**THE IDEA IN BRIEF**

**Post-Eligibility Career Preparation of NCAA Division I Female Athletes**

- Female student-athletes report value in their experiences as student-athletes, but indicate that these experiences alone are not enough for them to start a career outside of athletics.

- Learning opportunities which may help gain entry into their chosen field such as internships, study abroad programs, membership in organizations, or attending events in support of their major were limited.

- Female student-athletes reported unfamiliarity with student services available on-campus that are positioned outside of the athletic department.

- Role conflict between their student role and athletic role also contributed to the lack of preparation for post-eligibility career transitions.
Athletic departments should be given more discretion to allow student-athletes to reduce the number of required credit hours per semester should the student elect to engage in a bona fide professional development experience, such as an internship.

- Does our athletic department create and encourage professional development programming for student-athletes based on their individual career interests?
- Does our athletic department career development policies support opportunities of the entire student-athlete population?
- Does our athletic department partner with other on-campus career development programs located outside of the athletic department?
- What types of experiential learning or internship opportunities are available for student-athletes that fit within the academic and athletic responsibilities, and in support the student-athletes' career interests?

RESOURCES

NCAA - Career in Sports Forum
http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/leadership-development-programs-and-resources/career-sports-forum

Athletes to Business
http://www.athletestobusiness.com/

Career Athletes - Student-Athlete Professional Networking
https://www.careerathletes.com/colleges.php
About the Working Paper Series

The Center for Leadership in Athletics at the University of Washington proudly presents the *Issues in Intercollegiate Athletic Leadership Working Paper Series*.

The purpose of the series is to highlight topics specific to the intercollegiate athletics setting and discuss the implications of this research for athletic leaders. The *Implications For Research* section features key ideas and considerations for applying this research in practice.

This paper highlights the work of Markesha Henderson from the University of West Georgia, titled “Preparation Pitfalls: An Examination of Female Student-Athlete Post-Competition Transition.”

This paper used a qualitative approach in order to capture and understand how female student-athletes at the end of their eligibility in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic programs perceive their preparedness for post-collegiate careers. This work has the strongest implications for leadership involved with student-athlete development, life skills, and transition preparation.

Special thanks the following faculty for their contribution to the Working Paper Series as reviewers:

**Michael Fulford, Ph.D.**
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Research Summary

Transitions are defined as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 33). A particular transition unique to student-athletes in comparison to other college students is the end of their collegiate athletic eligibility. Intercollegiate athletes also face schedule demands that make it prohibitive for them to engage in co-curricular activities, internships and professional development opportunities that are offered on campus. The purpose of this study is to understand how female student-athletes at the end of their eligibility in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic programs perceive their preparedness for post-collegiate careers. Using basic interpretive qualitative research methods and interview protocol developed from Schlossberg’s theory of transition, 20 female participants in NCAA Division I intercollegiate sports were asked to describe the situation surrounding the end of their collegiate sports career and their post-competition plans, the support they received to prepare for careers, the strategies they used to prepare, and their own self-assessment of their transition (Schlossberg, 1981; Goodman, Schlossberg and Anderson, 2006).

The findings are grouped into the following themes: (1) career development experiences, (2) transition experiences, (3) transferability of athletic skills, (4) support from coaches, and (5) outside the bubble. Participants reported having sufficient resources at their institutions to be prepared for their lives post-competition, but because of their schedule demands, lacked experience they felt necessary to gain entry into their chosen professions. The lack of experiential learning opportunities and unfamiliarity with student services outside of athletics contributed to their feelings of inadequate preparation. Implications for this research are to help student affairs practitioners, athletic administrators, faculty, and coaches better understand the areas that impede student-athlete career development.
About the Author

Markesha Henderson is currently an Assistant Professor in the Sport Management program at the University of West Georgia. Dr. Henderson earned a Doctor of Education in Higher Education Administration at The George Washington University. As a student she served as a research assistant in the Department of Educational Leadership and was chair of the Educational Symposium for Research and Innovations (ESRI), a scholarly conference that showcases emerging research of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development. Her dissertation research examined the career development experiences of Division I female student-athletes and she will continue to build a research agenda around intercollegiate athletics on the higher education landscape.

Dr. Henderson took a unique path to the academy will be beneficial as she pursues a career in higher education student-affairs. She attended University of Wisconsin-Madison on a track and field scholarship and is a two-time All-American and National Champion. After graduating with baccalaureate degrees in both Journalism and Communication Arts she started her career in journalism as an Assignment Coordinator at CNN. Her work as a journalist would later prove beneficial to her work as a qualitative researcher as she developed proficiencies in interviewing and research using an inductive approach.

She earned her Master’s degree in Sport Administration from Georgia State University with an emphasis in school, college, and professional sport management and worked as a senior-level athletics administrator on both on the NCAA Division I and Division II levels of intercollegiate athletics. She served in multiple capacities such as managing television contracts, negotiating corporate sponsorship agreements, and participating in conference governance and sport oversight. However, it was her work as the advisor to the student-athlete advisory committee and facilitating sessions for the NCAA in student-leadership development that she developed an interest in college student development.

Her decision to join the academy came from a desire to make scholarly contributions to higher education and use research to inform policy and practice in intercollegiate athletics. She is involved in multiple professional associations, including the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), where she serves as Chair of the Commission for Recreation and Athletics. Along with her work in intercollegiate athletics, Dr. Henderson has published work on role conflict. Her first publication, “The Myth and Mismatch of Balance: Black Female Constructions of Balance, Integration, and Negotiations of Work and Life” appeared in an edited volume Experiences of Single African-American Women Professors (Lexington). She is currently completing a second publication on mothering while pursing tenure entitled “Clashing Clocks: Black Women Professors’ Perceptions of Parenting on the Tenure Clock”. In addition to her scholarly pursuits, Dr. Henderson is the Executive Director of Operation P.L.A.Y., a non-profit organization dedicated to childhood obesity awareness and prevention in Georgia.

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Preparation Pitfalls: An Examination of Female Student-Athlete Post-Competition Transition

Markesha Henderson

University of West Georgia
At some institutions, sports are an integral part of the collegiate experience. Aside from the contests themselves, institutions hope athletics can serve as a catalyst for prestige, encourage enrollment, and entice donors (Suggs, 2009). As a result of the heightened attention and importance placed on intercollegiate athletics, student-athletes may find themselves under increased pressure and scrutiny (Foster, 2003). Although sports are often used to integrate the student body and build a sense of community on campus, the student-athletes themselves may be socially isolated (Watt & Moore, 2001; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000).

