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EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR
STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS
PROGRAMS AND THEIR ASPIRATIONS TO
ATTEND COLLEGE

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NATIONAL-LOUIS UNIVERSITY

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO
PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS
PROGRAMS AND THEIR ASPIRATIONS TO ATTEND COLLEGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

IN

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

BY

ASHLEY B. KNIGHT

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

FEBRUARY 2012

Community College Leadership Doctoral Program

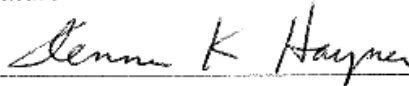
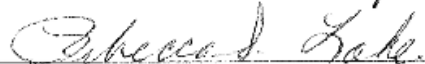
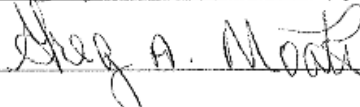
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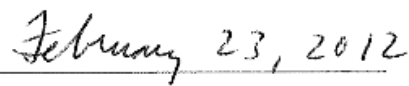
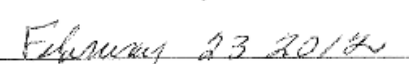
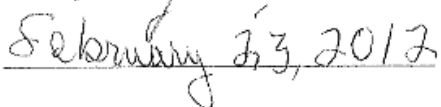
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We certify this dissertation, submitted by the above named candidate, is fully adequate in scope and quality to satisfactorily meet the dissertation requirement for attaining the Doctor of Education degree in the Community College Leadership Doctoral Program.

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the opportunity to participate in community college athletics and students' aspirations regarding higher education. Students who may not have considered a college education due to a lack of family support, financial resources, or underperformance in secondary education may decide to attend college because of the opportunities to excel in college sports. This interest in sports motivates some student-athletes towards academic accomplishments including completion of a college degree.

This study employed a partially mixed methods approach, which included a survey of community college athletes, focus groups of community college student-athletes, and focused interviews with athletics directors at community colleges. The research produced a collective case study of three community colleges in Illinois in order to provide a description of the relationship between opportunities for intercollegiate athletics participation at the community college and the student athlete's aspiration to attend college. The findings indicate athletics participation is one of the primary reasons the student athletes in this study aspired to attend college. However, as the participants considered the opportunity to continue excelling at their sport at the postsecondary level, they experienced additional influences such as the recognition that college is an effective way to prepare for a career that is both financially rewarding and meaningful and the perception that a college education is a vehicle for improved social mobility. In addition, the student athletes and their parents recognized that their athletic achievements could be rewarded by college scholarships at both the two-year and four-year levels, and that these scholarships have the potential to ease the burden of the costs of a college education.

The findings reveal the significance of these combined factors on college aspiration for student athletes. The study concludes with the Knight Model for the impact of athletics participation on aspiration to attend college, which provides community college leaders with a visual understanding of the implications of this study.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The debate continues over whether intercollegiate athletics contributes to the mission of community colleges and whether providing these programs creates value for the community. Community college presidents, Boards of Trustees, and athletic administrators routinely weigh the benefits and costs of providing financial support for intercollegiate athletics teams. During times of fiscal uncertainty due to the reduction of funding from state governments, leaders are under heightened pressure to analyze expenditures on all college programs and assess them alongside the mission, community expectations, and shared governance demands. Some constituents argue that intercollegiate athletics programs are outside the community college's scope and therefore detract from mission-specific academic and career programs. Unlike athletics programs in four-year institutions, community college athletics' programs do not produce substantial revenue streams to justify the allocation of resources for required personnel, practice, and competition facilities. Community college leaders seek other justifications to support the continuation of athletics and often pursue data-driven decisions related to grade point averages, graduation rates, and persistence and retention rates.

Besides these traditional measurements, other methods can be used to examine the success of college and university athletes. For example, in a survey conducted in six states, Williams and Pennington (2006) found that a majority of responding community college presidents thought that having an athletics program promoted student diversity, led to higher enrollments, encouraged local students to attend, and improved the college's reputation. Providing access to higher education, especially for underrepresented populations, is a hallmark

of community college educational philosophy. For those students who may not have aspired to a college education because of lack of family support, financial resources, or underperformance in secondary education, participation in community college athletics may open a door into higher education. This study examines the relationship between students' participation in community college intercollegiate athletics programs and their aspirations to attend college.

Background and Context

College and university sports programs have been the focus of criticism related to the academic under-preparedness of some student athletes and the lack of focus these students bring to their coursework. Gayles referred to college athletics' many critics when she wrote that "some of the harshest criticism suggests that athletics programs create a separate culture in which student athletes experience lower levels of academic performance, graduate at lower rates, cluster in certain majors, and are socially segregated from the general student population" (2009, p. 34). Suggs described other detractors' points of view that "athletes at selective colleges tended to have poorer academic credentials than other students, tended to cluster in the social sciences, and held fewer community leadership positions following graduation" (2009, p. 26). Historically, college athletics programs have had critics and fans alike.

Studies show that negative faculty perceptions are present at both four- and two-year institutions. In a study on athlete stigma in higher education, Simons, Bosworth, Fujita and Jensen (2007, June, p. 251) found that 33% of student athletes reported they believed that professors had negative perceptions of them and 62.1% stated they were present when a faculty member made a negative remark during class about athletes, including comments about low intelligence, lack of academic motivation, and "dumb jock" references. Lawrence (2009, p. 108)

suggested that faculty have a perception of being disconnected from institutional decisions about athletics, with 62% indicating sports are an auxiliary enterprise accountable only to administrators. This lack of connection and sense of shared responsibility may contribute to a lack of faculty support for athletics programs.

For athletics programs to continue to be offered at two-year institutions, it is also important that faculty, administrators, and board members be informed about the benefits of student participation in intercollegiate athletics and how this participation relates to student athletes' aspirations to attend college. Student athletes not only contribute to the institution through tuition revenue generation and increased enrollment, but they also augment the number of underrepresented ethnic minorities and first generation college students. Community colleges' democratic function of providing access to education is strongly supported by the aspirations of student athletes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between students' opportunities to participate in community college athletics and their aspirations to attend college.

Guiding Questions

The guiding questions for this study are:

1. What factors influence students' decisions to attend college?
2. How do students perceive their reasons for pursuing higher education?
3. Is there a relationship between the opportunity to participate in athletics and students' college choices, including the choices to attend community college?

Significance of the Study

This study explores the factors influencing high school student athletes to attend college and their reasons for pursuing higher education at a community college. The research focuses on student athletes at three Illinois community colleges representing the northern, central, and southern regions of the state, and includes athletes from a variety of ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. Both male and female athletes from thirteen sports sanctioned by the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) participated in this research.

This study presents both quantitative and qualitative findings describing the factors that contributed to the participants' decision to attend community college. Understanding how high school student athletes made the decision to attend community college and participate in a sport certified by the NJCAA, COA, or NWAACC will help community college leaders in strategic planning, budget preparation, and program development related to athletics programs and other student support services utilized by student athletes. Additionally, this understanding will provide information that may lead to improved communication and planning between the community college and feeder high schools to increase the likelihood of district students attaining a postsecondary credential.

Assumptions

The following assumptions guided this study:

1. The opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics programs is one of several factors related to high school student athletes' aspirations to attend college.

2. The option to participate in athletics provides an opportunity to help fund a college education through scholarships at both two-year and four-year colleges and universities.
3. Students who participate in athletics receive encouragement from others based on their achievements on the court or the field, enhancing their self-concept, and leading many to aspire to play their sport after college at the professional level.
4. Many academically underprepared student athletes choose to access higher education through the open doors of community colleges.

Acronyms

COA (Commission on Athletics): a governing organization for two-year colleges' athletics departments in the state of California

NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association): a governing organization for four-year colleges' and universities' athletics departments

NJCAA (National Junior College Athletic Association): a governing organization for two-year colleges' athletics departments

NWAACC (Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges): a governing organization for two-year colleges' athletics departments primarily in the states of Washington and Oregon

Definition of Terms

Aspiration: a goal, objective, ambition or desire

Athletic director: the person in charge of managing college or university intercollegiate athletic programs

Athletic eligibility: academic requirements set forth by the governing body of intercollegiate athletics determining an individual student athlete's qualification to participate in college sports

Community college: an institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree

First generation students: college students whose parents had no education beyond high school

NCAA Division I athletic programs: the highest level of intercollegiate athletics sanctioned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States

NJCAA Division I athletic programs: programs offering financial assistance because of a student athlete's athletic capabilities, including a maximum of tuition and fees, room and board, course related books, and transportation costs one time per academic year to and from the college by direct route

NJCAA Division II athletic programs: programs offering financial assistance because of a student athlete's athletic capabilities, including a maximum of tuition and fees and course related books

NJCAA Division III athletic programs: programs not offering athletic scholarships or aid of any kind

Red shirting: the practice of delaying a student's participation in a sport (having the student "sit out") for a year in order to increase the length of eligibility

Retention: continuing enrollment of students from semester to semester or from fall of one year to the fall of the following year

Self-concept: the idea or mental image one has of oneself and one's strengths, weaknesses, and status

Social mobility: elevation in status based on wealth, occupation, education, or some other social variable

Student athlete: a student in high school or college participating in that institution's sanctioned athletic programs

Summary

Community colleges serve as an open door to higher education for all Americans, but particularly for individuals who have limited financial or family support, have been underprepared academically to compete for admission to more selective postsecondary educational institutions, or are place-bound for any number of reasons and therefore seek a degree within their local communities. Additionally, community colleges have created access to education for a population of students who often face harsh criticism with regards to academics:

student athletes. Despite the criticism, the opportunity to participate in athletics has also provided these individuals with aspirations to further their education.

In the following chapter, a literature review will illuminate the issues related to postsecondary education aspiration for student athletes, beginning with an examination of expert research on the benefits of attending and completing a college education. The factors involved in college decision-making for student athletes will be set within a conceptual and theoretical framework and explored particularly as it relates to community colleges.

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

“The athletic field, like the gymnasium, is one of the University laboratories and by no means the least important one.”

William Rainey Harper, 1896

The benefits of attending and completing a college education are both societal and individual. A society in which more people graduate from college includes citizens who contribute higher amounts of taxes, are more likely to vote, and are more likely to be employed (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Cities, states, and countries benefit when more of their citizens attend college. Individuals benefit socioeconomically and in other aspects including cognition and personal health (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research notes many benefits of participating in postsecondary athletics, including greater likelihood of college graduation, improved communication skills, and increased personal self-concept (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2009; Gayles & Hu, 2009). Yet, criticism of college athletes and athletics programs frequently focus on poor academic achievement and the allocation of college resources for non-academic purposes (Sperber, 1990; Sperber, 2000; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). The debate often centers on whether directing limited fiscal resources towards athletics supports the mission of access to education through the open doors of community colleges. Student affairs administrators must face the internal and external issues affecting the fiscal management of each student program on the college campus, such as the internal competition for resources and reduction of external funding sources (Barr, 2009). They must be prepared to

advocate for athletics with supportive data, including the value of the programs to individual students.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between opportunities to participate in intercollegiate athletics programs at the community college level and students' aspirations to pursue higher education. This study investigates three areas of inquiry: a) which factors influence students' decisions to attend college; b) how students perceive their reasons for pursuing higher education; and c) what relationship exists between the opportunity to participate in athletics and students' college choices, including the choice to attend community college.

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature regarding student athletes and the reasons they aspire to higher education. The topic is examined within the context of the history and purpose of community colleges as channels of upward mobility. Further, this chapter reviews the opportunities college athletics programs provide in both two-year and four-year institutions, and the impact participation makes on the motivation of students to attend college. Finally, this chapter summarizes the existing research on the topic of college aspiration related to athletes as well as other special populations such as Latino adolescents and first generation college students.

Benefits of Attending and Completing a College Education

The impact of attending and completing college has been well documented in the relevant literature. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have made a significant contribution by synthesizing three decades of research on the effect of college on students. Their research contributes to the understanding of the changes college students experience in terms of learning, cognition, and

moral reasoning, as well as career and economic outcomes. Regarding learning and cognition, they write that

exposure to postsecondary education not only appeared to enhance significantly students' general verbal and quantitative skills as well as oral and written communication but also had a statistically significant, positive net effect on their general intellectual and analytic skills, critical thinking, their use of reason and evidence in addressing ill-structured problems (reflective judgment-thinking), and their intellectual flexibility. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 579)

In regards to moral development, they found “extensive evidence of a positive relationship between the level of principled moral reasoning and the likelihood of principled behavior in a wide range of settings” (p. 582). For socioeconomic outcomes, they concluded that completing a bachelor's degree increased earnings by “20 to 40 percent” as well as conferred advantages in occupational status and an increase in return on personal investments (p. 582).

Over the course of a full-time, full-year worker's lifetime (between the ages of 25 and 64), having a bachelor's degree provides 74% greater earnings than the worker with only a high school diploma, according to a study by Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah (2011, p. 4). The authors of this study also found that even within the same occupation, greater levels of education increased the amount of lifetime earnings. Those who do not complete a degree, but who have some postsecondary education, benefit by “nearly one-quarter of a million dollars” (p. 4), and those who complete an associate's degree benefit by “another bump of nearly \$200,000 in lifetime earnings” (p. 4). Postsecondary educational attainment has an impact on lifetime earnings, by both providing a pathway to the highest-paying jobs and increasing pay level within the same occupations.

Occupational data from the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics reveals the positive relationship between greater levels of education and both employment and

earnings. In 2010, the unemployment rate for workers without a high school diploma (14.9%) was over ten points higher than for those with a college degree (4.7%); the unemployment rate for workers with a high school diploma was 10.3%, for those with some college but no degree it was 9.2%, and for those with an associate's degree, it was 7.0% (United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The median weekly earnings for full-time workers over the age of 25 are significantly higher for those with a bachelor's degree than for those with less education. In the second quarter of 2011, the median income for those with bachelor's degrees was \$1,043, while high school graduates earned a median income of \$643. Those without a high school diploma earned a median income of \$458 (United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The many significant outcomes of college attendance and completion elucidate the benefits of pursuit of a college education.

Community Colleges in the United States

There are over 1,100 community colleges in the United States today (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011), having increased exponentially as higher education providers since the first junior college was established in 1901. At that time, Joliet Junior College focused on the pre-baccalaureate transfer curriculum as envisioned by University of Chicago President William Rainey Harper and the principal of the public high school system in Joliet, Illinois, J. Stanley Brown (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). The concept was intended to provide students with the first two years of college education, leaving the last two years for the often research-focused universities. Junior colleges continued to bridge high school and the senior institutions for students who had reasons to remain close to home or who were not academically prepared for the more competitive universities through the mid-1940s. As World

War II veterans returned home with GI Bill benefits and a need for post-war education and training, the Truman Commission of 1947 recommended an expansion of postsecondary education to include vocational education. This report is credited with popularizing the term *community college* and with conceptualizing the comprehensive mission that these institutions carry today (Bragg, 2001).

Between 1947 and the end of the 20th century, community colleges grew in numbers and added the focus of providing continuing education for local communities and training for business and industry. Community colleges today are called upon to provide the transfer function, the workforce development function, and the community lifelong learning function to the over 12 million students accessing these institutions today (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011).

Community Colleges as Channels of Upward Mobility

Community colleges provide an entry point to higher education for many students who would not otherwise aspire to higher education. According to Cohen and Brawer, community colleges “can and do make it easier for people to move between social classes” (2003, p. 393). Community colleges provide an access point for lower socioeconomic status individuals and academically underprepared students because of the low cost of attendance and open admissions policies. These institutions may be the only postsecondary option for students, as Cohen and Brawer wrote, “the choice is not between the community college and a senior residential institution; it is between the community college and nothing” (2003, p. 53). Community colleges have been pivotal in providing access to higher education for working-class and ethnic minority students over the last few decades, as Shaw, Rhoads and Valadez wrote:

Community colleges are positioned to play a critical role in the process of upward mobility in American society. While higher education traditionally has been the realm of the white and middle class, over the past 30 years the poor, the working-class, and ethnic and racial minorities have enjoyed increased access to postsecondary education, largely through the doors of community colleges. (1999, p. 1)

The lower cost of attendance, locations close to home, and less demanding admissions policies have increased the attractiveness of community colleges for a broader range of people, including first generation college students. According to Kane and Rouse, “Compared to students who first enroll in a four-year college, community college students are more likely to be the first in their family to attend college and are much less likely to have parents who have graduated from a four-year college” (2006, p. 97). As these students enter the open door of community colleges, there is an increase in aggregate American educational attainment as well as job and wage enhancement for those individuals who enroll in and complete programs of study.

The community college provides workforce development options and job retraining in emerging fields for members of its community. Additionally, as Dougherty described, “It is also a central avenue into higher education and toward the baccalaureate degree, particularly for working class, nonwhite, and female students” (2006, p. 77). As economically disadvantaged students enter the community college, their economic outcomes improve and there is a long-term personal economic benefit. The Illinois Community College Board indicates that graduates of Illinois community colleges have a “55% greater projected lifetime earnings gain” than if they had not graduated (Illinois Community College Board, 2011b). Students who attend college and graduate improve their life outcomes.

Illinois Community Colleges

There are 48 community colleges within 39 districts in the state of Illinois, making it the third largest community college system in the United States (Illinois Community College Board, 2011b). The governor of the state appoints individuals to the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), which provides coordination for these colleges. Each college is governed by a locally elected board of trustees with the exception of the City Colleges of Chicago, whose board is appointed by the mayor of Chicago. According to the Illinois Community College System Information and Facts page on the ICCB website, nearly two-thirds of students engaged in public higher education in Illinois are enrolled in community colleges (Illinois Community College Board, 2011b, para. 12).

The most recent Illinois Community College System Performance Report (2008) indicated that the system is providing an affordable education for Illinois students. Costs for in-district students are “26.8 percent of the average public university tuition and fees” (p. 16) and are rising at a slower rate than at the public four-year institutions. The report states that over an eight year comparison, “average undergraduate tuition and fees . . . at Illinois public universities are up 129.2 percent” while “average tuition and fees in the Illinois Community College System are up 62 percent” (p. 16).

Illinois community college students transfer more often when compared with the national transfer rate. Using the National Transfer Assembly approach, Illinois student transfer rates were “31.2 in fiscal year 2006 and 38.4 percent in fiscal year 2007” while “national results have varied between 21.5 and 25.2 percent” (Illinois Community College System Performance Report, 2008, p. 37). Those graduates from the pre-baccalaureate/transfer programs represent

“approximately one-third of all graduates over the last several years” (p. 41). The health sciences and the trade/industrial programs have the next largest number of graduates.

According to the ICCB’s Annual Student Enrollments and Completions in the Illinois Community College System Report for fiscal year 2010, “Although 40.4 percent of the fiscal year 2010 credit student population was enrolled in the baccalaureate/transfer area, only 34.0 percent of all students indicated intent to transfer” (p. vi) and “nearly 48 percent of all students indicated that they were enrolling with no intention of pursuing a degree” (p. 6).

Participation in Postsecondary Intercollegiate Athletics Programs

Students in the United States have participated in sports at the collegiate level since the mid-1800s, but organization of postsecondary intercollegiate athletics programs began with the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) in 1906. The group changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1910.

According to the NCAA website, there were 1,022 NCAA member colleges in the 2009-10 academic year with more than 421,000 young men and women participating (NCAA, 2010). The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) was founded as the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball in 1940 and in 1952 was reorganized as the NAIA. The NAIA grew to 290 schools in 2009-10 and 45,000 student athletes participating each year.

