their processes differ, there is a good deal of overlap in the desire to work with a special group of students realize their

potential in the classroom and prepare them for a life away from the sport that they are there to play. They want their student athletes to succeed both athletically and academically, they try to bridge the gap for their students by finding them an academic home in something they are intrinsically motivated to study as that will allow them to better succeed academically so that they are never in jeopardy of not participating athletically.

CHAPTER THREE: WHAT DO THEIR DAYS LOOK LIKE?

Daily Workload

For academic advisors of student athletes, the day to day operations is often a mixed bag where it could be the same everyday but one visit from a student could turn it on its head. There are commonalities among everyone such as grade tracking, emails, meetings with coaches, student progress reports, and of course meeting with students. However, some of the advisors I interviewed had some additional daily tasks that depend on special positions they hold or committees they are a part of at their universities. Again, each day *“largely depends on the student athletes and what issues they bring in that day”* as Jordan stated. But there are also seasonal differences that will cause the day to day to vary during those times, such as whether the academic advisor’s sports are currently in season or if NCAA certifications for progress toward degree are due. The day to day operations are not the only aspects of an academic advisors’ daily workload. One has to consider how many students they are responsible for and how frequently they meet with them, the administrative work that they have to do, as well as whether they work with other academic advisors on campus including non-academic ones.

Student Caseload

Most of the academic advisors are responsible for two whole sports, the exceptions being Payton who has three sports (two of which include a men's and women's team) and Taylor who only has one sport. Each advisor is responsible for around 70-120 students. Again, Taylor is an exception for this as they work primarily with a subset of the football team at their university, the first-year football players as they transition from high school to college. All of them like to have their students see them regularly. This is relatively easily accomplished because of the relationship building done by the academic advisors leads to many of the student athletes coming to see the advisors without having to be told to. However, there are some students that require some extra effort to get them to come in for meetings. Then there are some student athletes that the academic advisors require see them multiple times a week. For Avery, these meetings often end up informal as they may end up meeting at various places around the athletic building rather than being cooped up in their office, sometimes this is even impromptu if they happen to cross paths with one of their student athletes on campus. Riley and Taylor are both willing to stay later or work nights, if necessary, to ensure that students have access to them. All of the academic advisors report dealing with student athlete "*pop-in*" questions which can sometimes include non-academic questions such as relationship advice or troubles with coaches that student athletes may bring to them.

Administrative Work

Only two academic advisors ever really mentioned any sort of specific administrative work other than the generic day to day items like emails and grade

reports. These largely depend on being members of outside committees and positions that the academic advisor holds. For example, one of the advisors interviewed is on a committee that works on historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) involvement within that organization, and they sometimes have to take conference calls for that. One of the others is a supervisor for another section of the athletic department at their university and of course has to allocate some of their time to dealing with problems that may arise there. This sort of out of athletics administrative work is probably more common than what my modest sample makes it seem. Especially considering the existence of the National Association of Athletic Academic Advisors (N4A), which several of the advisors mentioned that they attend the annual convention, this association has several committees that academic advisors for student athletes have the opportunity to work with. There are of course also opportunities for academic advisors for student athletes to get involved within their own universities and athletic departments to have an impact on more than just the student athletes.

Working with Other Academic Advisors

Working with other academic advisors plays a major role in how all of the academic advisors for student athletes operate. Many of them work very closely with them to help them understand the specifics of the NCAA requirements and how that factors into how a student athlete's degree needs to progress over time. At the same time, the non-athletic advisors help keep the athletic advisors up to date on the requirements of the different majors. The athletic academic advisors often make a point of having their student athletes go to see their major's academic advisor for that very purpose. As Riley states, "*They'll know more about the classes, know more about*

policies, know more about what 's going to be required to graduate, and what classes are offered" while they should have some level of knowledge since they are the ones that are responsible for getting their student athletes registered for classes, but all of the athletic advisors send their student athletes to the specialists. For some of the advisors, they used to have a non-athletic advisor from each of the departments come to the athletic department for a day and do major specific advising within the athletic building, however this has changed in recent years and they now send their student athletes to the different departments on campus. Jordan, whose department used to do this, said the change was to make sure that the student athletes feel comfortable utilizing other advisors as a resource. Jordan also explained that their athletic department puts on events and training sessions that are for outside academic advisors to better educate them about the needs of student athletes and how that could impact their advising and academic needs. This was also apparent at Avery's university. Avery also mentioned that they work a lot with the undecided or exploratory department at their university, as they are a great help at advising student athletes that have yet to come to a decision on their major because that is what their advisors specialize in, I presume. There is also reason to believe that sending the student athletes to the departments around campus will force them to experience the different cultures that are harbored within the departments. The student athletes spend the vast majority of their day in the athletic building, the athletic dorm, and the other athletic facilities their universities offer and as a result end up only exposed to the athletic culture and are only aware of the events going on in athletics. Because the academic advisors have them go to the other departments, the student athletes become more aware of the other campus events,

particularly those that involve their major and are exposed to a different campus culture than what they are always around which furthers some of the academic advisor's goal of developing the student athletes as people.