Bowen and Levin (2003) suggest there is “a growing divide between intercollegiate athletics and the academic missions” of institutions (p. 2). In their study with over 33 schools and over 27,000 student-athletes, they found student-athletes spend more time on sports than other members of the student body spend on co-curricular involvement. For example, performing arts students and students involved in media such as the campus newspaper spend approximately 10 hours per week on their activities whereas student-athletes spend a minimum of 20 hours per week (Bowen & Levin, 2003).

Student-athletes who devote a considerable amount of time to their sport and less time exploring other interests may gravitate toward sport-related careers after college because they may feel it is an area where they have the most experience and competence. However, limited opportunities in professional sport participation, coaching, and athletic administration for women make it difficult for women athletes to pursue post-collegiate career opportunities in sports (Hoffman, 2011). Opportunities to play professional sports are limited for both male and female
athletes, but there are far fewer professional leagues and associations available for female athletes than for their male counterparts. In the United States, the most prominent professional leagues or associations that exist for women are the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), Women’s Professional Soccer (WPS), the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) and the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA). According to Forbes’ “Top Ten Highest Paid Female Athletes” list, a majority of the top earners in women’s sports are tennis players (Badenhausen, 2011). Much of the income from professional sport participation comes from commercial endorsement contracts rather than from salary. Men not only have professional sport participation opportunities in basketball, soccer, golf, and tennis, there are additional opportunities in Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL), and the National Hockey League (NHL). Professional athletes in these three leagues in particular, earn some of the highest salaries in professional sports. The disparity in female athlete compensation compared to male athletes is evident considering the top-ten highest paid female athletes earn a collective $114 million, while the top-ten highest paid male athletes earn $445 million combined (Badenhausen, 2011).

Women also face disadvantages in the job market when pursuing careers in coaching and sport administration. The outlook for women coaches has drastically declined, considering before Title IX was enacted in 1972, more than 90 percent of women’s teams were coached by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2010), but in 2010 only 40 percent of women’s teams were coached by women (Lapchick, 2010). Women also face barriers to obtaining senior-level positions in sport administration. For example, women only represent 8.3 percent of athletic directors at NCAA
Division I institutions (Lapchick, 2010). Some of the disadvantages for women in the sport-career marketplace are due to fewer positions in absolute terms, while others are due to social inequality, resulting in a need for women to explore careers outside of athletics upon graduation.

**Problem of Practice**

Because of the time and scheduling demands that are placed on the student-athletes, there is often little opportunity for career exploration. In addition to their academic requirements, student-athletes dedicate significant time outside of the classroom -- including practice, team meetings, physical conditioning, treatment for injuries, and competitions. These obligations result in a highly regimented schedule that leaves little time for exploration of outside interests (Foster, 2003). In addition to the restrictions on their time, student-athletes are sometimes subject to academic clustering, which is the practice of steering student-athletes to certain majors that will interfere - in terms of time and course requirements - least with their athletic schedule (Schneider, Ross, & Fisher, 2010; Benson, 2000; Foster, 2003). This practice may restrict student-athletes’ major choices in order to coordinate coursework deadlines and class schedules with practice and competition times.

The restrictive culture of competitive athletics can result in student-athletes over-identifying with the athlete role and reducing the student role (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991). Student-athletes experience role conflict when expectations as an athlete conflict with their role as a student (Lance, 2004). Role conflict may have adverse effects on student-athletes’ career development if they cling to their athletic identity when their athletic career is over (e.g. an
athletic career-ending injury or end of athletic eligibility) without exploring other options for their career. These former athletes may still pursue athletic careers even though they are aware of the limited opportunities mainly because they have little preparation for anything else. Another example of role conflict is when student-athletes over-commit to their athletic role at the expense of career preparation. In this situation, the student athlete may have majored in a discipline for a career outside of athletics, but because of the heavy emphasis on their sport, they did not gain professional competencies, participate in internships, or do sufficient networking to gain advantages in the job market.

**Problem of Research**

The average Academic Progress Rate (APR) for participants in women’s sports is higher than that of men’s sports in all NCAA sponsored sports (NCAA, 2012). Additionally, the average Graduation Success Rate (GSR) of NCAA Division I Women’s Sports is 88 percent (NCAA, 2012). Simons, Van Rheenen, and Covington (1999) found that female student-athletes are better able to balance athletic and academic roles compared to male student-athletes. Female student-athletes in Sturm, Feltz, and Gilson’s (2011) study reported higher levels of student identity and lower perceptions of athlete identity compared to their male counterparts.

However, Lance (2004) conducted a study with 169 student athletes and found female student-athletes generally experienced more role conflict than male student-athletes. He suggests female student-athletes are more likely to experience “confusing messages regarding the value of their involvement” (p. 179).
Career maturity refers to a student’s ability and readiness to make career decisions (Savickas, 1984). Several studies suggest female student-athletes possess greater career maturity than their male counterparts (Jackson and Healy, 1996; Luzzo, 1995; Luzzo, 1994; Windish, 1987). However, Linnemeyer and Brown (2010) found student-athletes, both male and female, experience lower career maturity than non-athlete students. Gayles and Hu (2009) found effects of educationally purposeful activities were conditional on the profile level of the sport in which the student-athlete participated. More research is needed to examine career maturity of non-revenue women sports, which accounts for a majority of women sport participants.

Although research suggests female student-athletes have higher career maturity than male student-athletes, it cannot be assumed that because one possesses greater career maturity that s/he has a high career decision-making self-efficacy (Luzzo, McWhirter, & Hutcheson, 1997). In his dissertation research, Archer (2010) conducted a phenomenological study on the pre-transition experiences of female student-athletes. The participants expressed feeling unprepared to deal with the reality of sport transition due to the time commitments and prolonged engagement they experienced. They also reported having little opportunity to prepare for careers outside of their sport. Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996) concluded exploratory behavior, which is often lacking from student-athlete experiences, is important for career development.

Considering women student-athletes statistically outperform men in academic performance (i.e. graduation rates and grade point averages) their developmental needs can be overlooked by athletic administrators, student-affairs personnel, and coaches. Persisting to
graduation does not necessarily mean that one has high career maturity. Therefore, more
investigation is needed to understand female student-athlete career maturity and not assume that
because they are graduating at higher rates and outperforming their male counterparts
academically that they have received the development they need to be prepared for life after
college.

