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## Factors affecting college student athletes' academic success in the classroom

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FACTORS AFFECTING COLLEGE STUDENT ATHLETES'  
ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Education:  
Kinesiology

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by  
Alicia Ann Berber

June 2008

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June 2008

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6/4/2008  
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## ABSTRACT

Academic success of college student athletes in the classroom is a controversial issue, not only for student athletes, but also for coaches and teachers. It is important to address the necessary factors that directly affect student athletes. The purpose of this project was to investigate the various factors that affect the success of college student athletes in the classroom. It was hypothesized that there were some critical factors that initiate and sustain student athlete's academic performance. A review of literature was used to examine factors affecting the academic success of college student athletes in the classroom. The factors found by the review of literature that positively affected student performance were goal-setting, life skills and support services that provide resources such as mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and task orientation. The results indicated that factors affecting student athletes were pertinent in reaching academic success in the classroom.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## DEDICATION

To my husband Frank, my best friend, who is always there for me and the first to support me in pursuing all my dreams. You are truly a blessing and I thank you for your love, faith, and in believing that this project can be completed. Thank you for keeping me on task. And to my two beautiful children Maximus and Athena you motivate me and inspire me to pursue things I never thought possible. I love you all very much.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem of the Statement

Teachers, coaches, and student athletes at the college level are concerned with the factors that lead to the success of student athletes in the classroom. However, there are many contributing factors that can guide and support them whether or not their sport is in season. There are numerous ways to help student athletes to reach academic success. There are many student athletes struggling with academic success and looking for help. Studies show that student athletes can be just as or even more successful than their counterparts. According to NCAA (2004) statistics from 1999-2000 graduate rates among student athletes were at 63% while the rest of the students were at a 61% graduation rate at Division I colleges/universities. Although, graduate rates are increased, student athletes' academic success is measured by grade point average (GPA), attendance, and everyday performance in the classroom achieved by utilizing various programs readily available to them.



Various journals talked about ways to help them. Some of the key factors generally discussed in the journals are counseling, support program models, strategies, faculty, and above all teaching student athletes life skills to become successful.

According to Tinnesz, Ahuna, and Kiener (2006), adopting active and dynamic strategies such as mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and task orientation is critical to eliminate under prepared students. It is important to continue to find ways to help student athletes become more successful. According to Carodine, Almond, and Gratto(2001), there is a correlation between alienation felt by student athletes in the classroom and academic performance. A study done by Hurley and Cunningham (1984, p. 55) also showed that this alienation affects academic and athletic performance negatively by causing student athletes to be unsuccessful and full of uncertainty.

#### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to examine and critically synthesize the factors affecting the success of student athletes in the classroom. An important part of this project was a critical examination of the support

services such as mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and task orientation and other services that still need to be developed and implemented for those student athletes at the college level.

### Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study was that there were critical factors such as life skills and support services that provide such resources as mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and task orientation that affect college student athlete's academic success in the classroom.

### Scope of the Project

This project was intended to focus on college student athletes and share some of the tools necessary to show coaches and professors to recognize the critical factors that help student athletes become academically successful. The journals that focused on other age groups not relating to college student athletes were excluded, using the university databases (ie., EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, and ScienceDirect). Information was gathered by 10 scholarly journals, such as the *Journal of College and Character*, *College Teaching*, and *Journal of College Counseling and*

*Research in Higher Education*. Studies sharing the critical factors that have an impact on college level athletes' academic success were also selected to further understand factors affecting student athlete's performance in the classroom.

#### Limitations of the Project

The first limitation of this project was the selection of studies that specifically focused on college student athletes, excluding any studies focusing on K-12 grade levels. Second, the project focused on 10 major journal articles, specifically describing the affects of mentoring, counseling, and other life skills that contributed to factors that lead to the success of college student athletes.

#### Definition of Terms

A. A student-athlete is defined as "someone who combines athletic prowess with academic success."

(Emerson College, 2008).