CHAPTER FOUR:
WHAT DO THEY THINK OF THEIR STUDENT ATHLETES?

The academic advisors try to know their student athletes inside and out, and as a result know just how strenuous being one can be, even if they were not one themselves. As a result, the advisors have opinions on what it is like to work with student athletes, how they compare to non-student athletes, and offer some stories of some student athletes they have worked with over the years. To give context to the variation of sports, and by extension student athletes, they work with. The academic advisors interviewed are primarily responsible for non-revenue sports including men's and women's swimming and diving, men's and women's track and field, men's and women's cross country, baseball, men's and women's soccer, and women's tennis. Each advisor is currently responsible for at least two sports. There is some overlap as I had 3 track and field advisors and 2 swimming advisors. I had two definitive revenue advisors, both in football, however for one of them football is not their current appointment. There is one sport, women's basketball, that is traditionally considered a non-revenue sport, but the advisor's university is doing exceptionally well so it could be considered a revenue sport at the time of the interview.

Working with Student Athletes

The academic advisors again emphasized that they really want their student athletes to take ownership of their academics and the process of relationship building is an essential tool for them. A few new themes emerged for this section such as the schedules that student athletes have to operate on. The academic advisors want their student athletes to have a great understanding of what they are doing, such as why they are taking a certain class and a deeper understanding than simply that class being what the academic advisor and the student athlete agreed should be taken. As Payton explains,

I mean, they're adults. Right? And I don't look like a babysitter last time I checked. And I may, they may view me as their mother, but I am not. So, I would say that I one hundred percent expect the responsibility to primarily be with my students. I mean, I'm not going to work harder than they are on a degree that's not going to have my name on it. Right? So, at the end of the day, it's all their responsibility. So, my job is to support. My job is to provide resources. My job is to kind of help facilitate, to make it a little bit maybe smoother. I don't even want to say easier. But I think that sometimes a university can come with a lot of hoops to jump through that nobody understands how to jump through.

The academic advisors are a support system there to assist the student athletes during their time, they are not there to get their degree for them. However, unlike other resources the academic advisors know their student athletes on a personal level so that they can help keep them motivated to be successful, and of course help them develop as a person. The academic advisor also must be prepared to have hard discussions

with their student athletes, often in the case of poor academic performances. If the situation arises that the student athlete would not be able to participate in their sport because of their academic performance because of the major being too difficult for them to keep up, it may be necessary to have a discussion with them and weigh whether that major is worth their athletic career or if the major holds special meaning to them, at which point the academic advisors have the student make the decision to change their major to something that the student can better manage with their athletic schedule or discuss ways for them to better manage their time between athletics and academics or whatever the issue was for the student academically.

Working with student athletes does have its perks. The academic advisors get to work with the next generation of athletic superstars sometimes before they make it to the professional stage. Not only that but they are partially responsible for developing them as people that can properly represent themselves on that stage. For example, Riley mentioned that they get to work with a lot of Olympians and by extension international athletes that come to the United States to train with the coaches here. Each time that one of these student athletes comes through their programs, Riley is humbled by how successful the student athletes are. Taylor has even had the privilege of personally knowing and working with a student athlete that went pro and ended up winning a championship in their sport. So, some of the student athletes that walk into their offices are the future stars of the American athletic landscape, and for some even the International scene, which makes the trials and turbulence that they go through in college worth it for the academic advisors to help them through so that they can successfully reach that level.

Compared to the Rest of the Student Body

Of course, the most obvious comparison to be made is the strenuous schedule of student athletes. The student athletes they work with often have a fully packed schedule that runs 6-7 days a week, resulting in minimal time to dedicate to studies even if the student athlete wanted to put the effort into their studies, which as Avery mentioned may not always be the case because the student athlete may just not be all that interested in academics because they got to college based largely on their athletic prowess. I have come across a document from the University of Alabama that outlines the daily schedule of their football team in 2017 (Purinton et al 2017). Considering the prestige that comes with Alabama football, the regimen that comes with being on that team may be harder than the rest of the student athlete population, but it should still be able to show just how a student athlete's schedule may end up. The student athlete's days start at 6:15 A.M. when they wake up at the student athlete dorm, they have classes from 8-11:50 A.M. At 1 P.M. their daily practice begins with weightlifting, followed by pre-practice meetings, then finally actual practice from 3:30 to 5:30 P.M. This is followed by training room and treatment to prevent injuries. Dinner is at 6:30 P.M. and is followed by two and a half hours of tutoring and study hall at their student athlete academic center starting at 7 P.M. The day ends after this, where the student athletes return to the dorms and get ready to do it all again. All of the academic advisors I spoke to acknowledged how strenuous this schedule can be for student athletes. Some of them also note that there are some student populations that can be comparable in terms of schedule such as band, ROTC, and honors students, but the day in and day out requirements of student athletes beyond just what their schedule

ordains in order to stay at the top of their game and ahead of the competition can and will further add pressure on them. This sort of schedule is something that a non-student athlete will ever have to deal with. Riley, however, makes sure that their students know that the regular student body is working as hard as they are at their jobs to pay for their college tuition, that most student athletes are given through scholarships. Riley does this to keep their student athletes humble, a part of helping them develop as a person.