**Conceptual Framework**

To better understand how female student-athletes make meaning of the end of college
sport participation and perceive their career readiness and preparation, Schlossberg’s theory of
transition was selected as the conceptual framework for this study. Exiting college may also
consist of an exit from sport for female student-athletes. This not only suggests student-athletes
experiences a change in status from college student to college graduate, but is likely to also
transition from athlete to non-athlete.

Schlossberg identified four factors that influence transition: situation, support, self, and
strategies (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Using the direct accounts from female
student-athletes, this study will construct how they make meaning of these four factors while
navigating career decisions. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) emphasized the
importance of perception in transitions and explain the difference between change and transition.
They contend transition only exists if it is defined as such by the individual experiencing it. This
is a marked difference from change, which may occur without the individual placing a great
significance to it. Therefore, when attempting to understand transition that occurs within
individuals, qualitative research methods are preferred because of the ability of the participants to report their perception in their own words.

Schlossberg’s transition theory is not as prevalent in student affairs research, but is a useful model in helping understand college transitions (Evans et. al, 2010). Although the original audience for Schlossberg’s work was individuals working with adult learners, Evans et al. (2010) considers Schlossberg’s Transition Theory relevant for studying transitions of traditionally aged college students. Several studies (i.e. Swain, 1991; Person & Petitpas, 1990; Missler, 1996) have used Schlossberg’s transition theory as a basis for understanding student-athletes’ experiences, particularly the aspect of retirement from sport, making it a useful framework for studying the transition experiences student-athletes (Evans et al., 2010; Swain, 1991; Wheeler et al., 1996).

**Significance**

Division I female student-athletes may have to come to terms with the fact that something they have been doing for a majority of their lives, and something that is so central to their identity, may come to an end when their athletic eligibility is exhausted. The time devoted to their sport, which also financed their college education, may have reduced the amount of time available to explore options for their post-collegiate careers. There is a deficiency in scholarly literature that addresses this phenomenon in female student-athletes. Much research is devoted to male student-athletes participating in revenue-producing sports (Beamon, 2010; Kennedy & Dimick (1987); Perna, Ahlgren, & Zaichkowsky, 1999; Smallman and Sowa, 1996). Furthermore, studies that address exit from sport typically focus on retrospective accounts
(Allison & Meyer, 1988; Coakley, 1983; Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Person & Petitpas, 1990; Wheeler, Malone, VanVlack, Nelson, and Steadward, 1996). This study attempts to learn perspectives of individuals currently experiencing transition in order to provide a perspective that has not been captured. This study also fills a gap in literature by including the experiences of student-athletes of various ability levels. The few studies that do address female student-athlete career development and transition typically focus on elite student-athletes or retiring professional athletes (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Coakley, 1983; Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Person & Petitpas, 1990; Wheeler, et al, 1996). Due to the competitive nature of athletics, only a select few female-student athletes participating in Division I sports are able to achieve accolades that will afford them an elite status (i.e. winning national championships and setting records). Although elite student-athletes were not excluded from the sample, it was not a criterion to participate. The findings of this study can be instructive to faculty and administrators in higher education responsible for the development of female student-athletes, as well as serve as a catalyst for future exploration of ways to support this population.

**Research Questions**

The guiding research question for this study is: How do Division I female student-athletes experiencing transitions perceive their preparation for post-collegiate careers? Schlossberg’s four factors informed the sub-questions of this study and guided the development the interview protocol. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the four factors that influence transition and the sub-questions used to address the phenomenon.
Strategies refer to coping responses or functions in which the individual engages. Sub-Question One (what are the career development experiences of Division I female student-athletes?) requested participants to describe the specific career development strategies they utilized while in college. It is important to note strategies was the first factor addressed in the line of questioning of the interview protocol. Questions that inquired about their major and the activities they participated in to gain experience (what is your major? what activities, such as an internship, have you done to gain experience in your chosen field?) allowed the researcher to first build rapport with the participants with questions that required little thought to answer than some of the more personal and thought-provoking questions associated with the other sub-questions.

Situation describes events, non-events or triggers that occur, such as exhausting athletic eligibility. Sub-Question Two (what transitions do female student-athletes perceive as they prepare to exit college?) and sub question 3 (how do these transitions influence their career decision?) helped the researcher understand the situations of the participants and place their experiences into context.

Support refers to the type of social support received from the institution, family, team, and others. Sub-Question Four (what forms of support do female student-athletes receive in making career decisions?) asked participants to describe the types of support they received. This support ranged from athletic department resources, institutional resources, and external resources including family.
Self refers to personal characteristics of the student-athletes that may help them cope with transition. Sub-Question Five (*how do female student-athletes perceive their preparation for post-college careers?*) requires the participants to self-reflect on their preparation.

![Figure 1. Relationship of four factors of transition theory to interview protocol](image)

**Method**

The purpose of a basic qualitative study is to understand phenomena, processes, perspectives, and worldviews of the people involved (Merriam, 2002). This method was chosen because of its inductive nature and the ability to respond to emergent insights (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative methods involve interacting with participants to shape themes that emerge from the process (Creswell, 2009). Coaches, athletic administrators, and other institution personnel were
contacted for assistance in locating contact information for potential participants that the researcher previously identified. The use of gatekeepers was minimized so that participants would not be pre-screened or recommended based on the gatekeeper’s perceptions of who would be appropriate for the study. Snowball sampling was also used and participants were asked to refer individuals who met the study criteria.

Twenty Division I female student-athletes ultimately consented to participate. The student-athletes that comprised the sample represented eight NCAA sponsored sports: basketball (BB), golf (GLF), soccer (SOC), softball (SOF), tennis (TEN), track and field (T&F), volleyball (VB), and ice hockey (HKY). Table 1 lists the participants, their sports, their institutions’ Basic Carnegie Classification, and their majors.