B. A red-shirt is defined by the NCAA eligibility committee "as a student athlete who does not participate in competition in any sport for one

complete academic year (i.e., August through May) (Stansbury, 2004).

C. NCAA is defined an acronym for the "National Collegiate Athletic Association, official association that oversees collegiate sports located in Indianapolis, Indiana (Stansbury, 2004).

D. NSSE is the acronym for the National Survey of Student Engagement and is defined as "a survey that is designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experience (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

E. HLM is an acronym for Hierarchical Linear Modeling defined as "a two stage analysis of data" (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

F. Academic Success is defined as a set of personal and educational goals determined by a student athlete's grade point average, tests scores, and the ability to achieve success in the classroom on a daily basis. (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2008).

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODS

This project was initiated by searching out information on the responsibilities and support services for student athletes on the Internet. Next, scholarly journals were reviewed on the library website. After reviewing several journals and literature reviews specifically pertaining to the affects that contribute to the success of student athletes in the classroom, the main goal was to focus on the factors that make them become successful through programs that teach life skills. The scholarly journals used for this project included the *Journal of College and Character*, *Journal of College Counseling*, *College Teaching*, and *Research in Higher Education*. Many of the same factors consistently appeared in the scholarly journals. The common factors were counseling, mentoring, and life skills.

Various factors were found relating to the success of student athletes in the classroom. Some focused on one major key component beginning with life skills; this factor was considered as the focal point into many other factors

that were analyzed for their effects on student athletes to become more successful in the classroom.

CHAPTER THREE  
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

According to Ferris, Finster & McDonald's (2004) analysis of NCAA Division 1 graduation rates, standings of student athletes are unfit. They began their research by analyzing four questions; (1) Do athletes graduate at rates different from their student cohort?, (2) Do universities with higher graduation rates also graduate athletes at a higher rate?, (3) Do academically select universities graduate athletes at higher rates? and (4) do athletically successful universities graduate athletes at lower rates? From 1992-93 to 2002 for each Division I university institutional academic profiles were used. The data collected to answer these questions was limited because of the inaccuracies of the university standard for student athletes compared to their cohorts. Their findings indicated that graduation-rate analysis is confounded by the diversity of the constituents served by the university and that is if this diversity is to be honored. They also found that the graduation-rate statistics also offers little insight into the actual educational processes and

thus are limited in remedying the systematic challenges of educating athletes. They concluded that measuring academic success is a good first step but it is not a true measure as a student athlete G.P.A. or even their individual test scores. The following journals explore the various methods and services used to improve student athlete academic success.

#### Goal-Setting

In Curtis' (2006) study, encouraging student athlete's academic success through task orientation, ego orientation and goal-setting increases a number of satisfactory ways to help build a successful foundation for student athletes in the classroom. Rather than addressing these individuals as athlete students, he focused on changing their role to become a student athlete. In his opinion student athletes are more driven today on getting through classes and draw their attention more to ways of winning in life without education. The approach should be to change student athletes approach towards goal setting, which will in turn enable the support services to move forward helping them become more successful. He explained two types of goal orientations that can be successful. These orientations



include task orientation and ego orientations (Duda, 1993). According to Curtis, individuals driven by task orientation achieve success by learning new skills and improving their own personal ability levels. It is believed that an ego-orientated individual is someone that may be drawn to success by aspiring to become superior over others. Whether or not student athletes become successful in the classroom depends upon their orientation.

According to the *NCAA Division I Manual* (2004), more than one third of student athletes failed to graduate on schedule; the lowest percentage of non-graduating collegiate senior student athletes since the NCAA began collecting such statistics two decades ago.