While it is most certainly the case that non-student athletes may work as hard as student athletes at their jobs, Payton notes that the expectations of student athletes are far different than students with a 20-hour per week job. Of course, there are physical and athletic demands that differ, but there are pressures on them to maintain their academics and then the less often thought about pressure to represent their university in everything they do. As Avery puts it, “...*they are at the forefront of the university, they are really the face of the university and it almost to an extent, they always joke and say, athletics is the front porch of any university. And you know, because they serve as just almost this representative, there's this silent bar that's there, they're held up against in the standard where they have to almost not be able to be themselves...*”. This means that student athletes are the first thing people associate with universities especially the universities that are often in the athletic spotlight. Academically speaking, student athletes are required to take 15 credit hours per semester, at least at Jordan’s university, which is typically about 5 classes in order to stay eligible for athletic participation. A regular student would be able to drop classes if they need to, but this option is not allowed for student athletes. Riley mentioned that there are some traits that they commonly see in student athletes, that help them deal with and meet the pressures

placed on them. Riley claims that student athletes have a tireless work ethic and superb time management. These are traits that instilled in them by participating in sport and are traits that can help them succeed in all facets of life, not just athletics and academics.

Interactions with Student Athletes

I asked of each of the advisors to tell me about a positive and negative interaction they have had with student athletes over their careers, if they were able to and would like to share the experience. To my surprise, they were all very willing to tell their stories. I was expecting them to be more reserved when describing what goes on behind closed doors with students. There was a lot of variation for what the stories entailed, some of them even told stories that did not have to do directly with an advising session directly, but rather stories of the successes and failures of the students overall that stood out to them.

All of the academic advisors said that the positives far outnumbered the negatives when it comes to working with student athletes. Some of the academic advisors gave a story of a success story. Taylor told a story about a former player that came to them in their first year in tears because they failed a test exclaiming that academics is not for them, fast forward a few years, and that student is graduating early and recently participated in one of the United States' marquee sports championship. Taylor had helped them realized that that one test would not decide their future and assisted them getting back on track. According to Taylor, that kind of student and their success story is "*the goal of their job*". Similarly, Jordan said that their positive interactions with students occurs when the student athlete just comes to their office to tell them how well they had done on a test, and they love to see that that student athlete

is proud of themselves for how hard they worked to get their good grades. Riley gave a success story as well, but one less focused on academic success, but rather a systematic success. In their story, a major international student athlete was unable to get their professional VISA to train for their sport in the United States, and they were not planning on attending school leading up to a major international competition. Well, they ended up showing up to take classes using a student VISA they had already had. Riley had worked hard with the student athlete and were able to get them in classes just in time by working with their international student center. This resolution made everyone involved, including the student's home national federation, happy with the result. Aside from success stories, there were stories of offering a safe space for student athletes to come and talk about their problems and ultimately problem solve to rectify their problems, as was in Avery and Payton's cases. These two, as well as Riley, mentioned that they exercise an "*open door policy*" where their student athletes may come to or contact them at any time to simply chat, to ask questions, or to seek help with an thing that the student athletes may need to talk to them about. This helps the academic advisors and the student athletes to build the relationship that allows for effective advising that the academic advisors have said are especially important.

While they are rare occurrences, likely due to the relationship building efforts of the academic advisors, negative interactions with student athletes do happen from time to time. The advisors' negative interactions with students are thematically similar in that the student athletes were not being transparent with situations that were occurring in the classroom or just generally not wanting to listen to anything the academic advisor has to say. This can have to do with not taking accountability for their academics, not showing

the respect that they are expected to have, and not being truthful. Taylor, as previously mentioned, had the blame placed on them by their student athlete for the decisions made by the student athlete. Riley had a more intricate situation where a student athlete was blaming another student athlete for the former being found out by the academic advisor for skipping class. Ultimately, this ended up with a situation in which the student athlete was implying that the academic advisor was a liar, thus breaking the relationship they had built up to that point. Where the student athlete had to be passed off to an intern under the academic advisor, because even though the academic advisor is still responsible for their academics, they could no longer work with the student because of the severed relationship. Other times, as was in the story Avery told, their office became a place for an international student athlete to come to their office and rant about how much they did not like the United States. Avery speculated this was due to their experience coming to the United States was not the greatest, but eventually the student athlete left the university and likely the United States altogether.

CHAPTER FIVE: WHERE ARE THEY SITUATED IN THE COLLEGE CAMPUS STRUCTURE?