Table 1

Summary of participants’ sport, institution type, and major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allie</td>
<td>VB</td>
<td>Masters-L</td>
<td>Psychology/Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>SB</td>
<td>RU/VH</td>
<td>Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandy</td>
<td>BB</td>
<td>RU/H</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celeste</td>
<td>T&amp;F</td>
<td>RU/VH</td>
<td>Mass Media Arts/Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity</td>
<td>BB</td>
<td>RU/VH</td>
<td>Criminal Justice/Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>SOC</td>
<td>RU/VH</td>
<td>Political Science/Communication Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>T&amp;F</td>
<td>RU/VH</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>T&amp;F</td>
<td>RU/VH</td>
<td>Mass Media Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>VB</td>
<td>RU/VH</td>
<td>Exercise and Sport Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jade</td>
<td>BB</td>
<td>RU/VH</td>
<td>Business Management and Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Management (graduate school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>T&amp;F</td>
<td>RU/H</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>SOC</td>
<td>RU/H</td>
<td>Communications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of Division I female-student-athletes that have either completed their athletic eligibility or will do so within one year informed the study. Once it was determined that they met the criteria, a face-to-face interview was scheduled at a location and time convenient for the participant. When they arrived at the interview, the details of the study were explained and they were asked for their verbal consent to participate. They were provided with an informed consent document that outlined the study details, including any associated risks, as well as the contact information for the researcher. The initial face-to-face interview lasted approximately one hour using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Glauser and Strauss (1967) define saturation as the point when collection of new data does not shed further light on the issue under investigation. Through preliminary data analysis and examination of field notes, it was determined that a saturation point had been reached at 20 interviews and recruitment of additional participants ceased.

A summary of each interview was emailed to the participant for review. A second interview lasting approximately 30 minutes was scheduled and the participant had the option of
participating face-to-face or over the phone. The second interview was a method of respondent validation to protect against misinterpretations of their responses (Maxwell, 2005). It was also an opportunity to get further elaboration or clarification of data provided.

Data analysis was a simultaneous process with data collection and began with the first interview (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2009). Analytical memos were kept for each interview and promoted continuous reflection about the data. The interviews were transcribed and coded in multiple stages to discover relationships between the categories of information and generate themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 2009). The transcripts were analyzed using first-cycle, open coding and consisted of descriptive coding to summarize and categorize data content. In vivo coding, which uses the actual words of the participants to capture the terminology they ascribe to their experience, was also used (Saldana, 2009). Analysis continued with a second cycle of axial coding for “classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building” (Saldana, 2009, p. 45).

Next, a comparative analysis was conducted to compare one segment of data or group with another (Merriam, 2009). The data were placed in tables on a spreadsheet that displayed information across the whole dataset to make systematic comparisons (Gibbs, 2007). A cross-case analysis was conducted to review and compare responses across participants.

Following analysis, data were organized into overarching themes that emerged. Each theme is presented along with rich descriptions to provide a highly descriptive and detailed
presentation of the findings (Merriam, 2009). Direct quotations from participants are also included to support the themes and provide the reader with greater context.

Results

The findings from interviews with 20 Division I female-student athletes are presented and grouped into themes that emerged from the participants’ responses to the overarching question, *How do Division I female student-athletes experiencing transitions perceive their preparation for post-collegiate careers?* Direct quotations from the participants are used as often as possible to illustrate concepts and provide examples.

Overall, the participants reported feeling prepared to transition from college, but identified issues that could have contributed to their development. The results are divided into five dominant themes that emerged: (1) career development experiences, (2) transition experiences, (3) transferability of athletic skills, (4) support from coaches, and (3) outside the bubble. Each theme is addressed and supported with direct quotations from study participants to illustrate concepts.

Career Development Experiences

All of the participants unanimously felt they did not have enough time to engage in experiences they believed would have helped them develop professionally. Annie, a softball player, said she is having trouble figuring out what is next after softball:

I don't really know exactly what I'm good at because I played softball for so long - you know. So, I haven't had like the work experience some other people may have
had. It's almost like I don't know what my niche is yet. I'm willing to do whatever. I get better at something the more I do it. I just got to figure out what I enjoy (Annie, softball).

Internships, professional-development opportunities, and study-abroad programs are some of the experiences the student-athletes reported having to sacrifice or delay. All of them felt the lack of engagement in these types of activities put them at a disadvantage after graduation.

**Internships.** The participants reported two reasons participating in internship opportunities are challenging for student-athletes. The most common issue is having time to do it in addition to their coursework and athletic schedules. Even in the summer, participants pointed out that it is difficult to pursue internships if you are required to train on campus during the summer. Many student-athletes said they wait until they have finished their playing eligibility, as Natalie, a volleyball player, explained:

I wish I had been able to intern in the summer while I still had eligibility - the summer before my senior year. But, we were required to be here working out all the time. I could have been working somewhere else. The opportunity wasn't available until I was done with eligibility (Natalie, volleyball).

Connie talked about the difficulty she experienced finding an internship due time constraints and being an international student, which has certain restrictions concerning summer employment:

It was really different than what I'm used to back home. The thing that really tough for athletes is we don't really get time to do internships or do much of what we want to do because track takes up a lot of our time. We have training, traveling, competitions, plus we have tutoring and all that stuff and that takes up most of our time. It was kind of
tough going from being an athlete and trying to get a job. It's hard because you don't really have anything on your resume and employers like to see experience and all that. You can try to get it in in the summer but only Americans can do that. For internationals it's kind of hard for us to do that with your visa (Connie, track and field).

The participants not only perceived the lack of time to do internships as a barrier to gaining job experience, some also said it had negative implications for graduate school requirements. Liza said her graduate program in a medical field requires a minimum number of hours of direct patient care before applying; this does not include volunteer work or shadowing. She said:

It's tough because tennis isn't really a sport that you can put down for a few months… Most of the ones [graduate programs] I'm looking at require six months to a year of full-time work, which obviously I have not had time to do in school. I'll wait and apply this spring, and I wouldn't go until Fall 2014, so I'd have a year to work. So that's my plan this year, to work and get those hours (Liza, Tennis).

Liza and other participants who were planning to enter a medical profession utilized shadowing opportunities as a substitute for internships because shadowing does not have the ongoing demands of an internship, but can offer useful exposure to the field. Marlys, who wants to become a dentist, was required to complete 100 shadow hours, but reserved most of the requirement for when her eligibility was over and she would not have to worry about the added pressure of making it back to campus for practice or games.

Participants that expressed interest in careers in sport management received internships within their athletic departments. Jade was unsure of the career path in sport management that she wanted to take and she said the internship with the department of athletics was helpful:
Right now I have an assistantship with the event management department. It's been going really well. I worked some football games, tennis, and volleyball and I'm really enjoying it. So I can hopefully see myself doing something along those lines. I also would be interested in professional teams and being a part of a professional organization (Jade, basketball).