Athletics in community colleges were organized at the national level with the founding of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) in 1937. There were 525 NJCAA member colleges in the 2009-10 academic year with over 54,000 student athletes participating annually, according to the association’s website (NJCAA, 2010a). The state of California organizes its community college athletics within the Community College League of California’s

Commission on Athletics (COA) with a reported participation of nearly 25,000 student athletes in over 100 colleges, according to the COA website (California Community College Athletic Association, 2010). The states of Oregon and Washington are organized within the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges (NWAACC), with a total of 35 member schools, as reported on the association's website (NWAACC, 2010).

Nearly every Illinois community college offers an athletic program in the NJCAA. Between the two NJCAA regions, Region 4 and Region 24, 47 colleges have committed to athletics. Men's and women's basketball are ubiquitous, with nearly every program offering these sports, followed closely by men's baseball and women's softball. In all, 23 NJCAA-recognized intercollegiate sports are offered in the state of Illinois (NJCAA, 2010b).

Positive outcomes have been associated with participation in intercollegiate athletics. In fact, athletes at four-year institutions have a higher graduation rate than non-athletes. According to the most recent U. S. Department of Education graduation data on NCAA participants, for those athletes who entered college in 2002-03, 64% of athletes graduated within six years, while only 62% of the entire student cohort graduated within the same amount of time (Sander, 2009). Using the NCAA formula, whereby transfers in good academic standing are considered in the graduation rate, the number jumps to 79 %. Pascarella and Terenzini, in three decades of research on college students, found that “. . . male athletes are 4 percent more likely to graduate than male nonathletes” (2005, p. 616). These findings indicate that participation in college athletics enhance student outcomes at the four-year level.

A recent study examined how well student athletes engage in educationally purposeful activities and how this impacts student learning (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Student athletes from

Division I institutions were surveyed to assess how these activities influenced cognitive and affective outcomes. Cognitive outcomes include academic achievement, critical thinking skills, and logic and reasoning skills. Affective outcomes are related to attitudes and values. A significant gain was noted in the student athletes' participation in academic related activities, leading to improved learning and communication skills as well as increased personal self-concept.

Comparing student athletes to the general student population provides positive data on student athlete engagement. Using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) from spring 2003, which surveyed 113,553 students from 395 four-year institutions, Umbach and Kuh (2004) conducted analysis including the relationship between athletics participation and student engagement. They reported athletes were slightly more engaged in college than non-athletes, athletes interacted more frequently with faculty, and athletes reported greater gains from college than non-athletes in personal, social, and practical competencies and in general education. In comparing student athletes to non-athletes, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted the gains for student athletes over their non-athlete peers in civic values, community orientation, and openness to diversity.

For these reasons, many college presidents support the continuation of intercollegiate athletics programs in postsecondary institutions. James J. Duderstadt, president of the University of Michigan from 1988 to 1996, wrote, "First and foremost, we should regard athletics as but one component of the opportunities for learning we provide our students. We should embrace the ideal of a scholar-athlete and its objective of educating the whole person, even if we realize this is rarely achievable" (2003, p. 264). Findings in studies conducted with community college

presidents support the value of mission-alignment of athletics programs with higher education and with that of individual institutions as imperative to maintaining the integrity of these programs (Burgess, 2006; Williams, Byrd, & Pennington, 2008). These presidents also articulate concern for the students' welfare and the central importance of academic success in community college athletics programs. Presidents who value the complementary nature of athletics and academics and connect this to the college mission are essential to successful athletics programs in both two-year and four-year institutions (Lawrence, Mullin, & Horton, 2009).

Student Athletes in Community Colleges

Historically, athletics programs were active in the early junior colleges of the last century, with the larger colleges supporting the largest number of athletic teams (Koos, 1925; Eels, 1931). Within this century, the number of full-time students participating in intercollegiate athletics in the three community college athletics associations rose to 73,926, according to Castaneda's national overview of athletics in the community college (2004, p. 83). This represents 6.3% of all full-time community college students (Castaneda, 2004, p. 83) with athletics programs in place at 59% of the community colleges in the United States (Castaneda, Katsinas, & Hardy, 2006, p. 1). Using information published on the three major athletic associations' websites and in personal correspondence with one of the associations, the most recent estimate of community college athlete participation is over 82,000 (NJCAA, 2011b; COA, 2010; NWAACC, 2010; C. Hardin, personal communication, December 7, 2010).

Athletics programs are more prevalent at rural community colleges than at their suburban and urban counterparts. According to Castanada et al. (2006), "Rural-serving colleges make the greatest commitment to intercollegiate athletics, as seen in student participation, relatively higher

coaching salaries, larger awards of athletically-related student aid, and the level of competition sponsored” (p. 2). Enrollment growth may be the primary impetus for hosting athletics, especially for those colleges seeking first-time male students, because “male student athletes account for 6 percent of all first-time students enrolled at multi-campus urban and suburban community colleges, while first-time female student athletes are 2 percent and 3 percent respectively” (Bush, Castaneda, Hardy, & Katsinas, 2009, p. 8). There are 47 NJCAA-affiliated colleges in the state of Illinois within two regions, 4 and 24 (NJCAA, 2010b), and they are located within rural, suburban, and urban areas.

For those students who are place-bound or who have academic or financial impediments to seeking postsecondary opportunities at four-year institutions, participating in college sports at the community college level may be an attractive option. In a qualitative study of current community college athletes and former community college athletes who had transferred to four-year institutions, Horton found that

though several students in this study were academically eligible to attend a four-year institution on completion of their high school diploma, their reasons for attending a community college included the ability to stay home while attending college, less expensive tuition, reservations about personal preparedness to be successful at a large college or university, and the opportunity to continue their dream by participating in athletics. (2009, p. 21)

The opportunity to continue involvement in athletic pursuits is a valuable educational option for interested students. Athletic scholarships to two-year institutions are available at 63% of community colleges offering a sports program, providing another incentive for potential college athletes to enroll in one of these institutions (Bush, Castaneda, Hardy, & Katsinas, 2009, p. 8).

Attitudes about Student Athletes

Student athletes are the subject of criticism and scrutiny both inside and outside the academy. While much of the criticism has been leveled at high-profile university athletes, community college student athletes are reproached for many of the same reasons. In fact, some consider the transfer of community college student athletes to four-year institutions an admissions loophole (Sperber, 2000). Community college athletes, or junior college (“JUCO”) athletes, may improve their four-year opportunities by attending community college initially because of less rigid admissions policies. Sperber stated,

JUCO athletes usually belong to the cohort of high school athletes who fail to meet the NCAA’s minimal academic requirements for playing intercollegiate athletics as freshmen. As a result, they attend junior colleges and, after receiving graduation certificates there, move on to an NCAA school (they lose two years of NCAA playing eligibility in the process). Most important, these athletes are not required to take the SAT/ACT exams or to prove to anyone outside their junior college and the welcoming NCAA school that they can read, write, and count past ten. (2000, p. 240)

Besides these admissions policies, critics raise concerns about the special services student athletes receive at many institutions, such as tutoring, mandated study halls, and priority class scheduling around practice and game times. The rigor of academic majors and class selection are also questioned. Shulman and Bowen noted that today’s student athletes “bunch” in the social sciences, whereas in the 1950s, athletes and non-athletes chose the social sciences in similar percentages. They write, “A sea change has occurred since the 1950s: the athletes in the more recent cohorts—and especially those who play the High Profile sports—are seen to be very different from their classmates in the fields of study that they elect” (2001, p. 75). Their research found that student athletes are more highly concentrated in departments such as economics, political science, history, and psychology.

Horton (2011) included student athletes as one of the marginalized groups on community college campuses. This marginalization is based on the attitudes that prevail among faculty members and advisors that student athletes “are neither capable nor interested in their academic studies” (p. 29). He described the negative inferences by campus constituents when athletes are advised to enroll in less rigorous coursework in order to achieve a grade point average that will allow the athletes to maintain eligibility. Lowering academic expectations feeds the stereotype that student athletes are not capable of being academically competitive with their non-athlete peers. Horton commended athletic programs that focus on taking a holistic approach to student interactions and valuing “the educational and athletic experience equally” (2011, p. 32) as a pathway towards reducing the marginalization of student athletes.

Academic Preparedness of Student Athletes

Academic underperformance, both prior to college admittance and during college, is another criticism of college student athletes. In a study with data drawn from the 1990s and published by Bowen and Levin (2003), men who were recruited to play the so-called “high profile” sports of football, basketball, and ice hockey entered the admissions process with SAT scores more than 100 points below other students. Once admitted, the recruited athletes included in the study also achieved lower grades than “walk-ons” (athletes who were not recruited or scouted) and other students. Bowen and Levin wrote, “Recruited athletes underperform even in seasons or in years when they are not participating in athletics” (2003, p. 328), which suggests their academic underperformance is not related to the amount of time devoted to athletics.

Due to the lack of preparedness of many high school graduates, a number of community college students must enroll in developmental education. For student athletes, these classes will

not count towards eligibility in NCAA Divisions I and II. Some critics are concerned about whether students who are enrolled in developmental education should invest their time in sports participation when they are academically at risk.

The academic research completed over the last forty years has focused primarily on academic issues, such as “performance, eligibility, graduation rates, and grade point averages,” according to Twale and Korn (2009, p. 16). These issues are often referred to as “student success,” but Horton found that student athletes’ meaning of success varies from this definition. For these students, success is measured by receiving grades that continue to meet eligibility requirements and evidence of team and individual athletic progress (2009, p. 19). Successes in these three areas allow community college student athletes to transfer to a four-year college or university with athletic scholarships.

Two-year and four-year institutions typically provide support services for student athletes in order to enhance student success. These efforts improve retention and graduation rates by giving student athletes access to professional support staff and resources that can impact study and time management skills and provide the student athlete with the appropriate balance between academic and athletic expectations. Storch and Ohlson wrote that in order to prepare student athletes for a successful future after college, community college athletic support services should focus on providing services such as “academic advisement, academic mentoring, tutorial services, personal counseling and development, study skills, career exploration and development, and life management skills” (2009, p. 81). They further stated that academic advisement must include a thorough understanding of NCAA transfer rules so that eligibility at the four-year institution is assured. Marx, Huffmon and Doyle (2008) recommended providing programs on

“time management, study skills, stress management, sexual responsibility, alcohol and drug use, career exploration and development, and life as a student athlete” (p. 21). Additional focus on the integration of their dual roles as athlete and student are also recommended in order to reduce the stress caused by a perceived conflict between commitments to academic and athletic success.

Aspiration to Attend College

Students aspire to attend college for at least four primary reasons, according to Schlechter and Milevsky (2010): societal expectations, career goals, providing for family, and need for independence. Athletics opportunities may be embedded within these major categories as students view athletics as their vehicle to pursue athletic careers, bring financial opportunities, and enhance social mobility. Parental expectation or encouragement is another strong reason for students aspiring to attend college. While students whose parents have completed more education indicate societal expectations motivated them to pursue postsecondary education, higher education as a means of attaining status or respect appears to be stressed more by parents with less than a high school education (Schlechter & Milevsky, 2010; Bui, 2002). First generation college students indicate providing financial assistance for their families is more important to them than students who come from a family in which at least one of their parents attended college (Bui, 2002).

While the expectations of other people figure prominently in the literature on college aspiration, so does the extrinsic motivation of reaping future rewards. This futuristic focus of aspiring to a dream of success may well reflect on student athletes’ reasons for attending college. This concept is supported by historical research in which Rehberg and Schafer (1968) found a positive relationship between post-high school educational expectations and participation in

interscholastic athletic activities. In another study, Otto and Alwin concluded, “athletics has a positive effect on educational aspirations and attainment. We also find that athletics affects occupational aspirations, occupational attainment, and income” (1977, p. 110). Clark and Schroth found that “first year college students attend college with the expectation of receiving future rewards, such as prestigious jobs, perhaps with generous incomes, or out of obligation or expectation” (2009, p. 22). The literature supports a link between athletics and future aspirations, which include higher education, occupation, and social mobility.

Existing Research on College Aspiration

Multiple factors influence students to consider college, and structural advantages such as higher socioeconomic status, greater financial resources, and parents with college degrees have been found to be associated with increased levels of higher education aspiration (Ali & McWhirter, 2006; Bohon, Johnson & Gorman, 2006). Existing studies have focused on aspiration as it relates to ethnicity, social class, and non-traditional age students among other factors. For example, findings in a study with high school graduates who entered the workplace prior to enrolling in postsecondary education indicated lower job satisfaction as one factor that motivated them to pursue higher education (McGaha & Fitzpatrick, 2010). Another small study of first year college students enrolled in a developmental education program found nine themes in answer to the question of why the students were attending college:

- a) a desire for education, learning, or knowledge; b) enhanced job or career opportunities;
- c) future aspirations for success or better life; d) personal goals (e.g., “for myself,”) to be well-rounded or for personal growth; e) family goals or influences; f) exposure to the college experience; g) social aspects such as having fun or meeting new people; h) monetary factors such as earning power or potential income; and i) credentialing in the form of a college degree (Schultz & Higbee, 2007, p. 71-72).

Parental expectations are one of the key factors influencing students to consider higher education. In a study examining parent expectations for their children's educational attainment, 91% of parents of 6th through 12th graders indicated an expectation their children would continue in postsecondary education. Bachelor's degree completion was somewhat less expected at 65% of parents. The likelihood that parents expected college completion is greater for students from two-parent families, families with a household income greater than \$75,000, and for students whose parents completed bachelor's degrees (Lippman et al., 2008). Parents and families are highly influential in students' college aspirations.

College Aspiration and Ethnicity

In Illinois community colleges, ethnic minority students account for 30% of baccalaureate/transfer students and 29.3 % of the Career and Technical Education enrollees (Illinois Community College Board, 2011a). While African Americans attend community college at a representative rate to the state population, Hispanics and Latinos are underrepresented at Illinois community colleges with 9.6% of the baccalaureate/transfer enrollees from the Latino population and 9.4% of the Career and Technical Education enrollees (Illinois Community College Board, 2011a; United States Census, 2011).

There is a relationship between ethnicity and postsecondary academic attainment, as ethnic minority students in America continue to be underrepresented in both enrollment and graduation rates. A study by Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat and Chen compared high school senior enrollment numbers with college graduation statistics five years later and found that

African American, Hispanic, and Native American groups composed substantially lower percentages of college graduates than their respective percentages as a cohort of high school seniors. For example, African American students composed 14% of high school seniors in 1997, but only 8% of their cohort's college graduates five years later.

Similarly, 11% of high school seniors in this cohort were Hispanic, but they constituted only 7% of 5-year college graduates. (2006, p. 553)

In the case of African American students, this study found that parental expectations were one of the most significant predictors of postsecondary attainment, a factor significantly higher for African American students than for Caucasian students.

A high value on education is apparent in African American families, and Herndon and Hirt (2004) found that family and friends were highly influential for Black students in their pursuit of higher education. Their work also describes the importance of role models, including current college students and alumni, in building college aspirations in young African Americans. Additionally, they recommend that college admissions personnel “work with whole families to promote college attendance” (2004, p. 506) in order to effectively recruit African Americans to campus.

Latino families have also been found to be instrumental in the college aspirations of their children. A study of urban high school students from predominantly Latino communities described their college aspirational goals, reporting that “98% of the students indicate that they want to go to college and 82% of the students reported that their parents expected them to complete at least a four-year bachelor’s degree” (Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez & Cooper, 2009, p. 540). Mothers, in particular, were significant in the academic lives of their children. The study also noted that social connections were important to their academic aspirations, and described such connections as church, community-based organizations, and participation on athletic teams as providing access to the college-going culture.

College Aspiration and First Generation College Students

While the U. S. Department of Education defines a first generation college student as a child whose parents did not receive a college degree (United States Department of Education, 2011), this definition is not consistently utilized, and in some cases is reserved for students whose parents never enrolled in college. In fact, Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini described these students as those “from families where neither parent had more than a high school education” (2004, p. 249), and in this description stated

compared to their peers, first-generation college students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (e.g., costs and application process), level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school. (p. 250)

This study found that first generation college students have a college experience divergent from those students whose parents had attended college; in fact, over the course of their second and third years of college, they worked more hours, completed fewer college credits, and were less likely to live on campus than their peers. After three years of college, these students also attained a lower grade point average than students whose parents had attended college. First generation students were found to participate in extracurricular activities at a lower level, but received a greater benefit from participation in some of these activities than their peers with college-educated parents. Other activities had a negative effect, including time-demanding activities such as intercollegiate athletics, employment, and volunteering.

First generation college students pursue higher education for somewhat different reasons than peers whose parents have some college experience or a degree. Bui’s study found that first generation college students, students for whom both parents had completed a bachelor’s degree,

and students for whom both parents had some college experience attributed similar levels of importance to the following reasons to attend college.

Their friends were going to college, their parents expected them to go to college, their high school teachers/counselor persuaded them to go, they wanted a college degree to achieve their career goals, they wanted a better income with a college degree, they liked to learn, they wanted to provide a better life for their own children, they wanted to gain their independence, they wanted to acquire skills to function effectively in society, they wanted to get out of their parents' neighborhood, and they did not want to work immediately after high school. (2002, p. 6)

First generation college students diverged in their reasons to attend college in several areas, including "gaining respect/status, bringing honor to their family, and helping their family out financially after they are done with college," while those students with bachelor-degreed parents indicated they went to college because their "siblings or other relatives were going (or went) to college and they wanted to move out of their parents' home" (p. 6). Schlechter and Milevsky (2009) found that societal expectations were a significant reason to aspire to a college education for students whose parents have higher levels of education, a reason that was less significant for first generation college students.

College Aspiration and Athletes

Since Coleman's (1961) work in which he posited that extra-curricular activities such as athletics detract from academic pursuits, positive effects on educational aspirations have been found in studies with student athletes. In a study of male high school seniors, there was a positive association between expectations to attend college and participation in intercollegiate athletics, and that the association was strongest "for those categories of respondents least positively disposed toward a college education and weakest for those categories of respondents most disposed toward a college education" (Rehberg & Schafer, 1968, p. 732). Videon noted that

her analysis indicated “that participation in athletics has a positive influence on adolescents’ academic outcomes” (2002, p. 415) and that “sports participation had a greater positive effect on boys’ unexcused absences and expectations to attend college than girls” (p. 435). Several studies indicate that sports involvement increases educational ambition based on a desire for status attainment (Spady, 1970; Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973; Picou, 1978). However, Otto and Alwin postulated there are three additional explanations for the effect of sports participation on postsecondary aspiration.

First, participation in athletics may teach interpersonal skills that are readily transferable and marketable outside of athletics. Second, athletics may serve an allocation function by raising the visibility of participants and providing them with an early success definition or label. Third, athletics may introduce participants to interpersonal networks, contacts, and information channels that are beneficial in establishing careers. (1977, p. 112)

Whether increased educational ambition is a result of a desire for status attainment or has a more complex explanation, research continues to demonstrate the relationship between these two variables. In a study of male high school seniors on college-bound behaviors, O’Bryan, Braddock, and Dawkins reported that

varsity sport participation was shown to be a significant (positive) independent predictor of the college-bound behaviors of males attending public high schools in the U. S. Thus, male student athletes were significantly more likely to engage in college-bound behaviors in their senior year of high school if they were involved in school-based varsity sport their sophomore year, above and beyond the effects of traditional determinants of academic success. (2008, pp. 14-15)

For male student athletes, sport participation in high school enhances academic outcomes and increases college-bound behaviors.

Findings in studies with urban high school students indicated they are inspired to attend college by their coaches and their peers. DeMeulenaere stated, “In several ways, participation in sports promotes successful school performances by offering greater structure, creating

incentives, building confidence, developing positive peer and adult role models, and fostering college aspirations” (2010, p. 132). Both the positive adult role models who stress the value of education and the peer relationships developed on the playing field produce motivation for student athletes to consider postsecondary education.