Departments

At a first glance, one may suspect that an academic advisor that works with student athletes may be hired by a university's athletic department rather than through the department that other academic advisors are hired by, however this is not accurate. According to the advisors that I interviewed, all except for one of them were contracted through their university's version of undergraduate studies, they are simply housed in and responsible for athletics. To my understanding, this is the same for non-athletic advisors as they are also contracted through undergraduate studies and are dispersed to work in their respective departments on campus. The undergraduate studies department may have a different name depending on the university you look at, but its function is to support undergraduate education are the same at each university, so I will be referring to these departments as undergraduate studies for ease. Some of the advisors specified a specific branch within undergraduate studies, the majority of which were academic services or something academic advising related, but again this could be due to variances between universities. The one exception, who did not follow this model, was Riley. At Riley's university, all of the athletic advisors are employed by the university, but according to Riley, about 85% of the academic advisors at their university

are employed through the athletic association, meaning the athletic department hired their own advisors. However, Riley said that they are the only university board hired athletic advisor. I suspect, some of the discrepancies may be attributed to older practices as Riley has been advising at their university for 32 years. Regardless of Riley's situation, their university is the only one of the three that the athletic department is responsible for their advisor hires. Furthermore, Riley is the only one to not mention a major benefit to be hired by undergraduate studies, which is protection. The other academic advisors said that their contracts being through undergraduate studies protects them from pressures from the athletic department so that "*they can do their jobs freely*" as Avery put it. Jordan added on to this by stating that it gives them an extra layer of integrity and accountability from an academic perspective, which was echoed by Payton. This sort of system comes in handy in a scenario that Avery gave, "*when a coach for example expects something from you [the academic advisor] that is outside of the advisor's contract or tries to pin something against the advisor*", the academic advisors are then not held responsible for doing the athletic department's bidding and potentially put academic integrity at risk if a star athlete is at risk of not being able to play their sport. Additionally, Taylor, Payton, and Jordan all shared the sentiment that this dual association helps with actual advising, because it allows them to have more seamless communication between not only undergraduate studies and athletics, but also to the other departments on campus through undergraduate studies. This helps them stay aware of everchanging academic policies that could greatly impact their student populations, but also keeping them involved in the larger campus discussion on academics rather than being completely isolated in athletics and being unaware of the

rest of the academic landscape at the university, and of course all of these aspects make the job of an academic advisor easier according to them.

Reporting Lines

This was a topic that each of the advisors had to take a second to think about, leading me to think that this is not something they often think about or is something that comes so naturally that they had to think about which people I was actually asking about. Again, with one exception, the overall consensus was that athletic academic advisors report to more than one person. These people include someone in undergraduate studies and someone in athletics. The person in athletics is typically an associate athletic director, while the person in undergraduate studies is the assistant dean of undergraduate studies. For some, the line in athletics goes from an associate athletic director for academics, who then reports to a senior associate director of athletics. The senior associate director of athletics was also reported to be in constant communication with the assistant dean of undergraduate studies. This can cause a slight dilemma, as Payton states, "*Ultimately, the people who hire and fire [in undergraduate studies] are highly influenced by athletics.*" However, I posit that this is not a major dilemma because undergraduate studies have the final say as the contract for the academic advisors reside there, rather than athletics. So, if there is some issue athletics is having with an academic advisor, while they will have input and influence, if the academic advisor is doing what their undergraduate studies contract states, then there are no grounds for firing all together. However, there is one caveat, being athletics likely has more push and pull when it comes to who they get put in to athletic academic advisor positions and who gets moved out of athletics, which is better than outright firing

in my personal opinion, but is nevertheless a concerning conversation to have for future research.

Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedure vary between the universities, as do programs that the university may or may not have available to them because of local organizations or investments. However, all of the athletic departments fall under the umbrella of the NCAA rules and regulations in addition to their own universities. This can cause some friction at times that may make an academic advisor's job more difficult due to having to juggle both sets of rules. It appears that regardless of having to juggle both, the number one priority for the academic advisors is, unanimously, the progress-toward-degree requirements of the NCAA. This required that student athletes maintain sufficient progress toward completing their degree over a 5-year period to remain eligible for athletic participation. While this is a number one priority for athletic academic advisors, it comes with its own set of difficulties. This can include student athletes having to maintain a 15-credit hour, or a full-time, schedule to meet the demands which can be hard to do especially if a student falls behind in a class. They cannot drop it due to the requirements, and as a result have to figure something out to get a passing grade in the course all while managing other classes and their athletic schedule on top of that. Additionally, for some of the academic advisors there are university policies that encourage and strongly push to graduate students in four years. This forces the advisor to seek an exemption for the student athlete if graduating in five years is more appropriate for them, which can prove to be challenging to get. This results in the student athlete to have to take a hit on their GPA and move them closer to being

ineligible to play even though they would have been fine by NCAA standards if it weren't for the university's initiative. The progress-towards-degree requirements can also prove to be challenging if a student wishes to change majors, as certain credits or courses completed in one major cannot be transferred to the new major resulting in a student being behind in their progress-towards-degree requirements and at risk of being ineligible to play. This is why advisors like Riley and Avery try to get ahead of the game and put students in majors where they will be happy before they get to the "*point of no return*" on their progress, which is typically the student athlete's fifth semester, or the first half of their second year.