**Student Organizations.** Some study participants found career development support by joining professional associations, clubs, student organizations, and academic fraternities. Natalie joined an accounting fraternity at her institution and eventually became an officer. After her athletic eligibility ended, she was able to utilize the contacts in the fraternity to secure an internship with a major public accounting firm during the summer. The internship experience eventually led to a job offer after graduation and passing the CPA exam.

Some of the student-athletes may not have had the same major-specific experience as Natalie, but some of them were able to join their student-athlete advisory committee, which is an organization that supports students participating in varsity athletics. The participants who were involved with the advisory committee reported participating in career development seminars and workshops. Christine had the opportunity to represent her institution on the national level by serving on the NCAA Division I Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC). Although she was a political-science major, her involvement in SAAC resulted in exposure to another area of interest. She served on the wellness committee; after graduating, she decided to become a wellness educator and work on nutrition programming. Christine shared her new interests with her campus committee advisor, graduated and received a part-time position to stay at her school working in student-athlete development until she determined the next steps to pursuing her
career. Although Christine had not previously considered a career in this area, she said the additional exposure to things outside of the classroom and working with the organization allowed her to reconsider her post-collegiate plans.

She described the opportunity:

So, it's a weird situation in how the stars aligned that they needed some extra help at least for the semester, and I'd been in and out of her office in the summer kind of freaking out about whether I should stay here or should I go home. I spent four years with her, and she and I have a very close relationship. She [advisor] knows how enthusiastic I am about these things, and she was like it is a way for us to help each other out. You know all the different life-skills programming like the back of your hand, and you need some money - so we can really help each other out (Christine, soccer).

It was common among the participants to continue to utilize internal athletic department resources rather than seek help from other campus departments of faculty members. Although student-athletes did not report working closely with career counselors to prepare for their careers, they did report enlisting the help of specific people. These go-to people proved to be particularly resourceful, even though their job titles or functions did not specifically include career development. These individuals served as gatekeeper, the bridge to the rest of campus. Many of the participants named their athletic academic advisor as a common go-to person. Mae describes her relationship with her academic advisor:

They are not just academic advisors, they are career coaches, career advisors; they do it all. If it wasn't for them, I don't know what half the student-athletes would do. You can tell that they are genuinely concerned about what happens to us after college. Honestly, if there are other things on campus for students, we probably don't take advantage of it like we should - like the normal students would. But having our academic advisor, if we need something, we just go to them and they know who to talk to, and they
can call someone to get the answers we need. They help us out (Mae, soccer).

Participation and engagement in student organizations was another aspect of professional development that was not easy for the student-athletes. Tiffany, who self-identified as African-American on a predominantly White campus said there was tension between the Black student-athletes and the members of the African-American Student Union (AASU). She said the student union members felt that the Black athletes were some of the most visible Black students on campus but did not participate in their programming. She took it upon herself to get more Black athletes involved and to foster better understanding:

You hear about the football players and basketball players that are really good athletes but don’t care about school, but they were seeing more of the other people, volleyball players, softball players, and track. I think that was my biggest accomplishment personally just bridging that gap just a little bit so the stereotypes on both side could stop (Tiffany, track and field).

**Study Abroad.** For all the reasons previously mentioned, study abroad is another experience that some of the participants found prohibitive. Danielle pursued a minor in Spanish, but regrets not having the chance to visit a Spanish-speaking country. For others, the closest experience they had for study abroad was international travel with their team for competition; however, the coach usually decides the destination.

Allie, a volleyball player, has an interest in using her psychology major to work with people who have experienced trauma. Her school offers courses during the breaks, so she was able to attend short-term, study abroad opportunities, as opposed to the traditional semester-long
or summer-long programs. She said when deciding on what school to attend, the ability to participate in study abroad was one of the things that she found attractive.

Elizabeth, another volleyball player, said she also utilized a semester break to study abroad. In addition to supplementing her classroom experiences and gaining another perspective, she commented about having that experience with people other than her teammates:

We went to Croatia to see a different part of the world and to meet different people and different situations. I went there, and I flew by myself to Croatia … I had to figure out how to get on the train to meet everyone else, and I didn't know anyone else on the study abroad that I went on … We became really close friends. I think just being able to be away from volleyball to meet new people helped a lot and also to see how public health functions in different parts of the world too (Elizabeth, volleyball).

Transition Experiences

The women in the study experienced many transitions: the end of their college careers, for some, the end of their athletic careers, transitions from being a student-athlete to a regular student, and transitions from being a student to a college graduate. All of the participants in the study began playing their sport before secondary school. For some of the women, it is difficult to recall a time when they were not playing their sport. Participants were asked to describe their last competition as a college athlete. “Bittersweet” was a common word that the women used to describe the emotions they felt when they stepped on their respective playing surface for the last time:

It definitely was bittersweet. It kind of puts things into perspective for female student-athletes. A lot of us don't go on to play our sport after college, and college is kind of the shining time for us, when we get to really focus on our sport and do the best we can there - because we'll never have that opportunity again in life (Marlys, ice hockey).
It was very bittersweet. Probably more bitter at that time because when I finished it hit me. It was kind of overwhelming that this life you have been knowing for the last 15 years of your life is ending right here as soon as you cross this line. I remember shedding some tears about it. I remember being happy because I could look back and see where track has actually taken me in life. It was probably one of the most moving and touching moments of my life (Jessica, track and field).

A majority of the participants did not express the desire to continue playing professionally. Some participants expressed not knowing exactly how to prepare for that final moment, as Christine described:

I semi-prepared myself for it at different points in the season: this could be the last time I do this or the last practice, but I kind of repressed that. As I was nearing the end of the season, it really started to hit me. And when the final whistle blew, I looked up at the scoreboard, and I remember kind of like falling down on my knees. It's over. That's such a huge chapter of your life and a huge part of your identity and you're just like, it's gone (Christine, soccer).

Tiffany said when her eligibility was over she realized that was the end of her involvement in sports as a competitor. She said to others, that the decision to not continue professionally seemed like she was quitting but they did not understand that her time as an athlete was just over:

I felt like all eight years smacked me at once…Stepping off the track you think of everything ... all of the bus rides you took all the weights you lifted, all the workouts you ran ... everything you've done to get to that point. You don't realize how much you love it until it's gone. It was definitely bittersweet, more bitter than sweet. I still miss it. What sucked was they [my family] were like, “you're quitting? You still have so much potential”. I'm not quitting, my time is just over. I don't know, it was definitely hard. As an athlete that has been competitive for such a long time you do feel like you're quitting but then after a certain time you have to realize that things are for a season and for a
reason. Track got me to [my school] and I could afford it because of the scholarship (Tiffany, track and field).