Aspiration to Participate in Athletics in NCAA and in Professional Sports

Athletics opportunities may draw high school students to college because of the societal value placed on high-prestige opportunities in NCAA Division I and professional sports. Critical of the athletic enterprise that focuses attention on athletics over academics, Shulman and Bowen state, “The issuing of rewards based on sports accomplishments supports (and in fact makes real) the message that sports is the road to opportunity” (2001, p. 278). The concern that young people will be attracted to college exclusively for fame and fortune has no racial or ethnic distinction, but many African-American scholars write about the effect of “big-time” sports opportunities on young African-Americans. For example, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the Alphonse Fletcher University professor and the director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University, wrote an often-quoted opinion piece in *Sports Illustrated* wherein he states, “In reality, an African-American youngster has about as much chance of becoming a professional athlete as he or she does of winning the lottery” (Gates, 1991).

According to a study of 7,000 former NCAA student athletes, almost a third of them believed upon entering college that it was at least “somewhat likely” that they might pursue either an Olympic or professional career (NCAA, 2011, p. 6) despite the fact that “of the nearly 305 million people who currently populate the United States, there are only 17,000 professional

athletes” (Sanders, Gardner, & Jones, 2009, p. 24). Yet, the dream of playing Division I sports and beyond may motivate young men and women to visualize playing their sport beyond high school. Community colleges and four-year colleges and universities are responsible for uniting the vision of athletics and academics for recruits and continuing student athletes.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is that students who maximize their hopes and dreams by seeing opportunities for themselves in college through sport participation have made an important movement toward improving their life outcomes. In the United States and other industrialized countries, the developmental period from adolescence to adult has been described as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2004). This transitional period allows young people to explore possibilities, and according to Arnett, “such freedom to explore different options is exciting, and this period is a time of high hopes and big dreams” (2004, p. 3). Arnett described the five essential features of emerging adulthood:

1. It is the age of *identity exploration*, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work.
2. It is the age of *instability*.
3. It is the most *self-focused* age of life.
4. It is the age of *feeling in-between*, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.
5. It is the age of *possibilities*, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. (2004, p. 8)

For young people who have experienced a challenging childhood and adolescence, this period presents the emerging adult with a chance to change their lives. Even for those who come from a stable background, the prospect of independence and new opportunities provides a basis for exceptional optimism, and as Arnett stated, “the fulfillment of all their hopes seems possible” (2004, p. 17). This optimism leads many emerging adults to have aspirations to attend college.

Emerging adulthood occurs in the late teens through the mid-to-late twenties (approximately between the ages of 18 and 29), which is the time period individuals traditionally approach the option of higher education or work. Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, and Tanner (2011) described this stage as articulated in Arnett's theory as

principally a demographic phenomenon based on later entry into stable adult roles; emerging adulthood is the new life stage that opened up when transitions in love and work that previously took place in the late teens or early 20s moved into the late 20s or early 30s. (p. 15)

The college decision is often linked to the emerging adult's perception of the options that are available to them in the work and career arena. Emerging adults are frequently optimistic about the type of work possibilities that exist for them, and according to Arnett (2004), among the most common work themes are owning one's own business, having a music career, or having a career in sports. The connection between an interest in sports and the opportunities that exist in college athletics provides a pathway for some students to select higher education as an option during emerging adulthood. Considering research cited earlier, students who wish to attend college for any reason improve their life outcomes and student athletes who aspire to higher education based on their involvement in sport benefit from their college attendance.

As this study considered student athletes and their involvement in college, the theoretical framework for this study is grounded in the sociological theory of change as suggested by Astin (1985). Referencing a "theory of involvement," Astin stated that "students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133). Students who put physical and psychological energy into their college experience, whether through clubs and organizations or on-campus employment, are considered involved. Educational involvement is also referred to as student engagement, and includes educationally purposeful activities such as interacting with instructors, collaborating with other

students in educational tasks, and participating in community service. Astin used longitudinal data from over 200,000 students, focusing on how student involvement affected over 80 different student outcomes. He examined such types of involvement as participation in honors programs, fraternities and sororities, student government, and athletics, as well as academic involvement and interaction with faculty and college staff. This study contributed to Astin's student involvement theory, of which he wrote, "the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development" (1984, p. 307). This theoretical framework supports the study in that student athletes who must put continued energy into tasks and functions of their education in order to participate in their sport are by definition involved in their own education. They will learn and achieve greater academic success as a result of this involvement. As a result of his research, Astin recommended that postsecondary institutions allocate resources towards student services because "it pays off in terms of the number of favorable cognitive and affective outcomes that result" (2001, p. 433).

Astin's work led to numerous subsequent studies on the effects of student involvement on academic and personal outcomes. Foubert and Grainger (2006) wrote of a relationship between involvement in college student organizations and greater levels of psychosocial development particularly in clarifying purpose, involvement in their education, and planning for a career. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) found that "student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is positively related to academic outcomes as represented by first-year student grades and by persistence between the first and second year of college" (p. 555). In a study focused on college athletes, Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) found that "student-athletes are as engaged in most educationally purposeful activities as their peers" (p.

718). Involved students, including those involved in athletics, are likely to improve their academic outcomes.

Studies focused on high school student athletes contribute to the literature on engagement and academic success. Jordan (1999) stated, “participation in high school sports is associated not only with higher grades, better self-concept, and greater academic self-confidence but also with higher academic achievement” (p. 68). His study found that high school students who participated in athletics were more interested in school and that their involvement provided greater opportunities to interact with adults who encourage academic success. Among female high school athletes, a positive relationship was found between sport participation and educational expectations (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1977). Involvement, specifically in athletics, has been shown to have a positive impact on high school student academic orientation and educational expectations.

Summary

This chapter reviewed literature related to community colleges, aspiration to attend college, and college athletics in the United States. Community colleges have provided postsecondary educational programs and courses since the beginning of the last century, and have expanded their mission beyond the transfer function to include the workforce development function as well as the lifelong learning function for residents of the local district. Community colleges offer low-cost open admissions educational opportunities within local communities. As such, these institutions are an entry point and open door to education for many people who may not have aspired to higher education, including working class and ethnic minority students who recognize the personal advantages to receiving a postsecondary credential. Those individuals

who attend and complete a college education receive cognitive benefits as well as career and economic benefits, including greater lifetime earnings and lower likelihood of unemployment. Community colleges have been identified as channels of upward mobility for lower socioeconomic status individuals, nonwhites, females, and first generation college students.

Many individuals aspire to college in hopes of achieving future success and to have a better life, elements which are tied to the positive career and economic outcomes described in the literature. Parents and families have also been found to exert a positive influence on the college aspirations of young Americans. These factors have been determined to influence student athletes as well, but since the 1960s, college athletics opportunities have been strongly linked to the educational ambitions of high school athletes. These students dream of continuing to play their sport at the next level, and that next level is within intercollegiate athletics programs.

U. S. college students have participated in sports since the mid-1800s, and these programs have been organized primarily under two organizations at the four-year level, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Community college athletics have been organized under the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), the Community College League of California's Commission on Athletics (COA), and the Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges (NWAACC). There are approximately 550,000 college students participating in athletics on four-year and two-year campuses around the country each year. While student athletes seek to compete at the four-year level, many choose to attend community college due to the lower cost of tuition or their lack of academic preparedness for a university or four-year college.

This study examines the reasons community college student athletes aspire to attend college and the relationship between intercollegiate athletics opportunities and college aspiration. The following chapter explains this study's methodology, a mixed methods approach utilizing a collective case study design.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The researcher has selected a partially mixed methods approach in order to thoroughly address the study's primary research question of whether there is a relationship between participation in community college intercollegiate athletics and students' aspirations to attend college. On the research continuum, which extends from the mono-method research approach to fully mixed research, one method is described as partially mixed. According to Johnson and Christensen, "as long as both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are used within the same investigation, the study moves from being mono-method to at least a partially mixed method, even if one of the research elements is used only minimally" (2008, p. 445). In this study, a survey was utilized but the primary approach was qualitative.

The primary use of qualitative research was appropriate for this study because the problem of exploring athletics' role in the higher education decision-making process must be understood through the viewpoints of community college student athletes. The student athletes' perspective is critical in understanding the value of opportunities to participate in intercollegiate athletics and the impact on their aspiration to attend college. Qualitative research was selected as the primary method because, as Creswell writes, "we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (2007, p. 40).

There is not an abundance of qualitative or quantitative data on this topic, and this partially mixed methods approach helps to describe the significance of athletics participation in

relation to college aspiration. This study focuses on the perspective of student athletes who have enrolled in community college and helps to provide the educational context for their experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between students' opportunities to participate in community college athletics and their aspirations regarding higher education. Community colleges serve as an access point to higher education for all community members, regardless of academic preparation or financial resources. Horton (2009) describes community colleges as open doors for recruiting student athletes, especially males and African Americans, who may not otherwise pursue higher education. He states that "athletic programs at the community college offer a valuable experience for student participants and facilitate the continued desire to pursue academic endeavors beyond sports" (p. 29). The motivation to attend college can be fueled by students' athletic aspirations, thereby opening doors to higher education for many who would not have considered a college education.

Significance of the Study

Aspiration to attend college has been linked to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors (Pisarik, 2009) as well as structural factors such as parents' college education levels and socioeconomic status (Ali & McWhirter, 2006; Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006). In a study of four-year college students, participants mentioned the influences of friends attending college, parents and high school teacher and counselor expectations, and enhancing career and financial opportunities (Bui, 2002). For first generation college students, however, the results of Bui's study found that in addition to those reasons, other factors influenced their decision to seek

higher education. These students identified reasons such as bringing honor to their families, contributing to their families financially, and improving their social status.

Because the proportion of first generation college students is higher among community college students than among those who begin their postsecondary education at a four-year institution (Kojaku & Nunez, 1998), understanding how important athletic opportunities are for these students and whether there is a link to social mobility provides a valuable contribution to the literature.

In general, little research and information exists in the literature about community college student athletes. This study provides a valuable contribution to the literature by providing insight into this relatively under-researched topic.

Guiding Questions

The primary research objective of this study is to explore whether there is a relationship between athletic participation and the aspiration to attend college. The guiding questions for this study are

1. What factors influence students' decisions to attend college?
2. How do students perceive their reasons for pursuing higher education?
3. Is there a relationship between the opportunity to participate in athletics and students' college choices, including the choice to attend community college?

Research Design

In order to answer the question of whether there is a relationship between intercollegiate athletics participation in community colleges and the aspiration to attend college, the researcher selected a partially mixed methods design. The quantitative element was the implementation of

a survey instrument, and the qualitative method was a collective case study utilizing purposeful sampling. The primary approach of qualitative inquiry provides an extensive description of community college student athletes' reasons for pursuing higher education and provides different perspectives on the situation. According to Merriam (2009), this case study design shares “with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (p. 39). The question about the relationship between athletics participation and aspiration to higher education can be examined through the explanatory perspective provided by case study research.

By using the collective case study approach, there is a greater opportunity for the research to produce meaningful insights to the problem being studied. According to Yin (2009), the advantage of employing a collective case study, or multiple-case study design, is that “the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial” (p. 61). The researcher did not utilize a comparative case method but instead sought to provide a wider breadth of analysis through the use of multiple cases. The intent of the study is to analyze the college decision-making process of the average student athlete participating in intercollegiate athletics in Illinois community colleges. The researcher conducted a survey, facilitated focus groups, interviewed participants, and made observations in order to implement the partially mixed methods approach to this multisite study.

Site Selection

Employing a collective case study, or multisite study, the researcher purposefully selected sites within Illinois that represents the problem studied. Criterion used in this purposeful

site sampling included selecting community colleges within the state with a strong athletics program as evidenced by a robust number of sports offered and some meaningful competitive success of one or more of the teams; colleges with ethnic and socioeconomic diversity among the possible participants; and colleges within the three primary regions - northern, central, and southern - within the state. Within each site, the researcher selected male and female participants in intercollegiate athletics programs who were recommended by the athletics director, the formal gatekeeper to the participants.

Utilizing Illinois Community College Board data, the researcher reviewed the primary geographical regions of Illinois. In order to select “information-rich cases for study in depth” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77), colleges were identified in each of the three regions of northern, central, and southern Illinois that have been recognized as providing a successful athletics program. The site selection involved reviewing the number of Illinois community college sports to assess whether fiscal and institutional attention has been focused on the athletics program. Colleges with robust athletics programs are institutions that draw prospective student athletes for their opportunities in both athletics and academics. Additionally, NJCAA reports on the athletic success of Illinois community colleges provided support in site selection. The researcher sought to include colleges that have evidence of competitive success in one or more sports as another measure of ensuring some institutional support for the athletics program. The specific criteria for site selection included community colleges in each of Illinois’ three regions that have

- a broad range and scope of men’s and women’s sports with at least eight offerings (the NJCAA sanctions 23 sports);

- evidence of competitive athletic success through conference, regional, or national titles in at least one sport within the last five years;
- a full-time athletic director with at least three years in the position in community college athletics programs; and
- at least one head coach employed as a full-time college staff or faculty member.

Participant Selection

The researcher chose typical purposeful sampling over unique or maximum variation sampling because this study seeks to provide insight into the experience of typical Illinois community college student athletes as related to their aspiration to higher education. A typical purposeful sampling approach provided participants who reflect the average student athlete attending community college in Illinois. Merriam (2007) wrote that “a typical sample would be one that is selected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 78). This study did not seek to understand the experience of outliers or to review a wide variation of experiences as would occur in unique or maximum variation sampling.

The athletic directors at each of the three sites were included in the participant pool as a method of providing triangulation of data. Experienced athletic directors interact with individual athletes and their coaches, thus making them familiar with the paths the student athletes take on their way to higher education. Each athletic director was interviewed individually in a face-to-face audio taped meeting.

Qualified participants were identified and accessed through the assistance of the formal gatekeeper, the athletic director at the selected sites. Participants at each site included

1. Both male and female athletes from a variety of intercollegiate sports;
2. First, second, or third year students so that those who were “red shirted” and remained on campus three years were a part of the participant pool;
3. Student athletes between the ages of 18 and 24 ;
4. Student athletes from diverse ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and parents’ level of education; and
5. The director of the athletics program.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this study included such sources of evidence as (a) a survey, (b) focus groups, (c) interviews, and (d) observations from each institution studied. The use of multiple evidentiary sources provides triangulation of the data and develops converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2009, p. 115). In addition to field notes and observations, the researcher utilized these data-gathering methods for each site: an interview with the athletic director, a focus group with 7-9 student athletes, and a survey of rostered athletes.

Survey

Each college participated in a survey (see Appendix A) to provide quantitative data about a larger sample of student athletes. Johnson and Christensen (2008) described the research continuum in which both quantitative and qualitative elements are implemented, and this continuum includes a method described as partially mixed (p. 445). By using a survey, this research design is partially mixed, even though the survey results are used minimally in the overall study.

The purpose of the survey was to gather information about the larger population of community college student athletes in the state of Illinois. The survey sought information from a sample of the population to provide a snapshot of Illinois community college student athletes at a moment in time. The researcher asked questions and sought responses to provide generalized descriptions of Illinois community college athletes. The survey included the following: age; gender; ethnicity; team affiliation; parents' educational level; personal academic goal, such as completion of associate's degree or completion of bachelor's degree; personal athletic goals; and whether participation in athletics was influential in making the decision to attend college. Based on the recommendation for a population size of approximately 500, the survey was collected from at least 50% of the participants in the athletics program (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 213). The sample included student athletes participating in a variety of sports at each institution. The results were tabulated and summarized in this document.

Focus Groups

The researcher selected the focus group as a form of qualitative data collection for this study. Utilizing typical purposeful sampling, participants were selected for the focus group based on their common experience as a community college student athlete and their ability to translate their experience into words in a group setting. Merriam (2009) indicated that the data obtained in a focus group is "socially constructed within the interaction of the group" and that the goal is to have the participants hear the viewpoints of others as they share their own views (p. 94). The student athletes may or may not agree with one another, but the goal was to provide a context in which participants hear their own view alongside the views of others. Each audio taped focus group was semi-structured, lasted approximately one hour, and took place in a

natural setting, the college campus. The focus group questions (see Appendix B) tied back to the primary research question and the guiding questions of the study.

The researcher selected 7-9 participants for each focus group based on recommendations by each institution's athletic director. The researcher facilitated each focus group, and an incentive was offered to the participants in the form of a \$10 gift card to the campus bookstore. The researcher provided lunch at each site visit.

Interviews

Another form of data collection for this study was semi-structured focused interviews with the institution's athletic directors. Merriam (2009) wrote that this more open-ended and less structured type of interview gathers data that "allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 90). The focused interview, according to Yin (2009), is one "in which a person is interviewed for a short period of time" (p. 107) utilizing questions gleaned from the case study protocol. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were derived from the primary research question and the guiding questions of the study. The researcher audio taped each interview in the natural setting of the college campus for approximately one hour.

The researcher chose to interview the athletic directors in an effort to triangulate the data. This provided a thick, rich description of the observed experiences of student athletes at the three community colleges. Choosing athletic directors with at least three years of experience in their current position in community college athletics programs provided data from their observations of individual athletes and coaches over time. The researcher included this data in this document.

Field Notes and Observations

The researcher also took field notes and made direct observations during the site visits and interviews to provide other sources of evidence for the study. Merriam (2009) offered a checklist of elements that may be observed during interviews, including the physical setting, the description and characteristics of the participants, the activities and interactions between participants, the content of the conversation including silences and nonverbal behavior, subtle factors such as dress and physical space, and the researcher's own behavior during the data collection activity (pp. 120-121). Immediately after collecting the data, the researcher recorded her observations in generous detail and included reflective commentary on her initial interpretations of the site visit.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analyzing case study data that has been acquired from a variety of sources required organization of the data. Yin (2009) recommended collecting the results in a case study database (p. 118), which should include notes, documents, and tabular materials such as survey data results. Preserving this data in a database increases the reliability of the study because other researchers can view the evidence in a presentable and understandable fashion. Similarly, reliability is increased as the researcher maintains a chain of evidence so that future investigators can also trace the research steps. The researcher reviewed the data in aggregate to provide overall data on the impact of intercollegiate athletics on aspiration towards higher education for the typical student athlete in Illinois. This aggregate data also provides a more global perspective of the phenomena in Illinois community colleges.

Member checking and review of the draft case study enhanced the internal validity of the study. The participants had the opportunity to review the comments and statements made during the interview process, which, in turn, increased the trustworthiness of the study. According to Merriam (2009), this strategy is also called respondent validation, and the process reduces the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of the data collected (p. 217). The researcher provided the participants with the opportunity to provide feedback on their statements and on the emerging findings of the study by sending the transcribed interview to each athletic director and student athlete. The participants reviewed the transcription of the interviews and focus groups and were invited to provide a written response to the researcher if necessary.

Data reduction was done through theming, coding, and condensing the codes. Miles and Huberman (1994) described coding as “. . . tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). The codes were then categorized and organized so that the researcher could cluster the data in a meaningful way that led to appropriate, data-based conclusions. This classification, or theming, reduced the data into general research themes to make interpretation of the data possible. For example, the data was coded according to themes such as (a) first generation college students, (b) athletic participation opportunities in relation to aspiration to attend college, (c) other factors influencing college decision-making, and (d) academic intention.

Using a narrative approach as well as tables and figures, the researcher represented the data in the final written report of the research. The researcher looked for patterns and trends and made natural generalizations, which are, according to Creswell, “generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or apply to a population of cases” (2007, p. 163).