While NCAA's progress-toward-degree requirement is a priority, it is not the only policy that can pose an issue for athletic academic advisors. Some of the other procedures that can impede advisors include the process of accommodation student athletes while they are traveling for competition. These accommodations are for testing and homework, so if a student has been competing all day long and they have an assignment due in the evening, they often are left with a small window to complete that assignment. Riley's university has a specific policy that protects the student athletes at university sponsored athletic events, by having professors make reasonable accommodations, but Riley claims this can still pose problems at times. Others have issues keeping up with the ever-changing university policies, especially in admissions, where students with great athletic potential may not be allowed into the university because of hard pushes into "*super elite academics*". Going further, one of the academic advisors had an issue with not being allowed to "*put pen to paper*" for their student athletes. While this may be obvious from an academic integrity standpoint, there

is a point where it gets “*ridiculous*” for the academic advisor. They are not allowed to even write on a student’s paper to capitalize a word when proofreading a paper, if asked. They have to verbally tell the student that instead. Additionally, the student athletes at that university are under an internal policy that does not permit student athletes to take tests and quizzes on the academic advising floor of the athletic building, which proves inconvenient for student athletes, but also the academic advisors who would otherwise be unable to proctor make-up exams if requested by professors or otherwise monitor a student athlete to ensure they are not cheating in some way. Avery mentioned another, similar issue of giving “*special benefits*” to student athletes. At their university, student athletes cannot receive anything additional that a normal student wouldn’t receive. An example Avery gave for this was,

Let's say, I'm driving on campus somewhere, and, you know, torrential weather happens, bad, just out of nowhere. And I see one of my student athletes and they're running, you know, well, I can pick them up in that case, because it's not a special benefit to give a student athlete a ride, when there's bad weather. But if I saw them and if it was a day like this [nice day, clear skies], and I wanted to give him a ride because I was on the way to the stadium, it's a 'no man, you gotta walk there'. So, it's unfortunate, you know, it's, it can get a little crazy with how the rules are...

Additionally, Avery refers to pay-to-play and social media presence as hot topics among policy making for student athletes in recent debates on the topic. The specificity of some of the rules when it comes to working with student athletes can demonstrate the mindfulness that must be present to work with this student population.

When asked to come up with a way to change a policy or procedure to make their job easier, some could not come up with a concrete way, but the others gave ways for dealing with problems. One of the advisors said they refer to the ombudsperson, formerly known as an ombudsman. As this was a new term to me, I had the academic advisor describe this person to me and they defined this person as someone that “*has full and universal and omnipotent power over the university to change and make changes*”, and has even said that going to this person in the past has proved successful for the athletic department if they have come across unfair practices within the university, such as in academic department specific make-up policies for example. Others simply bring their concerns to whomever is their representative on councils for academic advising at their university so that they can address it and emphasize how certain policies may impact student athletes.

CHAPTER SIX:

WHAT ARE THEY FOR AND WHAT DO THEY ACTUALLY DO?

Roles and Responsibilities

The formal and informal roles and responsibilities of the athletic academic advisors interestingly has some small variation in the phrasing between the advisors according to what they told me, again however there is a major focus on the progress-towards-degree and student athletes maintaining eligibility among them all. There are also some minor themes of empowerment of student athletes, supporting them, and facilitating their growth not only athletically but also academically. As Payton puts it, *“it is their job to support student athletes, provide resources, and facilitate their time at university”*. Payton went on to say,

We're asking them [student athletes] to do a time management hopscotch, you know, and to be able to navigate through that and on top of that, we're going to ask them to travel for this job. We're going to ask them to miss classes, we're going to ask them to sometimes be hurt. You know, whether physically like sore or like injury that might have a knee surgery. And they might have to figure out how to navigate their six weeks on crutches you know, and other things. So, my job is just to kind of help facilitate all of that.

This encompasses the majority of what the academic advisors had to say, however they each had their own personal variations such as Avery, who included the responsibility of empowering the student athletes in their academics to be more involved and pursue what they want to do beyond college sports. Jordan referred to athletic academic advisors as “*a jack of all trades*”, where they have to know each of the academic programs at their university to some degree, but they do not have to know it to the degree that a specialized academic advisor would need to. Payton also said that they have to be able to connect with other areas on campus if needed, such as international studies and student services so that they have the resources necessary to their job. This also includes the other academic advisors on campus so that they have connections with people to send their students athletes to for more specialized advising. Taylor and Riley both provided a more formal job description of their responsibilities. Taylor said that they have to make sure that NCAA and institution requirements are being met for their student athletes, as well as the progress-towards-degree requirements and making sure that their students are taking the right classes to meet that. Taylor also mentioned that they have a few additional responsibilities such as being a degree completionist coordinator, which assists former student athletes that left school early for professional sports careers that want to come back to the university to complete their degree. Riley said they are “*required to advise and counsel all student athletes that pertain to anything that is related to their university, their graduation, or their curriculum. They are required to help in their transition from high school to college and am personally responsible for their whole academic record and academic career at their university, including NCAA rules that apply as well*”, this being an extremely formal

description. Of course, this could be due to Riley having many years under their belt to get the formal job description dedicated to memory. All of the academic advisors interviewed reference their NCAA requirements, again highlighting how important those requirements are in the work of athletic academic advisors. Secondary responsibilities include making sure that the student athletes have access to the resources available to them, making sure that the student athlete is having a smooth academic life, and promoting the student athlete's growth.

How do They Accomplish These?