Curtis (2006) also utilizes the two types of goal orientations (i.e., task and ego orientations) outlined by Duda (2006). According to Curtis, individuals driven by "task orientation" consider success to be met by learning new skills and improving their own personal ability levels. It is also believed that individuals driven by "ego orientations" are drawn to the idea of being superior over others. The results of the study results indicated that most successful students are driven by ego orientation and

that student athletes enjoy "external benefits" which can drive their goal-setting.

### Life Skills

A study conducted by Tinnesz, Ahuna, and Kiener, (2006) outlined strategies that are necessary to achieve high graduation rates. The subjects for this study were 80 students, 51% of them male. All of the students were enrolled in the methods of inquiry course during one of four consecutive semesters. The participants were broken down in grade level that also included a diverse sample of the student population. All the participants completed pre- and posttest measures of the Revised Experimental Version of the Dynamic and Active Learning Inventory during the first and last week of the course (DALI-R; Iran-Nejad & Chissom, 1992).

The results of the study showed that implementation of active and dynamic strategies can be taught and implemented successfully. The methods of inquiry course described by Tinnesz, Ahuna, and Kiener (2006) gives undergraduate students concrete ways to approach their studies by helping them become actively involved in their own learning

processes. It is to assure comprehensive learning and provide for accurate assessment of what is indeed learned.

The active strategies described in this article are techniques such as note-taking, reading, concept mapping, concept elaboration, and generating mock exams are taught. These techniques enhance a student's knowledge and understanding of course content (Tinnesz, Ahuna, & Kiener, 2006). They found that students using active learning techniques participated more in class and did better on exams by almost a whole letter grade than their peers not using active strategies.

Some dynamic characteristics include enthusiasm, persistence, and the enjoyment of the learning process. According to Iran-Nejad and Chissom (1992), they found that when students possessed dynamic characteristics there was a greater increase in academic achievement than when students only engaged in active learning strategies. It was found that student athletes need both active and dynamic strategies to be successful.

Simons and Cleary (2006) evaluated the influence of service learning courses on students learning. College students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses at a private teaching university in an Eastern metropolitan area

during the fall of 2002 through the spring of 2004 served as a limited sample study. Service learning is course based educational experience that allows students to participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and to gain further understanding of course content, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Simon & Cleary, 2006).

The collective findings in this study suggested that service learning contributes to student athlete's academic learning and personal and social development through social-emotional-processes (Simons & Cleary, 2006). This approach is relevant because student athletes are a diverse special population because of their roles on campus, their typical lifestyles, and their special needs. (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 1996). They found that college student athlete's success needs to be both in and out of the classroom, which can often lead to many responsibilities that can become a grueling task.

Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) believed that students are responsible for fulfilling their academic responsibilities, such as attending classes, studying, and passing exams. In addition they must achieve and maintain NCAA eligibility standards. Failure to complete academic

tasks could jeopardize the student athlete's eligibility to compete, receive scholarship aid and graduate from the institution of choice. Student athletes recruited with an opportunity to earn a degree and participate in intercollegiate sports have great demands on their time. Often times this pressure and responsibility can cause the careers of student athletes to end with a negative experience.

Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) evaluated various programs necessary for the success of student athletes. The results indicated some examples of student athlete services available which include orientation, career and life skills development, career planning and placement, Challenging Athletic Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS)/Life Skills and academic advising and monitoring eligibility. Evaluation of the academic support programs begins to guide our student athletes in the right direction. This study provides guidelines to construct a model student athlete support program. The findings show that the ideal program should include academic support, career counseling, and personal development for student athletes.

A literature review by Stansbury (2004) evaluated the academic success in student athletes. The purpose of this

literature review was to evaluate why student athletes go through college and the reasons for being there to begin with. The question is whether or not they are receiving a quality education. This literature review uses research based studies that evaluate the effect that athletic participation has on the academic performance of intercollegiate student athletes. It was critical to examine the priority to the needs of student athletes' academic goals while competing in intercollegiate athletics, intramurals, and other co-curricular activities that allows students to enhance and expand their educational and social experiences in college. The results indicate that participation in extra-curricular activities improves student academic performance across the board. Having student athletes use a red shirt year is another way to bolster the success of student athlete's maturity development in the classroom.