Tina expressed the disappointment of leaving the sport after having a losing record the entire season. She said the tension made things between her and her coach very difficult. When talking about the final year of her 12 years of competitive basketball she said, “it was the most emotional experience of my life. It was stressful. Again, it's just like when you set your personal goals and you don't reach them, and your clock has expired and your career is over; you have a lot of emotions.”

The Transferability of Athletic Skills

The participants identified specific skills they gained as student-athletes that they feel are transferrable into the workplace, including non-sport careers. Most of the participants specifically referenced the people skills they acquired from being in a team atmosphere. Annie suggested working with her coach will be similar to working with a boss or supervisor in the workplace:

Our coach ... I love her; she knows what she's doing and everything, but it's the same thing with a boss, you know. There will be some days you will love her and some days you'll be like why do I have to work for her. So, I think it has kind of prepare me about certain situations that come up in the future, and I feel I am not afraid to handle them. Like, I guess my mental toughness has helped, you know. It's not that I don't like criticism and I can take it, it's just that I don't take it personally (Annie, softball).
For some of the participants, they found themselves on teams with people that they probably would not have associated with had it not been for their sport. Liza talked about how valuable it was for her to experience diversity:

I think sports in general are a microcosm of life, and I learned how to interact with people that are maybe not like me. I've had teammates from all over the world and from all walks of like, so I think that is something very valuable. I've been forced to get along with people that I have nothing in common with but tennis (Liza, tennis).

It appeared some athletic departments are aware of the difficulty their student-athletes face when trying to present their athletic experience as work experience. Natalie attended a workshop geared to help athletes with this problem:

We, just last month, had a resume building workshop, and we brought in a lady from career services and had them show the ways we could use athletic experience on our resumes, because it's so hard to have a job when you are in college … so showcasing what you have been able to do with your team, the athletic achievements, your volunteer things you have done with your team or individually, and highlight other pieces as opposed to just work experience (Natalie, volleyball).

Support from Coaches

When it comes to career development, participants seldom mention coaches as a primary source of support, unless they are planning to pursue a career in coaching. However, some participants emphasized the importance of having a coach who understands that life without sport is inevitable for many of them. Allie said that her coach’s particular coaching philosophy emphasized developing as a person. She says, “It was about character building more than it was
about winning championships and all those different things. But, we were still competitive at the same time.”

Out of all the types of conflict the study participants reported experiencing in the study, conflict with coaches was the most prevalent, particularly when the student-athlete and the coach had a disagreement about priorities. Generally, the participants said they had supportive coaches, but conflicts manifested when they had to do things that interfered with practice or competitions.

Natalie talked about the anxiety she encountered her senior year when she began interviewing for jobs and needed to schedule them around volleyball:

I was lucky in the fact that when I went for my accounting job, I was able to talk to the recruiter and get my interview moved up because it was going to be right in the middle of volleyball season. I was able to move it, but it was happening during pre-season. I missed a morning practice and didn't get back in time for my afternoon practice. I talked to my coach about it and was open and honest, and I got really lucky that she let me do that. Some coaches don't let you miss any time (Natalie, volleyball).

Athletes that experienced coaching changes had to adapt to the philosophies of the coach at the helm. Celeste had three coaching changes during her collegiate track career and said that some coaches cared more about off-the-field success than others:

It was different with different coaches I had. I would say with the first coach I had, like, you are supposed to be a student-athlete, but he expected athlete first and then student. They expect you to just magically have good grades, but as long as you weren’t ineligible it wasn’t a problem. But, when our new coach came, he really instilled in us to have good grades, and it is not just about track … we are going to be in the real world … he taught us you have to have everything in place to succeed (Celeste, track and field).
Tina, who played a team sport, also talked about how she encountered challenges with her coach during her senior year when she started venturing off from the team to pursue other interests.

I felt I was losing myself to please him. I was told “you’re selfish and not a team player.” I was always scared of not getting playing time … I didn’t care anymore and decided to follow my convictions, and I got benched. I was going to quit, but my parents told me to just finish my last season and move on (Tina, basketball).

Mae got injured during a portion of her second season and needed approval after her fourth playing season to play for a fifth season. Since she was not sure whether the request would be granted, she started to commit to other non-sport related activities. When she was approved to play for another season, she said this caused a conflict with her coach:

I had some ticks with my coach because I am involved with so many things outside of soccer. In the previous season which would have been technically been the end of my four years, I considered that my last season and so I got involved in a lot of things on-campus and off-campus. And so this season, I didn't think that I was going to actually get it, and it was sort of a spur of the moment, last minute decision to complete my fifth year. Because I had already committed myself there was back-and-forth between me and him when it was a school function or out of school function to go. So needless to say, it was a rollercoaster ride this past year, but it was fun nonetheless (Mae, soccer).

Mae later revealed that the tension between her and her coach about her non-athletic activity schedule only got worse as the season progressed and she said she did not get a proper senior send-off because he would not let her play in the final game of the season.

Many of the student-athletes devoted their off-seasons and summers to sport participation, which otherwise would be prime time for career development experiences. None of
the participants said their coaches required them to commit to their sports in the summer, but
some participants in both team sports and individual sports said it was certainly implied. As Liz
explained, her summer training schedule prevented her from studying abroad:

I would have loved to study abroad. In the summer we're expected to be [here], even
though we are not in season or whatever, you just can't put down your racket for three
months and expect to be fit and expect to be at the level you need to be at in the fall. So I
like pushed every summer and gotten a lot better but at the same time I've been here
every summer. I've either been at school or living at home and all my other friends from
high school in college they have been able to study abroad somewhere. (Liz, tennis).

Christine said she did not get off to a good start her freshman year and spent the summers
working hard to solidify her spot on the team. The hard work in the summer paid off and she was
named most improved her sophomore and junior year and was a team captain her senior year.
Although she is proud of her accomplishments, looking back she said she wished she had spent
her summers more productively on career development:

I wouldn't have cared and thought so highly of my authoritative coaches or like, oh
my gosh, I have to stress about this. I also would have stuck it to the man and did an
internship. That's something that I would have really wanted to do if something would
have come up. I could have played soccer at night or maybe train on my own (Christine,
soccer).

Outside the Bubble

Some of the participants regret allowing their sport to completely consume them and
wish they had done more in a non-athletic domain. Several participants spoke about the “bubble”
of athletics and wish they had the opportunity to engage more with other facets of campus.