The responsibilities are similar between them with variation in how they actually describe them, the means by which the academic advisors actually accomplish these responsibilities are also similar. All of the advisors utilize tracking and mapping of their student athletes to ensure academic progress and eligibility at all times. However, some have differing methods for doing this such as, Avery who puts effort into tracking via spreadsheets versus Riley who chooses to not use spreadsheets as heavily and instead opts for checking on specific students that they know were borderline or that they know are coming to see them that day before that student arrives at their office. This intrusive access into the student athletes' academics is the primary way for all of the athletic academic advisors to monitor their student's grades and academic progress. When a student does slip up and ends up needing the extra support to get back on track to maintain eligibility and or sufficient progress on their degree, weekly meetings with those students to address their academics, sometimes if the situation is dire, they will meet more frequently. For Payton, who outlined their process of meeting with students, they try to meet with all 120 between themselves, their assistant academic coordinator,

and any interns they have at their disposal. The first group they meet with are freshmen that are there on scholarship at least for their first semester to ensure a smooth transition from high school and getting acclimated to college life, the same applies to transfer students to ensure that they get used to life at a different campus. Then they move on to the “*risky*” students who are these that are near a 2.0 GPA, typically up to 2.5-6. These students are required to come in because they are the most borderline to not be on track for their degree and not be eligible to participate in their sport. The rest of their students are seen on an as necessary basis but are still required to come in at some point. Another key aspect to completing their responsibilities, is being knowledgeable about the different degree paths offered by their university. This ties in to being able to adequately track their students and knowing where they are at in their degree and what comes next for that student academically.

What do They do for Their Students?

The athletic academic advisors have more specific responsibilities that are dedicated to their students specifically. These largely entail creating a supportive environment for their student athletes, aside from keeping them on track in their academics. This could take the form of offering a safe space for their student athletes to voice their problems and problem solve. This can include fielding problems away from academics and athletics, even though that is not necessarily their responsibility until it starts affecting their academics. Riley at one point during the interview said that the job is not as much academic advising as it is “*academic counselling*” at times. The relationship building comes back into play here because the academic advisors need to have that relationship to properly address these issues that may not be evident from

their grades and progress reports. The checklists that Taylor makes for some of their students are also an example of something that an academic advisor would do for their students. Taylor also mentions that it is very important for academic advisors that do have constant communication and interaction with their students to know when to take a step back from their students so that they do not become too dependent on the advisor, hindering their growth as an independent member of society. The athletic academic advisors when it comes to the students have to offer them just enough support that they can maintain eligibility, they can grow as people, and facilitate the learning process while being under the extra pressures that come from being a student athlete.

What do They Expect of Their Students?

The academic advisors are not the only ones that have the responsibilities in the relationship. The academic advisors will give their student athletes responsibilities to complete away from the advisor's office. Sometimes they can be simple. This is the case with Avery, who only expects their students to follow three basic rules: to be respectful, to be themselves, and to do their best. Avery had previously tried an approach that had their student athletes follow long guidelines, but they soon found out that the student athletes would only follow a few of them, so they decided that they shouldn't be overbearing on the already pressured student athletes. Avery believes that if the student athletes follow those general rules, that all of the other things that are expected of them by their coaches and professors will come naturally. Jordan and Payton both expect their student athletes to use the resources that are available to them, the major advisors in particular. Essentially, this comes down to taking responsibility for their academics. The student athletes should use the resources

available to them to be the best student they can be, because as Payton says *“it is their [the student athlete’s] name on the degree, so they [the academic advisor] will not be the one working hard to get it”*. On a similar thought, Riley expects that their student athletes become experts in the field they are majoring in. Meaning, the students should be able to think for themselves about their academics and what is going on in their classes rather than coming to see the athletic advisor to tell them about what to take next all the time. All of these responsibilities placed on the student athletes, strive to achieve the development and growth of the student athlete and making them not dependent on the athletic academic advisors, as there is always the chance that they will fail at their job at times because they are ultimately human.

What Does Their Department Have Them do?

The departments that the academic advisors belong to, as we have seen to be both undergraduate studies and athletics, place certain responsibilities on their academic advisors as a part of their job and role within the departments. Most of the responsibilities that academic advisors get from their departments again have to do with keeping their student athletes on track with both the universities and the NCAA’s requirements. To do this for the department specifically, there is administrative work involved. This includes the previously mentioned tracking, but also making sure that everyone that needs to know about a student’s academic situation is aware of it such as coaches and administrators. The departments, particularly the athletic department, expect their academic advisors to know that there is more at stake than just a student athlete passing or failing a class. Coaches jobs, for example, may be at risk if a high-profile student athlete is unable to compete. The athletic and overall prestige of the

school may be at risk if star student athletes cannot compete. Acknowledging possibilities like these are important to keep the athletic academic advisors aware of their actions and to make sure that they are considering the choices and options they give student athletes with the upmost care.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSIONS AND WHAT SHOULD BE EXPLORED FURTHER