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of the proposed research include five points:

1. The study is limited to a small pool of participants who are student athletes in Illinois community colleges. The results cannot be generalized to a larger population of students in other community colleges or states.
2. The study is limited to a typical sample of Illinois community college student athletes and did not seek to understand the experiences of outliers or to review a wide variation of experiences of student athletes. The results cannot be generalized to the entire student athlete population in community colleges in Illinois or in other or all states across the country.
3. The study is limited to student athletes in community colleges, and the results cannot be generalized to student athletes in other postsecondary institutions.
4. There is variance in the scope and size of the athletics programs at the three community college sites. The results cannot be generalized to community college athletics programs of every size and scope.
5. The athletic directors at the three community colleges served as gatekeepers for which student athletes were selected to participate in the focus groups, and thus were critical in determining the participants at each site. The researcher acknowledges the presence of possible athletic director bias in participant selection.

The delimitations for this study include three points:

1. The study included a purposeful sample of community college student athletes and athletic directors at three institutions in one state.
2. Data collection interviews were scheduled at a time convenient to the participants and institutions.
3. Interviews and surveys included participants who were available during the site visit.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher took every precaution to operate ethically in this study with human subjects and applied the basic ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice in the data collection procedures. The risks involved in participating were not greater than day-to-day risks and the researcher explained this to all participants prior to the study, thereby ensuring the ethical principle of beneficence. Participation in this study was voluntary and participants had the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Only student athletes in Illinois community colleges were selected for this study, and their selection was based on their direct relationship to the problem being studied, which honors the ethical principle of justice. Each participant received and signed an informed consent form (see Appendices D and E) that explained the study, gave contact information for the researcher, explained any potential risks of participation, and ensured confidentiality and privacy. This ensures the ethical principle of respect for persons.

Summary

The study used a partially mixed methods research design. The researcher selected a collective case study design utilizing purposeful sampling in which three Illinois community

college sites were studied. Each site was also queried with a survey instrument. At each site, multiple data collection methods were used to triangulate the data including (a) a survey of student athletes, (b) focus groups of 7-9 student athletes, (c) semi-structured focused interviews of the institution's athletic directors, and (d) observations. The results of this study provide a rich, thick description of the relationship between opportunities for intercollegiate athletics participation at the community college and the student athlete's aspiration to attend college.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between students' opportunities to participate in community college athletics and their aspirations regarding higher education. Community colleges serve as open doors to higher education, and this study explores the aspirational factors that influence student athletes, many of whom are first generation college students or are underprepared academically, to pursue a community college education. This chapter presents the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative research conducted in this study.

The guiding questions for this study are

1. What factors influence students' decisions to attend college?
2. How do students perceive their reasons for pursuing higher education?
3. Is there a relationship between the opportunity to participate in athletics and students' college choices, including the choice to attend community college?

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings of this study are presented in several sections. First, the demographic data of the participants will be presented by gender, age, ethnicity, and team participation. The subsequent section will present the academic and athletic intentions of the student athletes, including their intentions to (a) complete an associate's degree, (b) transfer to a four-year college or university, and (c) participate in athletics at a four-year institution after leaving community college. Third, the factors that influenced student athletes to attend college

will be described. The fourth section will present the student athletes' perception of their reasons for pursuing postsecondary education. Finally, the influence of sports participation on the student athletes' college choice will be presented.

Participant Descriptions

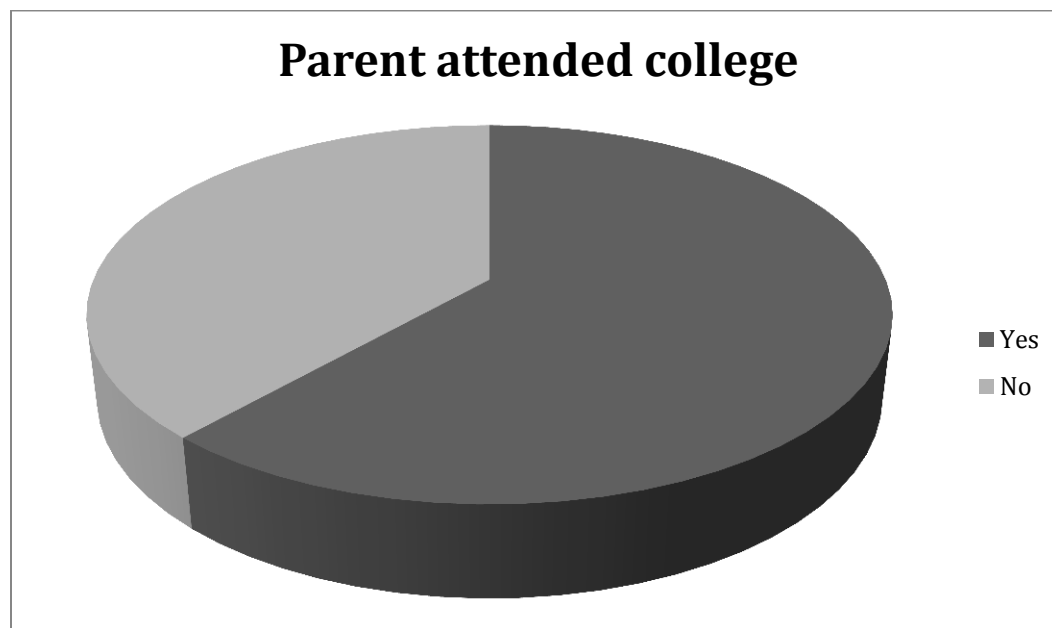
A total of 352 student athletes from three community colleges within the multi-case study completed the survey (see Table 1). In completing the survey, students self-identified their age, ethnicity, gender, and team affiliation. Some student athletes selected participation in more than one team; therefore, the percentage of student athletes in the team affiliation section is based on 357 responses. For the purposes of this study, men and women in cross-country and golf were grouped together due to the very low numbers of each participating in the survey. More than 56% of the participants were male and 91.2% were between the ages of 18 and 20. Over 63% percent self-identified as Caucasian, 29.3% as African American, and 2.8% as Hispanic. Another 2.8% self-identified as Multi-ethnic and 1.1% selected Other as their ethnicity. Two student athletes did not respond to the question on ethnicity (0.6%).

Participants in this study were asked about their parents' postsecondary educational experience. Six participants did not answer this question; from the valid answers to this question, 61.3% of the student athletes indicated that at least one of their parents attended college (see Figure 1).

Table 1: Student Participation Demographics
(N = 352)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage of Total
Gender		
Male	198	56.2
Female	154	43.8
Age		
18	78	22.2
19	151	42.9
20	92	26.1
21	23	6.5
22	3	0.9
23	3	0.9
24	2	0.6
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	223	63.4
African American	103	29.3
Hispanic	10	2.8
Multi-ethnic	10	2.8
Other	4	1.1
No responses	2	0.6
Team Affiliation		
Baseball	71	19.9
Football	56	15.7
Softball	50	14.0
Men's Basketball	38	10.6
Women's Soccer	31	8.7
Volleyball	30	8.4
Women's Basketball	29	8.1
Cross Country	21	5.9
Golf	14	3.9
Men's Soccer	11	3.1
Men's Tennis	6	1.7

Figure 1: Postsecondary education of parents



Academic and Athletic Intentions

Community college student athletes completing this survey indicated college completion and transfer to a four-year institution is a high priority for them, with 90.3% of all student athletes stating they intend to complete an associate's degree, and 92% indicating they intend to transfer to a four-year college or university. A lower percentage indicated they intend to continue playing their sport at the next level, with 63.9% stating they intend to participate in athletics at a four-year institution. The following tables (Tables 2, 3, and 4) display these results regarding intention by gender, ethnicity, and team affiliation.

Female student athletes were more likely to agree with the statement that they intend to complete an associate's degree, and Caucasian student athletes selected this option more often than African American student athletes (Table 2). Male student athletes indicated they intend to transfer to a four-year college or university at a slightly higher rate than female student athletes,

and African American student athletes were more likely to agree with the statement that they intend to transfer to a four-year college or university than Caucasian participants (Table 3). The sample sizes for Hispanic, Multi-ethnic and Other are very small, but 100% of all three of these groups agreed with the statement that they intend to transfer after community college.

Table 2: Intention to complete an associate's degree

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage of Characteristic
All	318	90.3
Gender		
Male	174	87.9
Female	144	93.5
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	206	92.4
African American	89	86.4
Hispanic	9	90.0
Multi-ethnic	8	80.0
Other	4	100.0
No responses	2	100.0
Team Affiliation		
Baseball	62	87.3
Football	48	85.7
Softball	49	98.0
Men's Basketball	33	86.8
Women's Soccer	30	96.8
Volleyball	28	93.3
Women's Basketball	24	82.8
Cross Country	21	100.0
Golf	13	92.9
Men's Soccer	9	81.8
Men's Tennis	6	100.0

Note. N = 352.

Table 3: Intention to Transfer to a Four-Year College or University

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage of Characteristic
All	324	92.0
Gender		
Male	188	94.9
Female	136	88.3
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	201	90.1
African American	97	94.2
Hispanic	10	100.0
Multi-ethnic	10	100.0
Other	4	100.0
No responses	2	100.0
Team Affiliation		
Baseball	67	94.4
Football	53	94.6
Softball	42	84.0
Men's Basketball	36	94.7
Women's Soccer	28	90.3
Volleyball	27	90.0
Women's Basketball	26	89.7
Cross Country	20	95.2
Golf	13	92.9
Men's Soccer	11	100.0
Men's Tennis	5	83.3

Note. N = 352.

Table 4 describes the participants' intention to continue their collegiate athletic pursuits at the four-year university level. Male student athletes were more likely to state that they intend to participate in athletics at a four-year college or university after they leave community college, with 78.8% of men and 44.8% of women agreeing with that statement. Table 4 also displays the responses to this statement by ethnicity; 88.3% of the African American students in the study

intend to continue their athletic participation, while only 49.3% of the Caucasian students have this intention.

Table 4: Intention to Participate in Athletics at a Four-Year College or University post-community college

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage of Characteristic
All	225	63.9
Gender		
Male	156	78.8
Female	69	44.8
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	110	49.3
African American	91	88.3
Hispanic	9	90.0
Multi-ethnic	10	100.0
Other	3	75.0
No responses	2	100.0
Team Affiliation		
Baseball	53	74.6
Football	53	94.6
Softball	15	30.0
Men's Basketball	34	89.5
Women's Soccer	14	45.2
Volleyball	16	53.3
Women's Basketball	23	79.3
Cross Country	5	23.8
Golf	3	21.4
Men's Soccer	10	90.9
Men's Tennis	1	16.7

Note. N = 352.

By team affiliation, football players were the most likely to agree with the statement regarding four-year athletics participation, with 94.6% of them intending to compete at the four-year level. Although there is a small sample size for men's soccer, 90.9% intend to continue playing soccer at the college or university. Nearly 90% of the men's basketball players are planning to advance to the next level, and 79.3% of the women's basketball players agreed with this statement.

Quantitative Findings by Research Question

The quantitative findings in this study are presented by each of the three research questions and are followed by a summary. Findings are presented in aggregate and are also disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and team affiliation.

Research Question One: What Factors Influence Students' Decisions to Attend College?

The student survey (see Appendix A) was distributed to student athletes at three community colleges during the early portion of the spring semester. The Athletic Director at each college enlisted the assistance of the team coaches to contact as many team members as possible for participation in the survey. Students were asked which other reasons besides the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics were influential in their decision to attend college. They were permitted to select multiple responses to this question. One respondent did not select any of these options. Students indicated that career preparation is the most influential of these other reasons to attend college, with 84.9% (298) selecting this option. Other reasons selected included parent expectations at 47% (165), teachers/coaches at 23.4% (82), and friends at 16.8% (59). The results are displayed in Table 5.

Research Question Two: How Do Students Perceive Their Reasons for Pursuing Higher Education?

Within the survey question regarding other reasons impacting student athletes' decisions to attend college, several responses illuminate the perception of the student athletes. Over 26% of participants indicated their college attendance will bring honor to their families and will help their families financially, and over 18% perceive it will improve their social status. Tables 5 and 6 identify the other reasons excluding sports participation that influence student athletes to attend college by gender and ethnicity.

Table 5: Other Reasons Student Athletes Decide to Attend College as a Percentage (by Gender)

Reason	Men (n = 197)	Women (n = 154)	All Respondents (n = 351)
Career Opportunities	86.8	82.5	84.9
Parent Expectations	45.2	49.4	47.0
Will bring honor to my family	28.4	24.0	26.5
Will help my family financially	32.5	18.8	26.5
Teacher/Coach	24.4	22.1	23.4
Improve social status	18.3	18.8	18.5
Friends attending college	15.2	18.8	16.8
Other	4.1	5.8	4.8

Community college student athletes indicate parents and family reasons figure strongly in their decision to attend college. Nearly half of the women and 45.2% of the men described expectations of their parents as a reason to attend college. Nearly a third of the men indicated college attendance will help their family financially, and 28.4% responded that it will bring honor to their family. These two reasons, helping their families financially and bringing honor to their families, were slightly less important to the female participants, with about a fifth of the

women selecting these reasons. Both men and women chose career opportunities as the primary reason to attend college other than athletics.

Table 6 disaggregates the data by ethnicity. There is a much larger sample size for the Caucasian student athletes (N = 223) and the African American student athletes (N = 103) than the other categories of Hispanic (N = 10), Multi-ethnic (N = 10), Other (N = 4), and No Response (N = 2).

Table 6: Other Reasons Student Athletes Decide to Attend College as a Percentage (by Ethnicity)

Reason	C	AA	H	ME	O	NR
Career Opportunities	86.5	82.7	80.0	80.0	60.0	50.0
Parent Expectations	46.4	44.2	80.0	60.0	40.0	0.0
Will bring honor to my family	19.4	41.3	20.0	20.0	40.0	0.0
Will help my family financially	18.0	41.3	50.0	30.0	20.0	0.0
Teacher/Coach	19.4	29.8	30.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
Improve social status	15.3	22.1	10.0	50.0	20.0	0.0
Friends attending college	16.7	14.4	20.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
Other	2.7	8.7	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0

Note. C = Caucasian; AA = African American; H = Hispanic; ME = Multi-ethnic; O = Other; NR = No Response.

Participants had the option of selecting “other” and writing in an answer of their own choosing. Of those students selecting “other,” 18 write-in answers were provided. Table 7 provides the statements, demographic information, and team affiliation of the participants who selected this option.

Table 7: Other Write-in Answers to Describe Reasons Student Athletes Decide to Attend College as a Percentage

Reason	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Team
To stay out of the streets	18	Male	AA	Football
To reach my goal	19	Male	AA	Football
To be successful in life and make it to the NFL	19	Male	AA	Football
To do more than what's expected of me	20	Male	AA	Football
It's what I'm supposed to do	21	Male	ME	Football
My expectations	18	Male	AA	Basketball
To be financially stable	19	Male	AA	Basketball
Fun	19	Male	AA	Baseball
Want to leave hometown	18	Female	AA	Basketball
Play basketball (2)	18	Female	AA	Basketball
To educate myself	20	Female	AA	Basketball
First one in my family to attend and hopefully graduate [from] college	18	Female	C	Soccer
Myself	20	Female	C	Soccer
I want to succeed	20	Female	C	Soccer
I am the first in my family to attend college and earn an athletic scholarship	20	Female	C	Soccer
Because I wanted to	20	Female	C	Volleyball
I wanted a degree so I can get a good job	20	Female	C	Volleyball

Note. AA = African American; ME = Multi-ethnic; C = Caucasian.

From these 18 write-in statements, several consistent themes emerged as to how student athletes perceive their reasons to attend college. Those who made the effort to write in an answer most frequently described an interest in improving oneself, whether it is “to stay out of the streets,” “to be financially stable,” or to reach their own expectations or goals for success (“to reach my goal” and “I want to succeed”). The goals of education and employment were mentioned by several of the student athletes (“I wanted a degree so I can get a good job”). Three

student athletes mentioned athletic participation, whether it is to play the sport specifically (“play basketball”) or to participate in their sport as a professional athlete (“make it to the NFL”). Two comments related to the student athlete’s position as the first generation in her family to attend college (“first one in my family to attend and hopefully graduate college”). Other comments describe college as a next step in life (“it’s what I’m supposed to do”), as a chance to gain independence (“want to leave hometown”), and as an opportunity to experience enjoyment (“fun”).

Research Question Three: Is There a Relationship Between the Opportunity to Participate in Athletics and Students’ College Choices, Including the Choice to Attend Community College?

The participants were surveyed on how influential athletics opportunities were to their decision to attend college, including their choice to attend community college. Over 80% described the opportunity to participate in college athletics as “very influential” or “influential” in their decision to attend college. Only 6.8% of the participants indicated it was “not at all influential.” Of the 346 answers to this question, “very influential” was the median and mode answer. Table 8 presents the results according to gender, with 83.9% of the men indicating it is “very influential” or “influential,” and 78.6% of the women describing it as such.

Table 8: Influence of Opportunity to Participate in Athletics as Motivation to attend Community College as a Percentage (by Gender)

Level of influence	Men (n = 192)	Women (n = 154)	All Respondents (n = 346)
Very influential	62.0	56.5	58.5
Influential	21.9	22.1	21.8
Somewhat influential	9.4	8.4	8.8
Slightly influential	2.1	3.2	2.5
Not at all influential	4.7	9.7	6.8

In Table 9, the results are presented according to ethnicity. African American student athletes in this study indicated athletics was “very influential” or “influential” to their decision to attend college more frequently (92.9%) than Caucasian student athletes (75.8%). The ethnic groups with a small sample size in this study - Hispanic with N = 10, Multi-ethnic with N = 10, Other with N = 4, and No Response N = 2 - selected “very influential” most often. Caucasian participants were more likely to state athletics was “not at all influential” with 9.9% choosing this option. Only 1.0% of African American participants and none of the Hispanic participants selected this response on the survey. These data suggest there is a correlation between ethnicity and whether athletics was influential in the participants’ decision to attend college.

Table 9: Influence of Opportunity to Participate in Athletics as Motivation to attend Community College as a Percentage (by Ethnicity)

Level of Influence	C	AA	H	ME	O	NR
Very influential	48.4	77.6	90.0	90.0	75.0	100.0
Influential	27.4	15.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Somewhat influential	10.8	6.1	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0
Slightly influential	3.6	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Not at all influential	9.9	1.0	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0

Note. C = Caucasian; AA = African American; H = Hispanic; ME = Multi-ethnic; O = Other; NR = No Response.

The data was disaggregated by team affiliation and is presented in Table 10. The sports in which the largest number of participants selected “very influential” or “influential” were men’s basketball at 92.1%, softball at 92%, and football at 90%. The sports in which the largest number of participants selected “not at all influential” were golf at 21.4% and cross-country at 19.0%.

Table 10: Influence of Opportunity to Participate in Athletics as Motivation to attend Community College as a Percentage (by Sport)

Level of Influence	BB	FB	SB	MB	WS	VB	WB	CC	G	MS	MT
Very influential	60.6	80.0	62.0	68.4	51.6	63.3	65.5	28.6	28.6	45.5	33.3
Influential	22.5	10.0	30.0	23.7	22.6	16.7	17.2	23.8	35.7	9.1	50.0
Somewhat influential	5.6	6.0	6.0	7.9	6.5	13.3	10.3	14.3	7.1	36.4	16.7
Slightly influential	1.4	2.0	0.0	0.0	6.5	0.0	0.0	14.3	7.1	9.1	0.0
Not at all influential	9.9	2.0	2.0	0.0	12.9	6.7	6.9	19.0	21.4	0.0	0.0

Note. BB = Baseball; FB = Football; SB = Softball; MB = Men’s Basketball; WS = Women’s Soccer; VB = Volleyball; WB = Women’s Basketball; CC = Cross Country; G = Golf; MS = Men’s Soccer; MT = Men’s Tennis.