According to Hobneck, Mudge, and Turchi (2003), post intervention data indicated that if the right programs were implemented, than most athletes were able to be responsible students. The combination of a life skills class and diligent use of progress reports aided in the academic growth of athletes. The issue that they encountered was

that student athletes at the college level failed to comprehend that academic skills were needed to be successful students. The purpose of this study was to show the uniqueness of the different programs that can make these students athletes successful.

Student athletes tend to have lower grade point averages than other students and implementing the use of progress reports proved to be a significant correlation to the student athlete's success. Based on the data collected by Hobneck, Mudge, & Turchi (2003) student athletes' success was remained relatively unchanged. However, student athletes' perceptions of themselves as students improved as well as their attitudes toward academic achievement. Completion of the life skills class and progress reports combined helped them realize that being a student is as important as being an athlete.

#### Support Services

According to Fletcher, Benshoff, and Richburg (2003), a strategic approach to understanding how to counsel college student athletes is a worthy skill to integrate as part of teaching success in the classroom. This article provides information for college counselors to increase

their knowledge to develop the tools necessary to emphasize the importance of education. An implication for working with college/university student athletes is a priority in this article.

Many of the student athletes discussed in this article face additional pressures that require them to balance social skills, leisure activities, maintaining health and fitness, all while competing in their choice of sport or extra-curricular activities (Fletcher, Benschhoff, & Richburg, 2003).

It is also necessary for college counselors to have a comprehensive understanding of the unique systems involved in college athletics (Fletcher, Benschhoff, and Richburg, 2003). Student athletes in this article share the same kinds of obstacles when faced with the challenge of balancing extra curricular activities and their studies. The NCAA, their institutions, the athletic departments, and their teams can all be factors in this delicate equation.

Fletcher, Benschhoff, and Richburg (2006) concluded that if counselors gained more understanding of the student athlete population, than they could help them achieve success by tailoring their practices to meet the unique needs of student athletes.



According to *the Student-Athlete Support Program Model* by Smith and Herman (1996), student athletes encounter considerably more obstacles than their non athletic peers as they strive towards academic achievement. Some of these that are obstacles stated in the program model are the coaches, institutions, NCAA requirements, training, travel, and games. To help student athletes deal with these factors, the Student Athlete Academic Support Program (SAASP) was implemented at a collegiate Division III institution. This program consists of 16 academic coordinators. It was implemented in 1994 with one goal that all student athletes graduate prepared.

Smith and Herman (1996) assert that student athletes will strive to meet their goals with the support services readily available to them. The components of this program model included team academic counselors, access to a career planning office, a mandated study time, study skills workshop and tutoring opportunities. Questionnaires were collected in 1995 and 1996 using the Likert scale, and in the evaluation of their ongoing study it was hoped that this student athlete SAASP Model could be used at other institutions that seek support of academic achievements of student athletes. This is an ongoing process that needs to

be continued to develop the skills necessary to improve the success of student athletes.

According to Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005), faculty play a large role in shaping student athlete's academic experience. This study used national data to explore the relationship between faculty practices and student engagement. This study examined the environment created between faculty and student athlete relationships. The national data found for this study was the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE was designed to collect data from student's college experiences. Only 137 schools were involved. The sample in the study was made up of 20,226 senior students and 22,033 first year students who completed the NSSE in spring 2003. A survey was handed out and collected of all 137 colleges. The survey was used to measure faculty expectations for student engagement in educational practices. It also examined how faculty members conducted the daily classes and out-of-class work. 14,336 faculty completed the survey.

The results indicated that the course related interactions appear to be positively related with student engagement (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). They found that faculty behaviors and attitudes affect students profoundly,

which suggest that faculty members may play the single most important role in student learning.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

After completing the review of literature, this project focused on key factors in student athlete's success such as, life skills programs and support services.