Returning to my research questions, the academic advisors I interviewed revealed how essential they are to the academic, and by extension athletic, college lives of student athletes. We have seen all the intertwining facets of their work such as the connections between building a trusting relationship with their student athletes leading to effective academic advising and being made more aware of the student athlete's personal life, interests, and concerns as a result. While this is not something that is not specified as a part of their job, all of them emphasized its importance in the role of being an athletic academic advisor. By building a trusting relationship with the student athletes, the athletic academic advisor is able to offer the student athlete a place to come and let their problems out so that they can work together on a solution. Additionally, the academic advisor gets insights into what the student athlete has interests in other than sports and is then able to help them discover an intrinsic motivation to succeed in academics by helping them pick an academic major they will be able to enjoy. We have seen the formal responsibilities that are actually required of their job, such as the progress reports, monitoring student athlete progress-toward degree, and the methods they use to accomplish these tasks such as having intrusive access into their students academics and meeting with students to make sure they are

staying on track. Regrettably, I am unable to pinpoint differences in revenue and non-revenue sports and the expectations of academic advisors in those two distinctions of college sports due to how few revenue sports academic advisors were in my modest sample. However, I can speculate that because academic advisors are often responsible for multiple sports, which may include both a revenue and non-revenue sport for one advisor, there likely will not be a difference between the two. Instead, the athletic academic advisors would have one set of roles and responsibilities, and personal style of advising, applied to both sports they work with regardless of the sport's revenue standing. Finally, the relationship between the athletic department, at least with regards to the academic advisors, and the academic departments on campus work far more closely together than I had expected before conducting the interviews. The major academic advisors on campus are the experts in their respective fields and the athletic academic advisors will willingly send their students to them for more specialized academic advising and to ensure that the major has not changed their requirements for the degree. Additionally, the athletic academic advisors will communicate the specific needs and situations of the student athlete populations to the major academic advisors so that everyone involved with student athletes are aware of what student athletes need to be successful students and athletes during their time in college.

This exploratory thesis ultimately serves the purpose of educating people about who academic advisors for student athletes are and how important they are to the success of the student athletes. These people are overlooked within literature despite playing such a pivotal role in how a student athlete goes about not only their academics but also their development while in college. Additionally, I have shown some of the trials

that athletic academic advisors face within their line of work, placing them in a unique population of their own, similar to the groups of unique students they look to empower. Finally, I also reveal some of the methods and philosophies that this kind of academic advisor uses. This allows others to see that athletic academic advisors appear to use a combination of both an intrusive and developmental model, sometimes called a holistic approach, to ensure that their student athletes are meeting their academic requirements and at the same time helping them develop as people that are capable of succeeding after college even if they do not continue into professional sports. This holistic approach appears to be the most common among my sample and to my understanding yields the best student athlete outcomes. The holistic approach will need to be looked at further to see if this approach to academic advising really does produce the best possible outcomes for student athletes and how widely it is adopted among athletic academic advisors.

Limitations

Within my study, there are several limitations. First, this is an exploratory study, so the sample was limited in scale and scope. These findings are not representative of the entire experience of how athletic academic advisors fit into the lives of their student athletes. The academic advisors I interviewed were from a specific kind of university in a single state in the United States. This could be expanded further to look at other NCAA divisions to see if there are differences between the NCAA levels, such as having less at stake because there is less notoriety for division II and III sports programs. Additionally, there may prove to be different advising processes at smaller universities or universities outside of the state of Florida. However, I speculate that there are likely

parallels specifically in the amount of access athletic academic advisors have to their students' academics because it appears to be an integral part of what they do.

Secondly, I admit that I am a novice interviewer. Someone with significantly more experience with conducting interviews could most likely discern where and when during an interview to dig deeper and probe into what an athletic academic advisor is saying at any given time and produce results that reveal far more information than a novice such as myself was able to obtain. Finally, the level of access to the desired population I had was relatively poor. This is largely because I had no prior connections to academic advisors at any university of interest in my study. This caused me to have to hope that my recruitment method was sufficient enough for attracting participants. As a result, I was unable to get many interviews. Additionally, I only used a single recruitment method, which was emailing the academic advisors directly. This proved problematic because of university email filters that are applied to all emails at a given university may flag or mark any email from outside of that university as suspicious or spam, as I found out from one of the responses to my recruitment email which still had the spam flag attached in the response I received. Other methods could include more physical recruitment methods such as meeting them in person at academic advising conventions that occur annually and may be attended by persons of interest. Recruitment over social networking sites such as LinkedIn or using snowball sampling from a single advisor to connect with other academic advisors they have previously worked alongside may be other recruitment options.

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Appendix A:
Recruitment E-Mail

Greetings.

My name is Max Murray and I am a graduate student at the University of South Florida in the Department of Sociology. I am conducting research how academic advisors for student athletes fulfill their role in the lives of the student athletes. I feel that academic advisors for student athletes are underrepresented in the research on college athletics. I am emailing you to ask if you are willing to participate in an interview for my research project. Participation is voluntary and responses will be kept anonymous.

The IRB study number is Pro00041564.

The time commitment to the study is approximately 1 hour for an interview.

Phone or Skype interviews are available as an option if that is more convenient for you.

An interview guide that features my full research questions as well as a list of questions that will be asked in the interview will be provided per request.