The following table describes the data in aggregate according to whether one or both of the participants’ parents attended college. Student athletes who had one or more parent attend

college were more likely to select “very influential” or “influential” (86.5%) while 78.8% of students with neither parent having college attendance selected those options.

Table 11: Influence of Opportunity to Participate in Athletics as Motivation to attend Community College as a Percentage (by Parents' College Attendance)

Level of influence	One or both parents attended college	Neither parent attended college
Very influential	61.7	58.5
Influential	24.8	20.3
Somewhat influential	6.8	10.4
Slightly influential	2.3	2.8
Not at all influential	4.5	8.0

In order to determine the relationship between variables within the study, a test of independence was conducted on three paired variables. These Chi-square tests of independence were conducted to compare whether the opportunity to participate in community college athletics was independent of the gender, ethnicity, and team affiliation variables. Tables 12, 13, and 14 describe these findings. The Chi-square analysis displayed in Table 12 consists of two categorical variables: 1) gender and 2) whether the opportunity to participate in community college athletics was influential on the student athletes' decision to attend college.

A Chi-square test is a statistical test used to determine the probability of obtaining the observed results by chance, and the Chi-square test for independence is used to compare the observed responses of two different sub-groups in a sample. This study sought to understand the relationship of categorical variables such as ethnicity, gender, and team membership to the level of influence of sports participation on student athletes' desire to attend college. The null hypothesis is that there is no relationship between the categorical variables (such as gender,

ethnicity, and team affiliation) and the participants' response to the question on the level of influence college athletics opportunities had on their decision to attend college. The p-value represents the probability that the differences between the compared groups occurred by chance, which means that if the p-value is less than the level for significance then the results did not occur by chance. One population or subgroup (e.g. gender = male) is compared to another (e.g. gender = female) to determine whether the differences in their responses reflect true difference. The researcher rejects the null hypothesis in the event the probability level is less than the significance level.

Table 12: Cross Tab Analysis by Gender of Influence of Opportunity to Participate in Athletics as Motivation to attend Community College as a Percentage (N = 346)

Level of Influence	Male			Female		
	% within gender	% within influence	% of total	% within gender	% within influence	% of total
Very influential	62.0	57.8	34.4	56.5	42.2	25.1
Influential	21.9	55.3	12.1	22.1	44.7	9.8
Somewhat influential	9.4	58.1	5.2	8.4	41.9	3.8
Slightly influential	2.1	44.4	1.2	3.2	55.6	1.4
Not at all influential	4.7	37.5	2.6	9.7	62.5	4.3

When data were disaggregated by gender using a cross tabulation (Table 12) and associated Chi-square analysis, statistically significant differences were not found relative to the level of influence on the opportunity to participate in community college athletics and gender, Chi-square (4, N = 346) = 4.107, $p = 0.392$. Therefore, the researcher accepted the null hypothesis in the gender analysis. The Chi-square analysis displayed in Table 13 consisted of two variables, ethnicity and response to the question on whether the opportunity to participate in community colleges was influential on the student athletes' decision to attend college. The

ethnicities selected were Caucasian and African American because the small sample sizes for the other ethnicities were not adequate to present meaningful findings.

By disaggregating the data by ethnicity using a cross tabulation (Table 13) and associated Chi-square analysis, statistically significant differences were found relative to the level of influence on the opportunity to participate in community college athletics and ethnicity as it relates to Caucasians and African American student athletes, Chi-square (4, N = 321) = 26.764, $p = 0.000$. As a result of these findings, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis in the ethnicity analysis. Table 14 describes the Chi-square analysis consisting of two variables: 1) team affiliation and 2) response to the question on whether the opportunity to participate in community college athletics was influential on the student athletes' decision to attend college. Football is compared to all other sports in this analysis.

Table 13: Cross Tab Analysis by Ethnicity of Influence of Opportunity to Participate in Athletics as Motivation to attend Community College as a Percentage

Level of Influence	Caucasian			African American		
	% within ethnicity	% within influence	% of total	% within ethnicity	% within influence	% of total
Very influential	48.4	58.7	33.6	77.6	41.3	23.7
Influential	27.4	80.3	19.0	15.3	19.7	4.7
Somewhat influential	10.8	80.0	7.5	6.1	20.0	1.9
Slightly influential	3.6	100.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Not at all influential	9.9	95.7	6.9	1.0	4.3	0.3

Note. N = 321.

Table 14: Cross Tab Analysis by Sport of Influence of Opportunity to Participate in Athletics as Motivation to attend Community College as a Percentage

Level of Influence	Football			All other sports		
	% within football	% within influence	% of total	% within sports	% within influence	% of total
Very influential	80.0	19.4	11.6	56.1	80.6	48.0
Influential	10.0	6.6	1.4	24.0	93.4	20.5
Somewhat influential	6.0	9.7	0.9	9.5	90.3	8.1
Slightly influential	2.0	11.1	0.3	2.7	88.9	2.3
Not at all influential	2.0	4.2	0.3	7.8	95.8	6.6

Note. N = 321.

In this analysis as described in Table 14, statistically significant differences were found relative to the level of influence on the opportunity to participate in community college athletics and team affiliation as it relates to football student athletes and all other student athletes, Chi-square (4, N = 346) = 10.626, $p = 0.031$. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis in the team affiliation analysis.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The multi-case study employed a survey of 352 student athletes from three Illinois community colleges. Each participant completed one survey, but five students selected more than one sport in the section on team affiliation. The data was analyzed in aggregate and disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and team affiliation.

Most of the participants were traditional age college students, with 91.2% between the ages of 18 and 20. The student athletes were asked if at least one of their parents attended college, and 61.3% of them stated their parents had at least some postsecondary educational experience.

Student athletes in the study were surveyed on their educational and athletic aspirations. Regarding educational options, participants were asked about their intentions to graduate from their community college, and if they intended to transfer to a four-year college or university. If participants intended to complete an associate's degree and subsequently transfer to a senior institution, they had the option to select both responses. 90.3% of all student athletes stated they intend to complete an associate's degree, and 92% of the total indicated their intent to transfer to a four-year college or university. In regards to athletic aspirations, participants indicated that athletic participation at the four-year level is less likely for those seeking to transfer, with 63.9% stating they intend to participate in athletics at a four-year institution. Female and Caucasian participants were most likely to indicate they intend to complete an associate's degree. Of those surveyed, male and African American student athletes were more likely to indicate they intend to transfer to a four-year college or university. Regarding athletic participation post-community college, males and African Americans in this study were more likely to indicate their intention to do so. Football players were the most likely of all the team members to state their intention to participate in intercollegiate athletics after community college.

This survey asked student athletes to indicate which other reasons besides the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics influenced their decision to attend college. Participants could select more than one answer, and 84.9% indicated that career preparation is the most influential of the other reasons to attend college, followed by parent expectations at 47%, bringing honor to their family at 26.5%, helping their family financially at 26.5%, teachers/coaches at 23.4%, improving their social status at 18.5%, and friends attending college at 16.8%.

The participants were surveyed on how influential athletics opportunities were to their decision to attend college, including their choice to attend community college. A total of 80.3% described the opportunity to participate in college athletics as “very influential” or “influential” in their decision to attend college. By gender, 83.9% of the men indicated it is “very influential” or “influential,” and 78.6% of the women selected those options. By ethnicity, African American student athletes in this study indicated athletics was “very influential” or “influential” to their decision to attend college most frequently at 92.9%. By sport, the largest percentage of participants who selected “very influential” or “influential” were men’s basketball players at 92.1%, softball players at 92%, and football players at 90%. By parents’ college attendance, student athletes who had one or more parent attend college were more likely (86.5%) to select “very influential” or “influential” than those whose parents did not attend college (78.8%).

Statistically significant differences were not found relative to the level of influence on the opportunity to participate in community college athletics and gender, but significance was found by ethnicity and team affiliation. The data indicate that there is a statistically significant difference for African American student athletes and those men participating in football regarding the level of influence related to the opportunity to participate in community college athletics when compared with Caucasian student athletes and those affiliated with other sports.

Qualitative Findings

This study utilized both focus groups and interviews to collect the qualitative data. The researcher conducted focus groups with student athletes at three Illinois community colleges, and semi-structured focused interviews with three athletic directors at the same institutions. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of an experience for those

individuals directly involved. According to Merriam (2009), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). In this case study, the student athletes describe the meaning of the opportunity to play their sports at the community college, and the athletic directors provide observations of student athletes’ experiences at their particular community college.

Participant Profiles

Twenty-three student athletes from three Illinois community colleges participated in focus groups at their college. Each semi-structured focus group was made up of seven to nine student athletes from the NJCAA-recognized athletic teams for each college and was held in either a campus conference room or in a classroom. The student athletes were both male and female between the ages of 18 and 24, and represented diversity in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parents’ level of education. Two of the student athletes were international students, one from Africa and one from Europe. They participate in one or more of 12 sports: baseball, men’s basketball, women’s basketball, men’s cross country, women’s cross country, football, men’s golf, women’s golf, men’s soccer, women’s soccer, softball, and volleyball.

Table 15: Focus Group Participants

Site	Gender	Ethnicity	Sport
1	Female	African American	Basketball
1	Female	Caucasian	Softball
1	Male	African American	Football
1	Male	African (International)	Soccer
1	Male	Caucasian	Baseball
1	Male	Caucasian	Baseball
1	Male	African American	Cross Country
2	Female	African American	Basketball
2	Female	Caucasian	Cross Country
2	Female	Caucasian	Soccer
2	Female	Caucasian	Softball
2	Female	Caucasian	Volleyball
2	Male	African American	Basketball
2	Male	Caucasian	Golf
2	Male	Caucasian (International)	Soccer
2	Male	Caucasian	Soccer
3	Female	African American	Basketball
3	Female	Caucasian	Golf
3	Female	Caucasian	Soccer
3	Female	Caucasian	Softball
3	Female	Caucasian	Volleyball
3	Male	Caucasian	Baseball
3	Male	Caucasian	Cross Country

Note. N = 23.

The athletic directors from each of the three community colleges were interviewed on campus. Each semi-structured interview was conducted in the athletic director's private office. There were both male and female athletic directors in the sample. Two of them have served as a head coach for over 20 years, and one has been a head coach for less than five years. In terms of

their length of service as athletic directors, one has more than 20 years of experience, one has more than 10 years of experience, and one has less than five years of experience.

Table 16: Athletic Director Participants

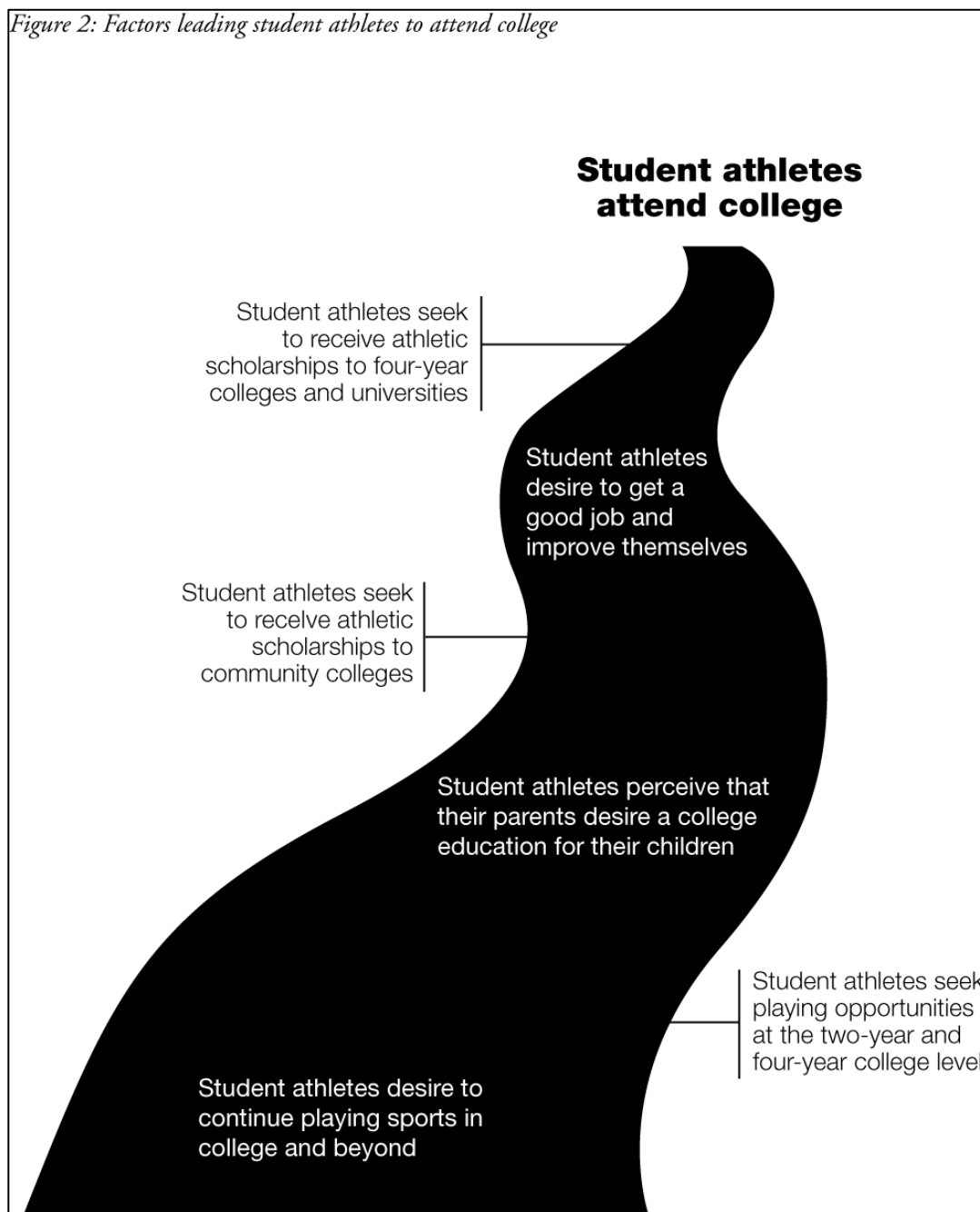
Years as Head Coach	Years as Athletic Director
More than 20 years	More than 20 years
More than 20 years	More than 10 years
Less than 5 years	Less than 5 years

Note. N = 3.

Qualitative Findings by Research Question

The qualitative findings are presented according to research question. The question matrix for the student athlete focus groups (see Appendix B) and the athletic director interviews (see Appendix C) were designed to provide answers to the guiding question of whether there is a relationship between athletics participation and the aspiration to attend college. In addition, the other factors that influenced student athletes to attend college were explored during each site visit. Three primary themes emerged as aspirational factors during the focus groups and interviews: 1) student athletes desire to continue playing sports in college and beyond, 2) student athletes desire to get a good job and improve themselves, and 3) student athletes perceive that their parents wish for them to attend college. The intervening variables (additional factors that contribute to college aspiration) are that student athletes seek playing opportunities at the two-year and four-year level, and student athletes seek to receive athletic scholarships in either or both the community college and the four-year college or university as a method of providing financial assistance to attend college. Figure 2 illustrates these themes.

Figure 2: Factors Leading Student Athletes to Attend College



Research Question One: What Factors Influence Students' Decisions to Attend College?

Student athletes who participated in the focus groups for this study described numerous influential and aspirational factors that led them to the goal of college enrollment, attendance, and intended graduation with either an associate's degree or baccalaureate degree. Several student athletes mentioned the influence of people other than parents as a reason they began to consider a college education, especially friends and high school coaches.

My friends were heavy. A lot of my friends aren't from here. Through basketball I traveled a lot, so we'd meet a lot of people and we'd keep contact -- buddies across the U. S. It was almost a competition! Who did you get a letter from this month, who came to the game, who would get signed first, and who would go to the biggest school. (Men's basketball player, African-American)

Student athletes explained that friends might have an influence on being recruited by coaches to play athletics in community college. Additionally, having someone familiar on campus during the transition to college provides some reassurance for some student athletes.

I think my friend helped me get my scholarship because I had thought about playing volleyball in a college setting, but I didn't know if I was good enough. She said, "Well, contact the coach and find out, you know?" and she had the coach come watch a game. I'd sent some tapes down and everything, and my friend was telling the coach, "Hey, check out this girl, she's good, she's right side", and she kind of influenced Coach's idea and I got on the team. Plus, it's nice to have someone your first year of college be by your side and teach you things and just help you out. (Volleyball, Caucasian)

All three athletic directors mentioned friends as influential to the process of a student athlete deciding to attend their colleges and participate in athletics. Athletic Director #1 said that if a student athlete from a particular high school has a good experience, he or she may recommend the college to upcoming students, and that "players are our best recruiters." The

athletic directors agreed that at times they are recruiting one player and they learn about another player based on the friendship between the two of them.

If I have successfully recruited Susie, and Susie plays on Sally's team, and I know they are good friends, and I want Sally, Susie is going to help me get Sally. No doubt. (Athletic Director #2)

Focus group participants also acknowledged the influence of high school coaches on their decision to attend college. One student athlete remarked, "Our head coach came down on us. It was expected of us to go out and play collegiate baseball." Another who plays both volleyball and softball stated, "I think it kind of depends which sport you play. There were some who were more serious about getting their athletes on, and some were just there for their reputation within the area." The athletic directors agree that there are some coaches who have a strong influence on potential players, and that community college coaches rely on positive relationships with those individuals in order to recruit effectively.

The high school coaches are the ones who, as recruiters, we live and die on. They're the ones that we hope will recommend us the player that's going to fit here, the player who was overlooked, the player who does have bad grades but can play a sport. (Athletic Director #1)

As described above, student athletes mentioned coaches and friends as having had some influence on their choice to attend college, but the focus group participants conveyed that these individuals did not have the greatest impact on them. The qualitative results support the results of the survey, which found that 16.8% of the participants said their friends influenced them and 23.4% stated they were influenced by a teacher/coach (see Table 5). In the focus groups, high school teachers were less significant than high school coaches to most of the students. One of the students, a women's cross country team member, said that high school was the time in her life that others began talking to her about college. She stated, "Teachers and instructors start

talking about, ‘What are you going to do after high school?’ so they had a big influence.” There were inconsistent findings regarding high school counselors as well. Some of the students had counselors who supported their interest in athletics and used that interest to encourage college attendance. One of the softball players commented on her influential high school counselor.

My teachers didn’t really care, but my school counselor, she always sat me down every couple of weeks and would ask what my thoughts are, where I’m at on college choice. I never really wanted to go to college because I didn’t like school. I just wanted to play sports. She was a big influence to help me get where I am today.

Some students stated that counselors helped them with college applications and in seeking scholarships. A men’s basketball player received help from a counselor who understood the relationship between athletics and academics.

He was a former football coach, and he had a really good relationship with my men’s basketball coach, so he put me in the right classes. He’d tell me the scores I needed to have, the whole nine. My counselor was really influential in furthering my education.

In the interviews with the athletic directors, however, high school counselors did not emerge as a strong influence, but they were able to describe how the college athletics department utilizes the counselors to help recruit student athletes for their programs. One athletic director explained the importance of high school counselors in the recruiting process to assess the level of fit between the student athlete and the college.