According to Ferris, Finster, and McDonald (2004), an analysis of graduation rates must be reframed to include student cohort comparisons. They assert that the analysis of NCAA Division I graduation-rates, standings of student athletes are unfit.

Also, according to Curtis (2006), results for student athlete's orientations gave a prediction of where student athletes are headed in their academic future. "If the student-athlete is able to accomplish this and has prepared appropriately, this student-athlete has a far better chance for academic success" (Curtis, 2006), p.7.

Furthermore, according to Tinnesz, Ahuna, and Kiener (2006), internalizing active and dynamic strategies preparing students in a specific class that teaches skills in all classrooms was by far the most successful in any diverse population. Along these same lines, Simons and Cleary (2006), results show the success of service

learning, which consists of school programs and community learning programs. The findings suggest that students improve academic learning and increase personal and social development through social and emotional processes. And finally, according to Carodine, Almond and Gratto (2001), another approach that can increase the chance of success in the classroom is athlete services that are made readily available. Examples of a couple of the athlete services are career and life skills development courses. A combination of all of these elements can have a dramatic effect on success.

Interestingly, according to Stansbury (2004) results, it is indicated that utilizing a "red shirt" academic year is beneficial to student athletes and can serve as a guide for them for the rest of their academic careers. A red-shirt year is designed for a student athlete to not compete and only practice with their team leaving more time for them to focus on their studies. Hobneck, Mudge, and Turchi's (2003) results show that many different programs can be beneficial to students.

An additional factor that can positively affect student services introduced by Fletcher, Benshoff, and Richburg (2003) was counseling student athletes.

Counseling was assessed to be a key component for their success in any classroom. The authors gave an overview to counselors of how to deal with the uniqueness of these students to help them have a clear understanding of what their goals should be.

According to Smith and Herman (1996), athletes must master obstacles that non-student athletes don't even consider. Some of the specific obstacles that student athletes face are the coaches, institutions, NCAA requirements, training, travel and games. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) found that faculty behavior could also play a significant role in student learning making their experience at the collegiate level more successful. Finally, Hobneck, Mudge, and Turchi's (2003) results show that many different programs can be beneficial to students. In tying all of this research together, we learn that implementing various programs that teach life skills and by utilizing some of the special services offered at universities/colleges can have a tremendous effect on the success of student athletes in the classroom.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this project was to examine the factors affecting the academic success of student athletes in the classroom. Many of the life skills programs and support services implemented the factors necessary for the student athlete's success, such as academic advising, counseling, and positive guidance from respected faculty.

The journal articles selected for this literature review for this project indicated the important role of mentoring, counseling, and life skills programs.

First, mentoring proved to be a key component in the success of student athletes. The environment in the classroom is just as important out of the classroom building relationships for a lifetime. Faculty may play the most important role in student learning.

Second, counseling was also a key factor and led to the success of student athletes in the classroom. Counselors need to understand their importance in a student athlete's life. Counseling and everyday class activities for students need to continue to be a cohesive unit.

Programs and life skills classes are also found to be the most important factor for student athlete's success both on and off the fields and courts. In addition, in the support program model by Smith and Herman (1996), implementing student athletic academic support programs will continue to have a lasting importance in the overall success of these students. It is an effective way to guide these student athletes' at all collegiate levels.

Third, as Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) described, it is critical to share the importance of student athlete's services. The conflict of sports and academics and the amount of effort our student athletes have to contend with, it is vital that they may have many programs readily available to help student athletes become more successful in the classroom.

The conclusion of this project and all the studies included, supported the idea that under prepared student athletes who are specifically taught active and dynamic strategies for their success can increase their involvement in the learning process. From students, to coaches, and institutions, we must be able to continue to research and find ways to guide all collegiate student athletes on a successful path that continues throughout their lifespan.



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