Charity says:

I probably should have done a lot more just to get out of the athletic community a little bit because we are kind of in a bubble, and we are always in this building. Twenty hours or more so a week definitely doesn't leave much time for the rest of campus and stuff like that or time for the extracurricular (Charity, basketball).

Elizabeth talked about the routine of being a student-athlete and looking forward to more independence:

I'm looking forward to getting out of this bubble I've been in the past four years. I feel you are a zombie every day. You do the same thing; you get up, you go eat, you go to class, you go to practice, you eat again, you go to tutor, and you wake up and do the same thing … and so I’m going to be coming out of the bubble and not being surrounded by athletes and people who are there to help you all the time (Elizabeth, volleyball).

Many of the respondents did not feel the lives they lived were indicative of how things are in what they called “the real world.” They acknowledged that they are subject to a level of privilege that will no longer exist when they leave college. Renee described approaching the real world with a bit of apprehension. She said that the athletic department has some responsibility to help student-athletes with the transition and help them prepare for the real world:

I think the [athletic department] needs to implement things more. I never lived on my own; I don't know anything about taxes. I don't know anything about buying a house or car. They're adults, they know. So I reach out to them to find out what I should do and the next step to take. So, I think more stuff like that, practical stuff is the kind of stuff that needs to be implemented when you are a senior and are about to be on your way out because some of us don't have a huge financial support system from our families. I know I don't, so everything that's next is on me (Renee, basketball).
Despite the limitations they encountered, a majority of the respondents overall felt their institution provided everything they needed to be prepared to exit college, even if they were not able to take advantage of all the opportunities. Being conscious that time does go by quickly, some of the respondents emphasized the importance of taking the time to pause and plan for the future. Allie said every minute of her day was planned for her, but it was important to not lose track and find time to contemplate her future. She advised:

College is about learning and growing, and you are going to make mistakes. But, the purpose is to learn and really find what your niche is, and just to find what you want to do. That's important to find what you want to do, and not just let it all fly by without thinking about it (Allie, volleyball).

Christine said even though it was difficult, she would do it all over again and feels that what she learned as a student-athlete will serve her well in the future. She said, “I really, really believe this is the greatest experience you can have as a human. It develops you in so many ways as a person, but also for your professional development later.” The most important lesson she felt she learned was time management; although she has a lot of uncertainty in the future, she believes her time management skills will help her with balance.

Discussion

The participants provided insight on how they cope with transition, the impediments to their career development, and the support they utilize to both prepare for and deal with the inevitable transition of ending their collegiate careers. The findings support previous research
that suggests female student-athletes lack exploratory behavior that is considered important for
career development (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996; Archer, 2010). High athletic identity and
role conflict between their student role and athletic role contributes to the lack of preparation the
participants reported feeling which is also consistent with prior findings (Adler & Adler, 1987,
1991; Foster, 2003; Lance 2004; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). The following four conclusions
can be drawn based on the findings as presented.

**Female student-athletes do not perceive athletic experiences as sufficient for obtaining non-
athletic, post-competition careers.**

The participants in the study found value in their experiences as student-athletes, but they
do not feel these experiences alone are enough for them to start a career outside of athletics. As
Bowen and Levin (2003) found, student-athletes spend more time on sports than other members
of the student body spend on co-curricular involvement. Their athletic involvement, which
includes being on a team, traveling, and engaging in competition, can also take more time than
the activities of their non-athlete peers. Yet, their athletic experiences often lack exposure to
careers other than those in athletics, interaction with peers with similar non-athletic interests, and
engagement in other campus organizations that could further their career development. Many
expressed uncertainty of how potential employers would perceive their experience as student-
athletes and whether their inherent characteristics such as discipline, teamwork, and dedication
were viable substitutes for actual work experience in the field. They also suggested that
applicants with internship experiences and other relevant activities on their resumes might be
considered stronger candidates for certain positions. Athletic accomplishments such as winning a national championship, being team captain, and receiving athletic honors, although impressive, did not give the study participants confidence, as those accolades might not be appreciated outside of an athletic realm.

Female student-athletes lack the opportunity to adequately prepare to exit college

All college students anticipate graduation and entering into the job market or graduate school and this can be a source of anxiety that is not necessarily unique to student-athletes. Schlossberg (1981) contends when transitions are gradual it is “easier to adapt because the individual can prepare for them” (p. 9). In the case of student-athletes, it is the lack of preparation and the lack of opportunity to prepare that makes their situation unique from their non-athletic peers and may influence how they adapt to transitions.

All of the participants in the study could clearly articulate their own ideas of what they needed to be adequately prepared. When describing the reasons why they felt deficient in their preparation they suggested the responsibilities of their sport prohibits them from engaging in career development activities. Intercollegiate athletic participation is sanctioned and governed by the institution. The barriers non-athletes face in regards to their preparation are not typically imposed by the institution. It is an interesting paradox that all institutions have some language in their mission statements referencing preparation for their students; yet, some of the most visible citizens on campus are excluded as a result of their obligations to the institution.
Female student-athletes are earning degrees but not receiving a well-rounded education.

The limitations placed on student-athletes are usually on their co-curricular involvement. The results confirmed existing research that student-athletes’ lives are highly structured, regimented, and lack autonomy (Foster, 2003). As a result, student-athletes need the opportunity to engage in their own exploratory experiences outside of athletics and independent of their teammates. As the participants reported, they feel they are missing many components of the collegiate experience, particularly as it pertains to co-curricular activities. Even though all of the participants reported they would graduate, or in some cases had already received a degree, they unanimously said they wish they had more time to do internships, study abroad, join organizations, and/or attend program events in their major.

Although they reported satisfaction with services the athletic department and the institution-at-large provided to help them graduate and meet degree requirements, they felt very limited in the opportunities they had outside of coursework. These deficiencies contributed to their feelings of inadequacy entering the job market or regarding having factors other than their academic record to make them strong graduate school applicants. Even those participants that managed to engage in activities outside of their sport, much of their involvement occurred in the semesters following the end of their athletic eligibility. This indicates there is a need for more on-going co-curricular involvement opportunities.
Female student-athletes want help with career development.