We talk with them on a regular basis to get transcripts and to get a better feel for the kid, how their classmates relate to them, how they relate to their classmates at the high school level. That will tell us a lot about how they’re going to relate to their teammates here at (community college name). We want to bring in good individuals who are going to relate to coaches, the faculty, the staff, and their teammates here. (Athletic Director #3)

Some participants described a positive relationship between high school faculty and staff and student athletes' aspiration to attend college; however, high school teachers and counselors did not emerge as some of the most consistent reasons student athletes chose to pursue a college education. The group of people with the greatest influence on student athletes to pursue higher education was parents. Participants described their parents' occupations and the impact that has had on their choice to attend college.

My dad went to college for a semester and he never got to finish. Now he's a construction worker. He has to get up at 5 in the morning every day, 7 days a week whether it's a holiday or not. I can't picture myself doing that. (Football player, African American)

Other students described a similar influence on their decision to attend college.

I think the reason my parents influenced me so much is so I would have a better life than what they had. Being limited to (town), there's not a lot of opportunity here, so they were like, "get your education, you can live where you want and you can pretty much do what you want." (Men's basketball player, African American)

A female student athlete described the impact her mother had on her choice to attend college, in particular as a woman.

My parents – mostly my mom – were everything. My parents got divorced when I was in high school and we stayed with my mom. She had dropped out of school to raise her kids and stopped working, so when she had to go back to work, I was older. I saw how important it was to get a degree, especially if you are a woman. Just seeing my mom go through that kind of stuff – it was a big influence. (Soccer player, Caucasian)

Several of the participants in the focus groups were children of former collegiate athletes or professional athletes who had personal experience with athletics and academics. Their parents stressed the importance of degree completion.

My dad was constantly on me because he went to three years of college and then he decided to play pro baseball, so he never finished his college

career. After that's done, it doesn't last forever. Going back, trying to find a job was difficult if he didn't have a job in that field of baseball. So he was always saying that schooling is what will get you through your life and not sports. (Volleyball/soccer player, Caucasian)

The athletic directors agreed that many parents have an influence on their children's decision to attend college.

They're very influential. I mean, when we bring athletes and parents on campus for visits, they have a lot of good questions. They want to know how do we handle academics, do we have study tables, do we have study sessions and tutoring, because their big concern is making sure that these individuals get their education so they can enter the job world and get a good job and move up and move on from there. We walk them around campus, we show them all of our athletic facilities, but then we also tour the academic side of the house and make sure they're comfortable with it and answer any questions they have. (Athletic Director #3)

One of the athletic directors noted that many parents are highly influential, but has also worked with students who do not have the same level of involvement by their parents.

Do parents have an influence on their decision? The answer would be absolutely yes, and in some cases it's extreme and they are really the ones making the decision. In other cases, it's extreme the other way – they don't even get involved. (Athletic Director #2)

Another athletic director noted the difference between the local, in-district prospective student athletes and their families, and the prospects for the sports that recruit out-of-district.

This athletic director described the difference between these two groups and how the parents' college attendance may have an impact.

We do pretty well at bringing in what we call "local kids" that are in our district; so when the local kids are here, I think most of those their parents are probably involved. We need to go to (community college name) because of money, because it's close. The parents might actually get involved and think that they're not mature enough yet to go off to a four-year school and live by themselves over there. So they can still get involved in the decision-making in different circumstances. I've seen different sports' parents come down here, and it might have been the first

time they had ever been on a college campus, so they have no idea. We have probably a good number of first generation kids that someone in the family has never gone to school. The mom and the dad really don't have much of a clue on how the whole process works. They come in and their eyes are real big, and they aren't going to understand anything. I'm sure every school does it -- we have to hold the parents' hands just as much as we have to hold the student athlete's hands. (Athletic Director #1)

Parental influence was one of the dominant emerging themes in the qualitative section of this study. This supports the quantitative findings that show 47% of those surveyed selected "parent expectations" as one of the important factors in their decision to attend college (see Table 5). The qualitative data suggests that student athletes and athletic directors perceive that parents desire a college education for their children because they believe it will improve their lives and their employment opportunities, and based on this belief, they influence their children to attend college.

Research Question Two: How Do Students Perceive Their Reasons for Pursuing Higher Education?

For some student athletes, college was considered the next step in their life. A volleyball player described it this way: "For me, it was just always kind of expected. Just after high school you go to college." A women's golf player summed it up in a similar way by saying, "It wasn't really a question. You are going to college. I didn't really have a choice; it was expected, I guess. It was never really a question." Athletic Director #2 stated that it varies depending on the sport, but that many of the student athletes consider college the next thing to do in life.

I'm just thinking oftentimes it's what they're supposed to do. This is the next step. The job market and the economy don't have jobs out there anyway, so I might as well go to college, or I'm supposed to do this. I think that it depends a little bit on the sport, and I don't want to completely categorize sports into certain socioeconomic groups, but oftentimes different sports are fishing from a different pond. You can approach, in

the sport of volleyball, and probably see that 90% of student athletes graduating out of that sport are going on to college, regardless of the sport. In another sport, it may be only 50%. How they describe it to me, right now within the last couple of years, it's just the next thing they're supposed to do.

Some of the student athletes described their desire to go to college as a means towards independence. A softball student athlete said she went to college because she "wanted to get away from home." One of the cross country student athletes said college was a way "to become independent, not having to rely on your parents."

One student athlete described a life-changing experience that influenced him to go to college.

I would say my influence was...well, I had a child early. I had a child in high school my senior year. That alone changes your whole attitude. I didn't have time to take a year off and work because I was already behind the eight ball. I had another mouth to feed. Whereas I could be kind of lax about going to school, now I feel like going to school will better myself faster than trying to work immediately and settling for a mediocre job. It was heavily influenced by my parents, too, but going to school puts me in a better position to afford a better life for him and I [*sic*]. (Men's basketball player, African American)

Other student athletes experienced a life-changing event in the form of athletic injury, which motivated them to consider a college education.

I broke my leg and had two surgeries. Before that I thought of just going professional, but after that I thought I could get injured at some point in my career and I'm done if I don't have school. (Soccer player, Caucasian, international)

There were other ways participants perceived the reasons behind pursuing a college education. Student athletes described their own intrinsic desire to improve themselves by getting a college degree. One of the women's basketball players had attended more than one high school, one of which was an inner city high school. She said, "I seen [*sic*] how I didn't want to

live, so I wanted to go to college to make a better life for myself.” A men’s cross country team member who had a good grade point average coming out of high school said, “It was just more like furthering myself to get into college.” The athletic directors were more descriptive about this point. One athletic director has observed this desire to improve their life situation more often in certain sports.

Mostly our males in football and basketball think this is a way out, to get away from maybe a bad situation at home, bad situation in the neighborhood, bad whatever. They can come here and try to improve themselves, make themselves better. (Athletic Director #1)

While the students the athletic director described are most often from American towns and cities, another athletic director noted that students coming from other countries might seek to improve themselves and their situation by attending college in the United States.

There are some with us, we have international students that are coming either as a means to improve their own family situation, possibly to leave a socioeconomic situation in their own country that’s not very positive, and so they’re seeking a better life. Period. Both immediately and their future, maybe for themselves and maybe for their own parents and family. (Athletic Director #2)

According to the interviewees, it is not only individuals from more challenging life circumstances who seek to improve their lives through intercollegiate athletics opportunities. One athletic director mentions the role of athletic scholarships as a means to achieve a college degree, while including the idea that athletics itself is an avenue to self-improvement.

Athletics is definitely a great avenue for a lot of kids who have dreams and aspirations, and it’s an avenue. I think you can get scholarships for other things besides athletics obviously, but it’s a great avenue to use a sport to improve yourself. (Athletic Director #1)

Another dominant emerging theme is that student athletes perceive a college education as the avenue to improve themselves. As a female golfer stated succinctly, “You go to college to

get a good job. You're taught that you have to go to college and get a degree to get a job." This theme of higher education as a pathway for social mobility was supported in the interviews with the athletic directors.

I think that they will say that yes, it is because they realize their opportunities for a career are much improved with a degree, whether it's simply the associate's degree or the pursuance of a bachelor's degree, or further. So oftentimes that would be why they're pursuing that education – what can they do as a career opportunity for themselves and what they might consider to be a future for their family. (Athletic Director #2)

The athletic directors described their commitment to advocating for degree completion, including the associate's degree.

We really press the concept of trying to complete the degree with us, regardless of what your intentions are. Because we realize you can transfer without it, both from an athletic standpoint and an academic standpoint. That's what has been my interest. I don't know that they fully understand the value of just the two-year degree, in case something happens and you get tripped up in life, and it takes a different turn and your path slows down for a while, and you don't get to complete the four-year degree right away. Their interest in doing it, I think they just look at it from the perspective I'm told that I'll have a better job market opportunity. (Athletic Director #2)

The concept of higher education as a way to improve student athletes' lives is one that recurred frequently in the interviews with athletic directors.

That's what we strive to our baseball players day in and day out, you need to get that bachelor's degree. That's something that's going to be very important, because baseball is not always going to be there, or basketball, or whatever sport is not always going to be there. There is a very select few, a very small percentage of people that get to play basketball or baseball for a living, and 10-15 years down the road, what are you going to fall back on? You're going to fall back on that education, and that's something that's going to be very important. You may not realize it now, but you will eventually. (Athletic Director #3)

Desire to get a good job and improve themselves was one of the dominant emerging themes in the qualitative section of this study. This supports the quantitative findings which show 84.9% of those surveyed selected “career opportunities” as one of the important factors in their decision to attend college (see Table 5). This supports other quantitative data that show 26.5% of those participating in the survey stated their decision to attend college would help their family financially. The same percentage (25.5%) of the survey participants also indicated their decision to attend college will bring honor to their family. The desire for social mobility described in the focus groups supports the quantitative results.

Research Question Three: Is There a Relationship Between the Opportunity to Participate in Athletics and Students’ College Choices, Including the Choice to Attend Community College?

This research question is central to the study, and the participants individually and collectively affirmed the impact of community college athletics on their aspiration for higher education. As student athletes spoke of their experiences, the intonation in their voices indicated their passion and sincere belief in the value of athletics at the community college level. A women’s basketball player said, “It was very important, because without sports I probably wouldn’t be in college. I love sports -- I love basketball. In order for me to be in college, I wanted to play.” A men’s soccer player agreed: “If there’s no sports – no soccer – there’s no school I want to go to...if I can’t play, I can’t learn. I don’t know -- that’s how I am.” One of the baseball players described how athletics opened the door to college for him.

It was everything. I went to college with a purpose and that was to be a student athlete. I had to make sure the team worked the way I wanted to play, and the coaching staff was on point with all of their ideas, and how they wanted to treat the game. I never really saw myself going to college just to do the schooling, it was always just to play ball first. It wasn’t until

I got here that I would pick up the books and get everything done in class so you can take the field. You can treat the classroom setting just like a game. (Baseball player, Caucasian)

Other focus group participants explained that their involvement in sports preceded their interest in higher education.

I would like to say that I first considered it [college] when I first started to play sports. My parents had a strong influence on me trying to continue my education through sports, so that's when I first considered it. (Men's basketball player, African American)

One of the athletic directors estimated that about 80% of the student athletes come to community college because of the athletics opportunity. Another athletic director stated that it varies based on sport and gender.

It's going to vary based on sport. That's still the whole difference in the socioeconomic background of the athlete participating in that particular sport. Because I would guess that a large majority of the female athletes were going to school regardless -- and maybe that's not the case, but it's a guess -- than male athletes were going to do. (Athletic Director #2)

Despite this athletic director's assumption that the athletics opportunity was a greater factor for men than women, and the survey's quantitative results which indicate 83.9% of male student athletes describe athletics as "very influential" or "influential" to college aspiration while only 78.6% of female student athletes described it as such (see Table 8), most of the women participating in the focus groups strongly contended that it was an aspirational factor for them as well. For many of the student athletes in the focus groups, both male and female, once they understood the academic requirements for college, they increased their attention on their high school coursework and grades.

I was never a good academic person. I never really cared. I just wanted to play sports. But once I realized my junior year that I needed my grades, I

really stepped it up my senior year, and I got in here. (Softball player, Caucasian)

The importance of high school grades to athletics participation was mentioned again by another one of the women student athletes.

If you didn't have the grades, you couldn't go to certain schools if you wanted to play athletics. If they weren't above a certain level they wouldn't consider you to come to that school. I'd say everyone wanted the option to go wherever they wanted by keeping high academics. (Volleyball player, Caucasian)

An athletic director affirmed that academic interest is often enhanced by sports participation. In some cases, family members or high school faculty or coaches have used athletics as an enticement to consider pursuing a college education.

I'll even have a female student athlete who plain out tells you, "I wouldn't be here if I wasn't getting a chance to play in sports" or "I don't have any interest in going to class – I don't have any interest in going to school." But they realize that that's part of the package -- that the title "student athlete" is written that way on purpose. So, yes, I've had athletes who have come through and it's someone else who has guided or mentored them at the high school level realizing this is the only dangling carrot there is for them. They love doing this. This is where they thrive, this is where they succeed, this is where they excel both as a leader in their leadership skills, and socially. So we use that carrot oftentimes to get them to turn the corner on finding the value of the education piece as well. And it can happen – easily it can happen. (Athletic Director #2)

Consistent with the athletic director's comments above, focus groups participants described the success that they experienced on the court or field as a motivating factor for them to pursue higher educational opportunities. Some of them described it as one of the primary reasons they aspired to attend college.

I'd say it was big. Just because I love to compete – I think that's why I play sports. Because I'm good at it. After high school, the next thing is college to compete. That's pretty much why I came. (Baseball player, Caucasian)

The love of the game was mentioned again and again by the student athletes participating in the focus groups. Student athletes described this passion to play sports as a factor in their pursuit of a college education.

I've been playing sports since I was like 5, so it's something I love to do. I knew if I wanted to keep doing the things I love to do, I have to do more in school. (Softball player, Caucasian)

A golfer stated, "I've been playing my entire life, so this is just basically the next step. I can't see myself doing anything else right now." This desire to continue to play the sport they love is one of the aspirational factors for higher education found in the study.

Once they were interested in higher education, many of the student athletes found that their talent and success in athletics may pay for their education, in some cases at a two-year college and also at a four-year college or university. One of the baseball players described the influence of athletics on his decision to attend college by saying, "It was very influential because it helped me pay for college. I've been playing baseball since I was a little kid and always loved it." One of the women's basketball players said athletics as an influence was "very big. Ever since I was young, I always told myself I want to play at a university and be on TV to play ball. It was very influential." Many of the student athletes had a similar experience.

I played soccer since I was like 5 and when I was little, I was like, "I want to be a professional soccer player." So, I already knew I wanted to go to college and play soccer. As long as my school gets paid for, then I'm happy playing it. (Soccer player, Caucasian)

In many cases, an athletic scholarship was the only route to higher education. Whether the barrier was academic, socioeconomic, or both, some student athletes mentioned the significance of scholarship opportunities. The football student athlete explained that because he

didn't have a perfect high school GPA, he would not receive any academic scholarships to college and said, "But athletics gave me an extra push and helped me. I can use my athletics to get me an education instead of them using me. It was very important." Other participants mentioned the value of athletic scholarships.

I feel like I always knew I was going to go to college, and I played sports my whole life. My parents always wanted me to get a scholarship. I played travel ball and that's when I talked to college recruits and everything. They had to pay for my brother for college; they didn't have enough money for me. It was kind of my way to get here. (Soccer player, Caucasian)

One of the athletic directors estimated that the success rate of student athletes transferring to a four-year institution with an athletic scholarship depends on the sport and gender, and that it ranges widely from 10% to about 90% of team members who will actually transfer with an athletic scholarship. Still, this is an important element of their recruiting strategy, and illustrates the link between academics, athletics, and the cost of higher education.

The biggest thing that all of us as coaches are trying to do here is sell this: get two years, get your gen eds [general education courses] out of the way, and then let somebody else pay for the next two years. It's a recurring theme throughout all of our sports. Some sports do better than others in getting our athletes out of here, but as a whole, we're probably trying to push to let the four-year schools pay for your education when you get done here. (Athletic Director #1)

Many students access higher education through the open door of community colleges, and this applies to student athletes as well as their non-athlete peers. Community colleges provide an opportunity for these student athletes to improve their grades while continuing to build their athletic skills. One of the athletic directors described recruits who come to community college with enough athletic ability to play at a higher level, but who have struggled academically, and stated that participating in sports was very influential for them.

The guys that we're recruiting want to be able to go on and play at the Division I level. Academically, they may not be at that level yet, but athletically they are, and they still want to have that opportunity. And after a year, they may have that opportunity. Or after two years. (Athletic Director #3)

The athletic directors agreed that this scenario is common across many of the sports. Continuing to play and train in the two-year environment also has a positive influence on their athletic performance so that they are better prepared for the four-year recruitment process. In football, for instance, an athlete "can come in here and maybe gain 30 pounds in muscle, and increase all of his abilities, running and lifting. It makes them a better football player" (Athletic Director #1). Out of the 525 NJCAA member colleges during the 2009-10 academic year, only 71 include the sport of football and only three are located in the state of Illinois, according to the association's website (NJCAA, 2011a). Football student athletes, therefore, are motivated to seek educational and athletic opportunities out of district and out of state.

If the kid wants to play football, and he doesn't have the grades, he's getting overlooked. These kids are going to travel. And sometimes that's a good scenario for them, sometimes it's a bad scenario for them. (Athletic Director #1)

Some of the student athletes who participate in football and other sports aspire to continue playing after college. One of the survey participants, an African American football player, wrote that a reason he decided to attend college was "to be successful in life and make it to the NFL" (see Table 7). In a focus group, an African American men's basketball player described what made him aspire to higher education: "I would say parents and ESPN. Watching ESPN, I figured I needed to be on there one day." According to the NJCAA website, only nine former NJCAA football players were selected in the 2010 National Football League (NFL) Draft (NJCAA, 2011a). Baseball, though, is different and allows community college players to be

drafted directly into Major League Baseball (MLB). The NJCAA website indicates that 161 NJCAA baseball players were drafted directly in the 2008 MLB Draft (NJCAA, 2011a). The athletic directors admitted that the dream of participating in professional sports contributes to student athletes' aspiration to attend college.

I'm sure everyone is thinking about professional. Now, the ones who have some intelligence about them realize that those numbers are also very small. We have had people go from us to a four-year school to professional. In baseball, it's the only sport that they can go pro from us, because those kids can get drafted. (Athletic Director #1)

Another athletic director explained how the goal to play professionally might impact student athletes' decision to attend college, but that it is more often the male athletes who fall into that category based on the limited amount of professional sports opportunities for women. If the student athlete is not ready to be a professional athlete, continuing in college sports allows them to play and improve their skills.

In all sincerity it's more of the male sports, simply because the opportunity does exist there still a little more than it does for the female sports. I think at our level within the community college ranks, it's very true within the sport of baseball because of how the draft is looked at with regards to that sport. I think the second sport that you might see that in would be men's basketball, and then thirdly, honestly, a little bit with men's soccer. The men's soccer would be more so on the international student side. (Athletic Director #2)

The community college coaches and athletic directors affirmed that they develop student athletes from the athletic perspective, but also academically.

A lot of the kids will look at where some of our guys are signing after their second year or first year. If they go and look at our website, and we talk to them about so-and-so signed at Kentucky, or Arizona State, or wherever, those are big baseball powerhouses. If those kids have been through our program, they want to be a part of that. But they didn't get that just by their talents, they worked hard, they strived, and that's what we try to instill in them. They didn't just fall into Arizona State, or

Kentucky, or those other baseball powerhouses - they worked hard. Academically, they took care of business as well. Because if you don't take care of your academics, those doors won't open up. (Athletic Director #3)

The focus group participants attested that athletics opportunities were influential to their decision to attend college; however, some of them could not pinpoint a precise reason that this was the case.