If you are interested or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at mmurray6@mail.usf.edu.

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B:

Informed Verbal Consent Form



Script for Obtaining Verbal Informed Consent

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Title: The Academics Behind the Athletics: The Academic Advisor's Role in the Lives of Student Athletes

Pro # 00041564

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Max Murray who is a Graduate Student at/in the University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Will Tyson. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at the University of South Florida. The purpose of the study is to find out the roles and responsibilities of academic advisors for student athletes in the lives of the student athletes. Additionally, the study will look at how the academic advisor fulfills their roles and how various influences impact their work. The research will be carried out using a single interview that will last about one hour.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you are an academic advisor that interacts with student athletes and are employed by a large Florida based university.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you

start. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. There is no cost to participate. You will not be compensated for your participation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: Max Murray (Principal Investigator), Will Tyson (Advising Professor), and The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Your information or samples collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will NOT be used or distributed for future research studies.

Data collected for this research will be stored at the College of Arts and Sciences, located at the University of South Florida in the United States.

Your personal information collected for this research will be kept as long as it is needed to conduct this research. Once your participation in the research is over, your information will be stored in accordance with applicable policies and regulations. Your permission to use your personal data will not expire unless you withdraw it in writing. You may withdraw or take away your permission to use and disclose your information at any time. You do this by sending written notice to the Principal Investigator at the following address:

Max Murray
Department of Sociology
CPR 107
University of South Florida
4202 E. Fowler Avenue
Tampa, FL 33620

While we are conducting the research study, we cannot let you see or copy the research information we have about you. After the research is completed, you have a right to see the information about you, as allowed by USF policies.

If you have concerns about the use or storage of your personal information, you have a right to lodge a complaint with the data supervisory authority in your country.

Would you like to participate in this study?

Appendix C:

Interview Guide

Primary Research Questions

1. How do academic advisors define the formal and informal roles they play in the lives of student-athletes?
2. How are academic advisors fulfilling their roles in the academic and athletic lives of the student athlete?
3. How do the roles and responsibilities of athletes in revenue and non-revenue sports differ and how do these differences impact expectations of academic advisors for these sports?
4. How can athletic departments and academic departments work together to improve student athlete academic outcomes?

Interview Questions

- How long have you been working in the field of academic advising?
 - How long have you been advising athletes specifically?
- How did you decide you wanted to be an academic advisor?
 - Why student athletes?

-
- What are your responsibilities as an advisor of student athletes?

- How do you accomplish those responsibilities?
 - What are the responsibilities of the student athletes you advise?
 - What kinds of expectations do you have for your students?
 - Within your knowledge of the field of academic advising, what differentiates advising student athletes from the general student body?
 - What, if any, implications do these differences have on student outcomes?
 - Is there an advising method that you believe is superior for working with student athletes? For the general student body?
-

- Describe a typical work day of an academic advisor for student athletes.
- How do you gauge your student's academic interests?
 - Is it difficult to match a student athlete's interests to a major that is offered at your university?
 - Can you explain what makes it more or less difficult to match a student's interest to a major?
- Describe a positive and a negative advising interaction you have had with a student athlete, if able.
- I'm Going to describe two student-athletes. Please answer the questions at the end of each description.
 - A student is entering college on a sports scholarship, the student shows decent aptitude for academics, but did not apply themselves in high school and as a result ended up with borderline grades ranging B's, C's, and a few D's. A colleague of yours was assigned as their advisor. This

colleague decided to lay out exactly what this student needed to do for their academics, such as telling them take classes X, Y, and Z. Did your colleague handle this student well? Why?

- A different student athlete is on track to graduate in 4 years after completing their second year. A colleague has already been handling this student through their first two years, and over that time the student and the advisor have had several discussions on how to proceed academically. This student is doing well enough to earn B's and C's. Your colleague plans to have fewer discussion with this student going forward over the next two years. Is your colleague making the right decision? Why?

-
- What department do you belong to on campus?
 - Does being affiliated with this department affect how you fulfill your responsibilities, such as NCAA regulations or university policies? How?
 - Do you have specific reporting lines on student athlete progress? Does this extend beyond just your department? How does this affect your role?
 - Do you coordinate with academic advisors for the general student body?
 - Y – How so and what affect does it have on your work?
 - N – Do you believe there should be more coordination? Why?
 - What policies or procedures pose the greatest challenge to your work, and how would you change them if you could?

- Have these procedures ever resulted in a disagreement? How was this disagreement resolved?

Appendix D:

Codebook

- Advising Philosophy
 - Gauging Student Athlete Interests
- Advisor Background
- Coordination with Other Advisors
- Daily Workload
 - Administrative
 - Student Athletes
- Decision to Advise
- Departments
 - Reporting Lines
 - Responsibilities to the Department
- Interactions with Student Athletes
 - Negative
 - Positive
- Policies and Procedures
 - Changes Advisors Would Make
 - Difficulties Advisors Experience with Policies and Procedures
- Responsibilities
 - How Accomplished
 - Placed on the Student Athletes
 - To the Student Athletes
 - To the Departments
- Views on Student Athletes

- Vs Regular Student Body
- Working with Student Athletes