The final conclusion is that female student-athletes want more direction and assistance with navigating career decisions. Because of how they are socialized in the restrictive culture of athletics, female student-athletes are waiting to be told what to do about their lives post-competition, but no one tells them. As some participants reported, by the time they realize the absence of direction, it is often too late or they have a lot of ground to cover. It is ironic that most aspects of their lives are directed, and they are told exactly what to do. But when it comes to career development, they are left to figure it out for themselves. As one of the most regimented populations on campus, if student-athletes are expected to fit something into their schedules, it is best to require it. For example, it is difficult for them to find the time to go to the career center on their own, but the participants who attended mandatory sessions all reported that the sessions were helpful.

Considering the information gathered from the participants, four recommendations-- two that address certain athletic department practices and two that address intercollegiate athletic policy are provided. These recommendations not only have implications for Division I female student-athletes, but for all student-athletes regardless of gender and level. Although one population’s experiences informed the recommendations, the suggested services can be beneficial to all student-athletes and not just Division I female student-athletes.

Free Summers
Participants reported - particularly those who played fall sports - they are often strongly encouraged to remain on campus during the summer for training. Although it is not mandatory, the student-athletes expressed feeling a sense of obligation. In team sports, where playing time are a factor, a student-athlete may feel pressure to stay during the summer to avoid feeling that she is not exhibiting the dedication her coach expects.

Because summer session is already not mandatory, there is little that can be done to remove the perception that it is required. Coaches have to find ways to reassure student-athletes that engaging in professional development opportunities in the summer are valued and encouraged. The culture of intercollegiate athletics is to control every aspect of the student-athletes’ experience in order to get desired results. However, giving them autonomy teaches lessons of responsibility and accountability.

**Meaningful Internship Opportunities**

Because of limited opportunities to do internships, student-athletes need to have quality experience to compensate for the lack of quantity. As the participants indicated, many of their internships opportunities had to be delayed until their fifth year or when their eligibility was over. The highly commercialized culture of collegiate athletics provides a unique opportunity to leverage profit-based relationships to provide internship opportunities for student-athletes. Corporations, television networks, and numerous other businesses place their names, marks, and logos on facilities, signage, program books, and sometimes on the athletes themselves, to capitalize on the opportunity to deliver their product, good, or service to the fans who support
intercollegiate athletics. With this, might it be possible to expand corporate-sponsorship agreements to include offering interdisciplinary-internship opportunities to student-athletes? These internships could help student-athletes gain valuable work experience from national companies and strengthen their resume.

Athletic departments also have the ability to create their own interdisciplinary internships within the department. Opportunities to learn exist in disciplines such as marketing, communications, facilities management, business, medicine, event management, compliance, and technology. Regardless of the student-athlete’s major, there are possibilities to gain experience in a variety of occupations even if the individual is not necessarily considering a career in sports.

**Reform to NCAA Eligibility Rules**

Athletic departments should be given more discretion to allow student-athletes to reduce the number of required credit hours per semester should the student elect to engage in a bona fide professional development experience, such as an internship. As pointed out by Mae, who shared how a friend lost eligibility because he took an internship instead of the minimum course load during the season, student-athletes may be uncertain about their ability to carry a full load of classes, along with their athletic schedule and an internship.

Often times, fear of abuse and potential NCAA violations are the basis for such restrictions, but it limits what athletic departments are able do for the career development of its student-athletes. It is likely the intention of the rule is to prohibit programs from keeping student-
athletes on their rosters that are not making progress toward degrees. However, especially in the
case of seniors, if the student-athlete’s academic record has been well established, athletic
administrators should be able to use their discretion in deciding whether or not this student-
athlete is trying to abuse the system or if s/he is actually someone who deserves the opportunity
to gain work experience. As the rules stand now, student-athletes who are on the right track for
graduation and want to do an internship instead of enrolling in a full load of classes are
inadvertently penalized for those who have previously abused the system.

Department-Wide, Career Development Policies

Career development programming and policies should not be program or sport specific,
nor should they focus on the coaches’ individual philosophy on career development. As several
participants noted, coaching changes often happen during a student-athletes’ eligibility period,
and a student-athlete can experience inconsistency in team policies. Likewise, a coach for one
sport may have different values as it pertains to activities outside of coursework and athletics
than a coach in another sport.

There should be institutionalized policies on how practices are scheduled around classes
required for graduation. Athletic department leaders need to develop relationships with academic
department leaders to understand the requirements of certain programs of interest to student-
athletes. It also needs to be emphasized that academic success is not only manifested in
coursework. Even though participants felt their coaches generally understood when it came to
scheduling classes, and they acknowledged that the athletic department provided them with
funding to take summer classes when classes they did not fit into their fall- and spring-term schedules, they all said that the opportunity to engage in co-curricular activities was restricted. Although the academic progress rates and graduation success rates indicate female student-athletes are performing well in the classroom, the participants illustrated a need for meaningful experiences outside of the classroom.

Several participants expressed feeling as if they were living inside the athletic “bubble;” created by the athletic department. More effort needs to be made to help student-athletes integrate into the broader campus community. Participants reported feeling prejudged by entities outside of the athletic department and viewed the bubble is a safe space for them. As Czopp (2010) found, stereotypes of athletes may have an effect on the type of counseling and academic support they receive. Student affairs practitioners, academic departments, faculty, athletic administrators, and coaches need to find ways to support each other’s goals, which should all be aligned with the university’s mission.

**Suggestions for Future Study**

This study specifically focused on the experiences of female student-athletes to fill a gap in existing research. Further study is needed on the gender differences that may exist in the experiences, specifically as they pertain to non-revenue men’s sports. Because the sample was single gendered, we cannot ascertain whether the experiences were unique to female student-athletes or similar to what their male counterparts in comparable sports experience. Student-athletes competing in NCAA Division II and III also possess a high athletic identity, particularly
if they have been playing sports for a majority of their lives, much like the participants in this study.

Criteria for this study included participation on the Division I level and receiving an athletic scholarship. One of the assumptions for this study is those students who are paying their own way have more decision-making autonomy when conflicts occur than someone who is receiving athletic aid. This in no way suggests that Division II and III participants are any less dedicated to their sport or any more prepared for post-competition life. More study is needed on the nuances of the various divisions. Likewise, a majority of the institutions in this study were research universities. It would be instructive to learn whether institution type is related to the career development experiences of student-athletes.

Overall, this study has shown it cannot be implied that student-athletes that demonstrate academic achievement and progression toward graduation have the tools they need to exit college and start careers. Continued research on the career development experiences of student-athletes will be useful for athletic departments and institutions in developing additional programs and services to meet the needs of this student population.
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