It influenced me a lot because I wanted to run cross country in college. I wanted to, and I had to – that's the way I felt. When I had finally made it to college to run, I felt like I had accomplished my goal, and that was important. (Men's cross country athlete, Caucasian)

Athletics became a part of the lives of the focus group participants, in many cases at a very young age. The importance of continuing to participate is one of the factors that brought them to community college.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

Interviews, focus groups, and field notes and observations were utilized within the qualitative section of this mixed methods research study. When these personal face-to-face encounters were recorded and transcribed, it resulted in a rich narrative. The following themes emerged from the qualitative data sources: (a) student athletes desire to continue playing sports in college and beyond, (b) student athletes desire to get a good job and improve themselves, and (c) student athletes perceive that their parents desire a college education for them. These aspirational and influential factors result in the following intervening variables prior to college enrollment: student athletes seek playing opportunities at the two-year and four-year college level, and student athletes seek to receive athletic scholarships to two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities in order to meet the financial demand of higher education. Student

athletes participating in the focus groups confirmed that there are numerous additional influences as they approach the college decision, such as high school coaches, friends, life-changing events such as athletic injuries, and their need for independence. However, these factors are less influential than their desire to continue playing their sport and their interest in completing a degree that may lead to a career that is rewarding both in meaning and financial security.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between participation in community college intercollegiate athletics and the student athletes' aspiration to attend college. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used for data collection in this study of community college student athletes through the use of a survey, focus groups with student athletes, and interviews with athletic directors at three Illinois community colleges.

The multi-case study provided valuable insight into the experiences of community college student athletes. The survey gathered results from 352 student athletes from three Illinois community colleges and provided not only demographic information about the student athletes, but also information about their academic and athletic intent, as well as which variables were most influential in their decision to attend college. The survey found that 80.3% of student athlete participants agree that athletics opportunities were "very influential" or "influential" to their decision to attend college. Other key reasons included career preparation and parent expectations.

The narrative in the qualitative segment of the study portrayed student athletes who participated in athletics from a young age, and for whom continuing to participate in intercollegiate sports was the next step in their athletic and academic pursuits. The findings were

affirmed by the three athletic directors, each of whom, in interviews, described student athletes who (a) were enthusiastic about athletics and had a love for the game, (b) had achieved success in athletics over the course of their K-12 educations and were motivated by this success, (c) had parents who desired a college education for their children in order to improve their lives and be career ready, and (d) saw athletics as a potential way to pay for a college education.

There were areas of congruence between the quantitative and the qualitative results, particularly as it relates to the significance student athletes ascribe to the athletics opportunities in college, their perception of college as the vehicle for career preparedness, and parental influence.

The following chapter will present a discussion of these findings and will include implications and recommendations for practice and additional research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This mixed methods study involved participants from three Illinois community colleges and provided insight into the relationship between community college athletics opportunities and students' aspirations to attend college. The study design utilized a quantitative method in the form of a survey and the qualitative methods of interviews and focus groups in order to provide a valid account through triangulation of the data from several sources. This final chapter includes a discussion of the findings followed by conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

The primary purpose of this research was to learn from community college athletes and community college athletic directors which factors influence student athletes' decisions to attend college and to examine the relationship between athletics participation and their aspirations to attend college.

The research questions for this study are

1. What factors influence students' decisions to attend college?
2. How do students perceive their reasons for pursuing higher education?
3. Is there a relationship between the opportunity to participate in athletics and students' college choices, including the choice to attend community college?

Discussion

The costs and benefits of intercollegiate athletics programs are debated inside and outside higher education each year, and the debate does not center exclusively on high-profile programs

in the NCAA. Two-year college athletics programs face criticism that they draw budgeted funds from an already scarce resource pool as well as concerns that athletics programs do not contribute to the mission of these institutions. However, recent research supports the embracing of athletics programs in community colleges due to their function as open doors for recruiting a more diverse student population inclusive of males and African Americans (Horton, 2009). Community college leaders have numerous factors to consider regarding the inclusion of intercollegiate athletics programs at their institutions and how this may impact who enters their doors.

Americans are seeking a college education in greater proportions than in previous generations, and there is significant evidence in the literature regarding the benefits of attending and completing a college education (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As the middle class has broadened, the children of the Baby Boomers have embraced the opportunity to pursue an education in order to improve their lives, and have increasingly accessed this opportunity through local public two-year institutions. This concept of the community college as a channel of upward mobility is also found in the literature (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kane & Rouse, 2006; Shaw, Rhoads, & Valadez, 1999). Greater numbers of Americans aspire to attend college to better their life and career outcomes, including high school students who have participated in athletics programs. Research on aspiration to attend college includes previous studies involving such groups as African American students, Latino/a students, first generation college students, and high school athletes (Bui, 2002; Clark & Schroth, 2009; DeMeulenaere, 2010; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez & Cooper, 2009; Otto & Alwin, 1977; O'Bryan, Braddock & Dawkins, 2008; Rehberg & Schafer, 1968; Schlechter &

Milevsky, 2010). In these studies, multiple factors are identified to be influential on college aspiration for the various populations under examination, including the findings of positive relationships between involvement in athletics and postsecondary educational aspirations.

The developmental period that begins with late adolescence has been described as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2004), and it represents a time of dreams and possibilities. For many of these young people, college symbolizes an opportunity to re-tool, re-shape, or re-make their lives. Student athletes, those who have enjoyed playing sports and who have been encouraged to continue their pursuit of the dream of participation in collegiate sports or even professional sports, may find the period of emerging adulthood to be a time of optimism, and this fuels their aspirations to attend college and participate in their sport.

Conclusions

The study developed several themes as data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Utilizing descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests of independence, the quantitative section provided observations about the aspirations and intentions of the 352 participants from three Illinois community colleges. Within the qualitative section of the study, which included results from interviews with three athletic directors and focus groups involving a total of 23 student athletes, data were coded and grouped into emerging themes. This “winnowing” process, described by Creswell (2007, p. 153), was inductive in nature and part of a data analysis spiral that began with large amounts of data and ended with a narrative inclusive of the most salient themes or patterns that emerged from the study. These themes, which answer the purpose and research questions, are reported in the following section of this chapter along with implications for practice.

Emerging Theme One: Athletic Participation, Achievement, and Love for the Game

The majority of the student athletes in this study described an interest in participating in athletics that began in childhood. This interest in their sport developed into a love for the game that continued through elementary school, middle school, and high school; as they approached the end of their secondary education, continuing to play the game became a significant factor in their decision to attend college. In the focus groups, many students used the word “love” to describe how they felt about participating in sports, which provides perspective into just how important athletics is to their lives. Their speech accelerated and elevated, and their body language became more animated when they discussed sports participation. A baseball player said, “It was everything,” when asked how influential sports was to his decision to attend college. Their answers about athletics were often very concrete and definitive, as when one of the softball players said, “I just wanted to play sports.” A cross-country athlete saw college athletics participation as something he “had to” do.

The athletic directors used the same passionate language to describe the meaning of athletics to these college students; for instance, Athletic Director #2 explained, “They love to do this. This is where they thrive, this is where they succeed, this is where they excel both as a leader in their leadership skills, and socially.” One of the baseball players echoed the AD’s sentiment by stating, “I love to compete – that’s why I play sports. Because I’m good at it. After high school, the next thing is college to compete. That’s pretty much why I came.” In addition to their love for the game, which compelled the participants towards pursuing athletics participation in college, another emerging and interconnected element was that they excelled at

their sport. Their passion was related to the feeling of achievement and success they experienced when participating in their sport.

Other focus group participants described attending college as a student athlete as the “next step” for them because they have been doing it their entire lives. According to one golfer, “I can’t see myself doing anything else right now.” Many athletes described beginning to play their sport as young as five years old, and they recognized that in order to continue playing, they had to consider attending college to do so.

Once student athletes have decided to attend college, the next step is selecting a school. The importance of athletics to many of these community college students may be similar to their peers who are eligible to compete in the four-year college and university setting. A spring 2010 study conducted by the NCAA on 20,000 current student athletes found that

in the majority of the sport groups studied, athletics participation was the most-often reported reason for choosing a college. Academics was generally a close second, followed by the institution’s proximity to home. The sport groups that had the largest disparity of athletics as a choice factor over academics were Division I women’s basketball, and baseball in Divisions II and III. Division III student-athletes generally reported academics and athletics as similarly important factors in college choice. (NCAA, 2011, p. 1)

Athletics participation opportunities play a significant role in deciding to attend college and also in determining which institution student athletes wish to attend.

Despite Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s warning that an African American young person has “about as much chance of becoming a professional athlete as he or she does of winning the lottery” (Gates, 1991), the lure of a professional sports career is strong, and logically follows a lifetime of love for the game regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. While some of the male athletes in this study indicated they hoped to play for the NFL, be seen playing basketball on

ESPN, or be drafted into the MLB, a few female athletes also described watching women succeed as athletes on television and aspiring to do that one day. The aspirations of the student athletes in this study are supported by research conducted by the NCAA which shows nearly a third of former NCAA student athletes believed it is at least “somewhat likely” that they will pursue an Olympic or professional career after college (NCAA, 2011, p. 6).

These aspirations are consistent with Arnett’s (2004) theory of emerging adulthood, which he considers to be “the age of possibilities, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives” (p.8). This optimism to continue participating in an activity they love, when coupled with educational opportunities that can prepare them for a family-sustaining career, is a formula for success for over a half a million student athletes in postsecondary education in the United States every year. People who attend college for any reason improve on many cognitive measures including verbal skills, quantitative skills and critical thinking, as Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) have noted. While college attendees’ socioeconomic status improves with each certificate and degree attained, Pascarella and Terenzini’s research indicates even “completion of one-year vocational certificates can increase earning power” (2005, p. 583). Getting students in through the open door of community colleges for any reason provides them with an opportunity to prepare for a career and improve their lives.

Emerging Theme Two: Career Preparation, Self-Improvement, and Social Mobility

The participants in this study indicated a significant reason they decided to attend college was their perception that college was the most effective way to prepare for a career that is both financially rewarding and meaningful. According to the survey, the largest percentage of students selected career preparation as one of the factors contributing to their decision to attend

college (84.9%). This factor is supported by the literature which finds greater levels of education increase the amounts of lifetime earnings (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011) and reduce the chance of being counted as one of America's unemployed (United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Additionally, "the college educated tend to hold jobs characterized by relatively higher levels of social interaction and self-direction than jobs held by those whose education ends with high school" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 584). During the focus groups, participants provided examples of their parents' and other relatives' occupational statuses, such as truck drivers and construction workers, leading them to point out that they would like to have a career with greater meaning. A men's basketball player mimicked his parents' admonitions: "Get your education, you can live where you want and you can pretty much do what you want."

This same community college student athlete described his parents' wishes for him to "have a better life than what they had." Many of the participants in this study described the effects of college education on perceived social mobility. Eighteen and a half percent of those surveyed indicated one of the reasons they decided to attend college was to improve their social status, but frequently in the focus groups, participants described making "a better life for myself" (women's basketball player) and "furthering myself" (men's cross country participant). In the interviews, this idea was supported by the athletic directors, one of whom said, "They can come here and try to improve themselves, make themselves better" (Athletic Director #1). This opportunity for upward movement between social classes is identified in the literature as one of the advantages of the community college education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). These institutions provide open access to higher education for a broad range of people who may not otherwise

attend college, particularly first generation college students, students from the working class, and students of color (Dougherty, 2006; Kane & Rouse, 2006; Shaw, Rhoads, & Valadez, 1999).

Community colleges are not only academically accessible to more people because of open admissions policies, but they are also close to home and more affordable than four-year institutions.

A key finding of this study is that these community college athletes report a very high intention to complete an associate's degree as well as to transfer to a four-year college or university. Ninety-two percent of those participating in the survey intend to transfer compared with 34% of the fiscal year 2010 credit student population in Illinois community colleges (Illinois Community College Board's Annual Student Enrollments and Completions Report, 2011, p. vi). This same ICCB report states, "Nearly 48 percent of all students indicated they were enrolling with no intention of pursuing a degree" (p. 6) but in this study, 90.3% of these Illinois community college student athletes reported their intention to complete an associate's degree. While these percentages only indicate intent to complete a degree, the results of this study are supported by the literature on four-year college student athletes' graduation rates in which athletes are reported to graduate at a higher rate than non-athlete peers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sander, 2009). Between the data in this study regarding intent to complete and the data on four-year graduation rates in earlier studies, it is apparent that athletes' focus on completion produces graduation outcomes that are greater than their non-athlete peers.

Emerging Theme Three: Parents and Paying for College

The student athlete participants described the influence others had on their decision to attend college, and in both the quantitative and the qualitative results, the individuals with the

most significant impact on college decision-making were their parents. The survey allowed students to select more than one option from a selection of eight other reasons they decided to attend college:

1. Parent expectations
2. Teacher/coach
3. Friends attending college
4. Career opportunities
5. Improve social status
6. Will bring honor to my family
7. Will help my family financially
8. Other (list)

The responses were disaggregated by gender and ethnicity in Tables 5 and 6 within Chapter 4, but in aggregate, 47% of the participants indicated parent expectations influenced their decision to attend college. Additionally, 26.5% of the student athletes indicated their college aspirations were impacted by a perception that it would bring honor to their families and 26.5% stated their college attendance would help their family financially. In an earlier study, providing financial assistance for their families was more important for first generation college students than for students who have at least one parent who attended college (Bui, 2002).

A majority of the participants in this study came from families in which at least one of the parents has attended college (61.3%), but the survey did not ascertain if the parents attained a degree. Whether or not students' parents attended college, an emerging theme from the focus groups developed that their parents desired a college education for their children. The students

described conversations with their parents over the course of their lifetimes in which parents impressed upon them the importance of completing a college degree. Many of the students had received clear direction from their parents that college would impact their career options and lifetime earnings potential.

In addition to the potential outcome of more diverse job prospects and increased salaries resulting from a college degree, students understood from their parents that athletics participation might provide financial benefits in the form of college scholarships. Once a student excelled in athletics, parents linked this success with the opportunity to fund a college education with athletics scholarships and began speaking to their child about how this might benefit both the student and their family. A soccer player said, “My parents always wanted me to get a scholarship,” and a football player whose construction worker father encouraged him to pursue college athletics stated, “I can use my athletics to get me an education instead of them using me.”

The three athletic directors interviewed in this study have witnessed this impact on student athletes. While parental influence is “extreme” in some cases, as described by Athletic Director #2, this AD has also observed that “it’s extreme the other way” in some families, referring to lack of involvement. For those families without any college experience, college norms and procedures regarding admission, registration, financial aid, and scholarships are foreign to them. Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) noted the disadvantage first generation college students have due to their lack of basic knowledge regarding postsecondary education. Students who have excelled in athletics well enough to be recruited to play their sport at the community college level may arrive on campus without adequate support to navigate the unfamiliar terrain.

Bush, Castaneda, Hardy, and Katsinas (2009) wrote that athletic scholarships are available at 63% of community colleges offering an athletics program and Castaneda's doctoral dissertation (2004) reported that in 2001-2002, 22,868 students received athletically related student aid. According to the NJCAA Handbook and Casebook 2010-2011, Division I programs are allowed to provide "a maximum of tuition and fees, room and board, course related books and transportation costs one time per academic year to and from the college by direct route" (2010b, p. 58) while the guidelines for Division II programs disallow room and board and travel costs but allow tuition, fees and books. Division III programs in the NJCAA are considered non-scholarship and forbid aid of any kind. For those community college students who have the opportunity to play and study at Division I and II schools, their athletic skills may begin to provide monetary resources within the first two years of college.

Whether or not student athletes receive scholarships at their community college, parents and coaches continue to fuel the dream of a scholarship to a four-year institution. As Athletic Director #1 described coaches' conversations with student athletes, "get your gen eds [general education courses] out of the way, and then let somebody else pay for the next two years." For 30 years, college tuition costs have risen more rapidly than other goods and services (College Board, 2010). Families seek out many possibilities to help fund a college education for their children, and athletic scholarships are one way to ease the burden of the costs of college.

Additional Emerging Themes

The previous three themes were the most consistent findings in this study. However, there were other factors that emerged in the focus groups and interviews that are salient in this discussion. The first is the impact of high school coaches on the decision to attend college. The

survey listed teachers and coaches together, and 23.4% of all participants selected this item as one of the factors that led to their decision to attend college. Findings from focus groups show that teachers, coaches, and counselors had varying levels of influence; however, it was clear that when an adult took an interest in one of these participants, it significantly directed their path towards college. These positive adult role models made a difference and enhanced the college aspirations of these individuals, just as it has been found to do in previous research on high school student athletes (DeMeulenaere, 2010; Otto & Alwin, 1977).

The second factor that emerged as an additional theme is the influence of friends on the participants' aspiration to attend college. Friends were selected by 16.8% of the survey respondents, and in the focus groups, friends made on the field and the court were often mentioned as significant reasons these student athletes pursued a college education. Some of the travel players made friends in other cities, and as they were recruited for postsecondary play, the participants began to envision themselves as college athletes. Others mentioned high school friends who encouraged them to contact college coaches or who recommended them to coaches, and this theme was confirmed by Athletic Director #1 who said, "Players are our best recruiters." Herndon and Hirt (2004) found that family and friends were highly influential for Black students in their pursuit of higher education, and Bui (2002) cited friends as one of the reasons first generation college students seek to attend college.

Several previous studies articulated that the need for independence is an important factor in college aspiration (Bui, 2002; Schlechter & Milevsky, 2010; Schultz & Higbee, 2007). This theme was voiced in the focus groups by a softball player who said she went to college because

she wanted to “get away from home” and a cross country athlete who said he saw college as a way “to become independent, not having to rely on your parents.”

These additional three themes, while not primary emergent themes, arose from the study as valuable contributors to the college aspirations of the participants. High school coaches, friends, and the need for independence played some role in college decision-making for many of the community college student athletes in this study.

Implications

As a result of this research, there are implications for community college leaders related to the presence of student athletes and athletic programs on their campuses.

1. Community college faculty members may seek to understand that the forces culminating in a student athlete’s presence in the college classroom are numerous, dynamic, and complex. It may be of value to comprehend that many student athletes are academically prepared for college and come to postsecondary education with more focus and determination than a number of their non-athlete peers. These student athletes have engaged in years of balancing athletics and academics, and have persevered through many levels of competition to be eligible to continue to participate in sports, even at the community college level. Athletics participation is one of the primary reasons they aspired to attend college, but there are other factors including career preparation and a desire to improve their lives. Faculty members can help reduce the marginalization of student athletes by recognizing the complexity of their decision to attend college and by providing an appreciative classroom environment free of stigma towards student athletes.

2. Community college student and academic affairs administrators must balance the internal competition for fiscal resources in order to support the many necessary programs and services on the community college campus, and may seek methods of managing limited funds related to student athletes. Understanding the importance of athletics programs for the individuals who have spent many of their pre-college years aspiring to attend college while continuing to participate in sports may provide a framework for the creative development of programs that meet the needs of these students. Programs and courses such as orientation or first year experience courses, which are designed to promote retention of students, may be used as models to address the needs of student athletes. Other efforts may be attempted to effectively budget internal resources, such as developing combined job descriptions for needed personnel in more than one department or functional area. For example, community college leaders may be able to utilize athletics coaches in facilities management, academic advising, or sports information roles.
3. Community college decision-makers, particularly presidents and members of the boards of trustees, may receive pressure from faculty and other constituents that athletics programs detract from mission-specific academic and career preparation programs. This concern may be balanced with this study's findings and other research that supports the inclusion of these programs as a method of driving enrollment and providing access to education for ethnically and socioeconomically diverse students. Decisions to eliminate a particular sport or

sports may deter students of color or first generation college students who have aspired to college attendance as an avenue to continue sports participation while preparing for a career. Decision-makers may consider the findings of this study and recognize the significance athletics participation has had and continues to have on the lives of student athletes who wish to attend and complete a college education.

Recommendations

Aspiration for student athletes to attend college may be derived from the amalgamation of developmentally appropriate aspirations and wishes, the benefits of innate athletic talent that bring a sense of enjoyment and competence, and the encouragement of parents and interested adults to maximize the student athletes' lifetime potential through college completion. These elements provide the backdrop for college administrators in consideration of practices that may benefit student athletes attending community colleges in the United States. Additionally, future researchers may focus on these concepts to provide additional insight into the factors that influence college aspiration in student athletes.

Recommendations for Improved Practice

Community college leaders must manage limited fiscal resources while weighing the needs of students and the community, and all programs must align with the college's mission and its' strategic directions. Based on the findings of this study, there are three recommendations for practice in the community college.

1. Community college administrators should offer or enhance current athletic opportunities at community colleges to increase the recruitment and enrollment of

student athletes. Enrolling student athletes promotes the democratic function of the open access educational system of community colleges, and increases the diversity of the student body in gender, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status. Administrators should promote partnerships between the enrollment management functions of the college and the athletics department and create systems and practices to ease access to admission, enrollment, registration, and financial aid. For example, community colleges can offer a comprehensive check-in day for student athletes with representatives from each of the departments who can immediately problem-solve and mitigate enrollment and registration issues. This will enhance and facilitate student athlete matriculation into postsecondary education by removing barriers to enrollment. Further, administrators should provide services and classes that effectively frame the relationship between athletics and academics for student athletes. Efforts should be made to hire athletic advisors who can “speak the language” of the two-year and four-year athletic associations, i.e. who can effectively advise student athletes towards college completion and transfer to four-year institutions. Administrators can implement summer transition or so-called “bridge programs” for first year student athletes who have been recruited for the next academic year, and design the curriculum to meet their specific needs. Deans can work with faculty to create contextualized courses for athletes that utilize athletic concepts to teach general education courses, such as including sports-themed reading and writing assignments in English courses, and create college success courses for cohorts of

student athletes utilizing faculty members who are specifically interested in supporting student athletes' success. These efforts provide commensurate emphasis to athletics and academics, enhancing the effectiveness of the community college programs for student athletes.

2. The study found that a significant reason student athletes decided to attend college was due to their perception that college is the most effective way to prepare for a life-sustaining career. Community college administrators should develop work-study or student aide positions at the college that can effectively integrate student athletes into the responsibilities and expectations of employment. By creating positions that draw on their natural skills and abilities, community colleges can provide student athletes with the experience of competence, and when possible, administrators can contextualize their work experience with their athletic experience by offering positions in recreation, intramurals, or related areas of the college. Additionally, community college leaders can create partnerships between the career advising and the athletics departments to provide effective career planning and preparation for student athletes. Career advisors can provide workshops and advising sessions that anticipate an interest in sports careers or affiliated employment opportunities while simultaneously seeking natural linkages to careers in other fields, especially those with family-sustaining income possibilities.
3. Community college leaders should recognize that college aspiration begins at a very young age, and important adults such as parents, teachers, counselors, and

coaches encourage its development. Community colleges can engage parents in college fairs and open houses when their children are in grade school, middle school, and high school. Program planners can provide the platform for discussion about the benefits of attending college and completing a degree, and seek to reach parents who have not attended college to begin the process of familiarity with the processes and systems of higher education. Planners should include the athletics department in the events to showcase the opportunities available for student athletes in community colleges and to highlight the holistic approach of valuing both academic and athletic achievement. Likewise, community college administrators should build effective relationships with district high school personnel, from the superintendent to the faculty to the athletic coaches. Leaders at the community college should practice two-way communication and listen to ideas from high school personnel for greater success in recruiting, retaining, and graduating district student athletes. Admissions and enrollment management leaders should create programs to invite student athletes and coaches to campus to help demystify the college experience and to encourage pursuit of athletic opportunities in higher education, and encourage current college athletes to invite younger former teammates to campus to participate. Each program or event may include materials and programming that focus on the value of a community college education and the opportunities that exist to continue participation in sports.

Model of Student Athlete Aspiration to Attend Community College

For community college student athletes, the factors influencing the path to college attendance varies by individual; however, the findings in this study outline some consistent elements that may positively impact a person's college decision-making. Student athletes experience both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors as they consider college attendance, and these factors have relevant implications to community college personnel.

As students leave high school and enter the developmental phase sometimes referred to as "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2004), they often view this transitional period as one that presents many new opportunities, including the prospect of independence. There are numerous options available to them, and frequently young people optimistically wish to transform their lives and fulfill the hope of improving their social status or creating a new identity. In addition, student athletes have innate physical talent and have developed special skills that have enhanced their self-concept. These intrinsic and developmental elements provide the internal environment in which the extrinsic factors can interact and influence their life decisions.

Extrinsically, their athletic skills and abilities are often valued by others, and over the course of their lives these abilities have provided them with attention and opportunities. Student athletes are aware of the financial and social benefits sports participation has afforded others, from the athletic successes of other athletes, athletic scholarships that have provided others with a college education, and professional sports opportunities enjoyed by their sports heroes. Likewise, their parents are aware of these possibilities and often encourage them to take advantage of their talent in order to help fund an education that may lead to better career options and higher earnings potential. Other adults, such as high school coaches, hone in on athletic

ability as a tool to motivate a young athlete to seek a college education. Between parents and other interested adults, high school student athletes are steeped in the message that a college education is the way to self-improvement and social mobility through career preparation.

As community college faculty members encounter student athletes in the classroom, and as other college personnel interact with them through the student service functions on campus, they can be cognizant of these driving factors in the life of the student. For the academically prepared student athletes as well as those who do not appear to be as prepared, linking athletic success and academic success may enhance motivation and produce greater effort. Student athletes wish to remain eligible to participate in their sport, and they understand how academic performance impacts their future hopes and dreams. Student affairs and academic affairs leaders can promote this relationship between athletic and academic success through the recommendations for practice detailed above.

The Knight Model for Impact of Athletics Participation on Aspiration to Attend Community College (Figure 3) was developed from the analysis of the data collected in this study. This model describes the ascending nature of a student athlete's experience with athletics from his or her pre-college years and the significant influential factors on aspiration to attend college. As the student athlete enrolls in community college and engages in further influential activities, aspiration continues to escalate towards completion and/or transfer to a senior institution. This model serves as a visual representation of the relationship between athletics participation and the aspiration to attend college.

Figure 3: Knight Model for the Impact of Athletics Participation on Aspiration to Attend College

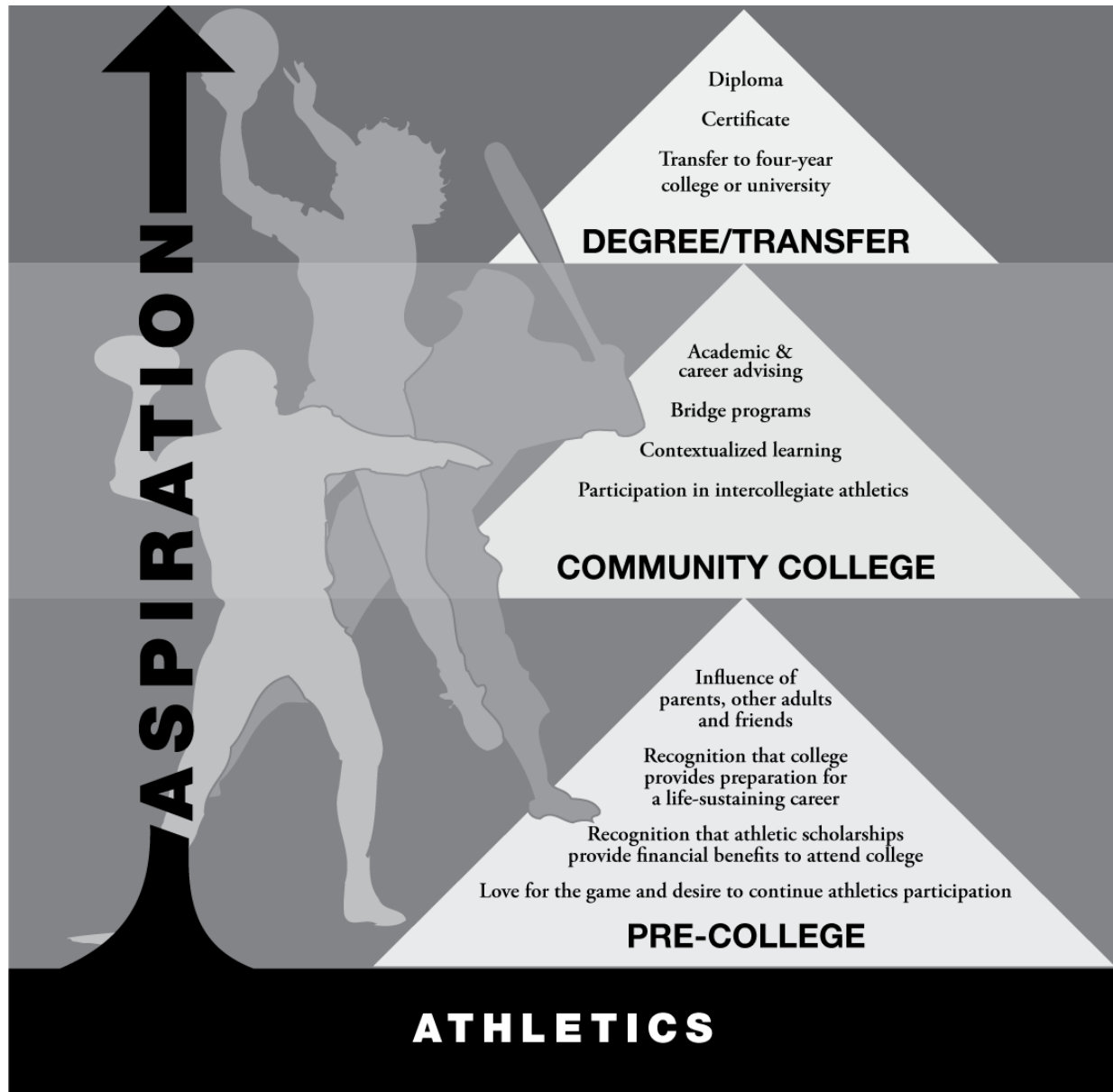


Figure 3: Knight Model for Impact of Athletics Participation on Aspiration to Attend College

Recommendations for Further Research

This study articulated the experience of the community college student athlete regarding his or her decision to attend college. Given the scope of this study, further research is recommended in several areas.

1. While this study included participants from various ethnicities, sports teams, and genders, further research may focus more narrowly on either male athletes or female athletes, on one particular ethnicity, or on one particular sport. Specifically, the data from this study indicate that there is a statistically significant difference for African American student athletes and those men participating in football regarding the level of influence related to the opportunity to participate in community college athletics when compared with Caucasian student athletes and those affiliated with other sports. Future research could examine more closely the impact of community college sports participation as an indicator of college aspiration for one or more of these groups.
2. In this study, male student athletes were more likely than female student athletes to indicate that they intend to participate in athletics at a four-year college or university after they leave community college, and African American student athletes were more likely than Caucasian student athletes to select that option on the survey. By team affiliation, those participants who plan to continue their athletic pursuits at the four-year level were more likely to be football players, men's soccer players, men's basketball players, and women's basketball players. Further study may be indicated in relation to sports participation and community college student transfer rates to four-year athletic programs,

specifically as it relates to males, African Americans, and the four team affiliations mentioned above.

3. Comparing the participants in this study who attend an Illinois community college to the Illinois state report on intention to complete an associate's degree, the student athletes surveyed had a greater likelihood of indicating their intention to complete their degree. Further research may be pursued to more fully understand the relationship between athletics participation and the intention to complete an associate's degree.
4. As the United States focuses on a national college completion agenda to increase the number of college graduates by 10 million in the year 2020, further research is recommended on the factors that enhance the graduation of community college student athletes. Further study may focus on practices such as athletic advising, career advising, student employment, or contextualizing of general education courses around athletic themes. For example, a future longitudinal study may examine the completion results of student athletes who were enrolled in a contextualized course compared with student athletes who did not enroll in an athletically themed general education course.

Recommendations for Dissemination of Findings

This study presents findings that will be of interest to several groups of professionals, including community college administrators, athletics administrators at both two year and four postsecondary institutions, and high school administrators and athletics personnel. It is recommended that the researcher submit a proposal to submit her findings in the form of a conference presentation at various state and national conferences, including the Illinois state community college administrators annual conference, community college athletics

conferences, and student affairs organization conferences. Additionally, the researcher may write journal articles for submission to publications within the fields of athletics, student services, student affairs, and community colleges. It is further recommended that the researcher present these findings to the audience of secondary educators in the form of conference presentations and journal submissions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey

1. My age is: 18 19 20 21 22 23 24
2. I am Male Female
3. My ethnicity is Caucasian African American Hispanic Asian
 Multi-ethnic Other
4. I am a member of the following team(s):
 Baseball Basketball Cross Country Football Golf Lacrosse
 Track and Field Soccer Swimming Tennis Wrestling
 Volleyball Other _____ (please list)
5. One or both of my parents attended college Yes No
6. I intend to complete an associate's degree Yes No Don't know
7. I intend to transfer to a four-year college or university Yes No Don't know
8. I intend to participate in athletics at a four-year college or university after I leave community college Yes No Don't know
9. How influential was the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics in your decision to attend college? Very Influential Influential Somewhat Influential
 Slightly Influential Not all influential
10. Other reasons I decided to attend college include (check all that apply) Parent expectations
 Teacher/coach Friends attending college Career opportunities Improve social status
 Will bring honor to my family Will help my family financially
Other(list) _____

Appendix B: Question Matrix for Student Athlete Focus Groups

Guiding Question: Is there a relationship between athletics participation
and the aspiration to attend college?

Guiding questions	Interview questions
What factors influence a student's decision to attend college?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When did you start to consider higher education? 2. What factors influenced you to consider higher education at that (earliest) time? 3. Which individuals spoke to you about higher education at that time? 4. Why did they speak to you about higher education at that time? 5. What value was placed on higher education in your home as you were growing up? Why do you say that? Can you give examples? 6. What value was placed on higher education in your primary school? Why do you say that? Can you give examples? 7. What value was placed on higher education in your high school? Why do you say that? Can you give examples?
How do students perceive their reasons for pursuing higher education?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What were the most important factors that led you to consider attending college? 2. How important were your academic accomplishments to your decision to attend college? 3. How important were your parents' influence to attend college? 4. How important were your high school teacher/counselor's influence to attend college? 5. How important were your high school coach's influence to attend college? 6. How important were your friends' influence to attend college? 7. Did most of your friends want to attend college? Of those who wanted to, did all of them get to attend college? Why or why not?
Is there a relationship between the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics and a student's college choice, including the choice to attend community college?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How influential was the opportunity to participate in your sport to your decision to attend college? 2. How influential was the opportunity to participate in your sport to your decision to attend this community college? 3. If you could not participate in your sport, would you have attended this college? Why or why not?

Appendix C: Question Matrix for Athletic Directors

Guiding Question: Is there a relationship between athletics participation and the aspiration to attend college?

Guiding questions	Interview questions
What factors influence a student's decision to attend college?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When you speak to college athletes, what aspirational factors do they mention about the desire to attend college? (career, income, sports careers, family concerns) 2. How influential are parents in college decision-making? 3. How influential are high school teachers and high school counselors in college decision-making? 4. How influential are high school coaches in college decision-making? 5. How influential are friends in college decision-making?
How do students perceive their reasons for pursuing higher education?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do student athletes describe their interest in attending college? 2. How do student athletes describe their interest in graduating from college with a four-year or two-year degree?
Is there a relationship between the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics and a student's college choice, including the choice to attend community college?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How influential was the opportunity to participate in sports to most athletes' decision to attend college? 2. How influential was the opportunity to participate in most athletes' sport to their decision to attend this community college? 3. If they could not participate in their sport, would most athletes' have attended this college? Why or why not?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form – Focus Groups

This study will take place from October 2010 to January 2012. This page outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant. You may want to make a copy for your records.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Ashley B. Knight, a doctoral student at National-Louis University located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand the purpose of the study titled EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS PROGRAMS AND THEIR ASPIRATIONS TO ATTEND COLLEGE is to examine the relationship between students' opportunity to participate in community college athletics programs and their aspirations regarding higher education.

I understand that my participation will consist of answering questions in an audio taped focus group lasting 45 to 60 minutes in length. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation.

I understand that only the researcher, Ashley B. Knight, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, taped recordings, and field notes from the interview in which I participated.

I understand that the results of this study may be published but my identity will in no way be revealed nor that of my community college.

I understand that there are no anticipated risks to me greater than those encountered in daily life. Moreover, the information gained from this study could be used to assist community colleges provide effective academic and / or athletics programs that meet the needs of students.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Ashley B. Knight, 2101 W. Summerdale Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60625. Phone: 773-616-0859 or email: ashleybknight@gmail.com.

If I have any concerns or questions before or during participation that I feel have not been addressed by the researcher, I may contact Ashley B, Knight's Primary Advisor and Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dennis Haynes, National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60603. Phone (312) or email: Dennis.Haynes@nl.edu.

Signature

Date

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form – Interviews

This study will take place from October 2010 to January 2012. This page outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant. You may want to make a copy for your records.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Ashley B. Knight, a doctoral student at National-Louis University located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand the purpose of the study titled EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS PROGRAMS AND THEIR ASPIRATIONS TO ATTEND COLLEGE is to examine the relationship between students' opportunity to participate in community college athletics programs and their aspirations regarding higher education.

I understand that my participation will consist of answering questions in an audio taped interview lasting 45 to 60 minutes in length. I understand that I will receive a copy of the transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation.

I understand that only the researcher, Ashley B. Knight, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, taped recordings, and field notes from the interview in which I participated.

I understand that the results of this study may be published but my identity will in no way be revealed nor that of my community college.

I understand that there are no anticipated risks to me greater than those encountered in daily life. Moreover, the information gained from this study could be used to assist community colleges provide effective academic and / or athletics programs that meet the needs of students.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Ashley B. Knight, 2101 W. Summerdale Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60625. Phone: 773-616-0859 or email: ashleybknight@gmail.com.

If I have any concerns or questions before or during participation that I feel have not been addressed by the researcher, I may contact Ashley B, Knight's Primary Advisor and Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dennis Haynes, National-Louis University, 122 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60603. Phone (312) or email: Dennis.Haynes@nl.edu.

Signature

Date

Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement

Data Transcriptionist

This confidentiality form articulates the agreement made between Ashley B. Knight, the researcher, and (NAME OF INDIVIDUAL AND COMPANY OF A PROFESSIONAL TRANSCRIBER).

I understand and acknowledge that by transcribing the audiotapes provided to me by Ashley B. Knight, that I will be exposed to confidential information about the research study and the research participants. In providing the transcription services, at no time will I reveal or discuss any of the information of which I have been exposed.

In addition, at no time will I maintain copies of the electronic or paper documents generated. Further, upon completing each transcription, I agree to provide the electronic and paper documents to the researcher:

Ashley B. Knight
 2101 W. Summerdale Avenue
 Chicago, Illinois 60625
 (773) 616-0859
 Email address: ashleybknight@gmail.com

I understand that a breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Transcriptionist's signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____