

COOL DOWN OR WARM UP?
UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATIONS BEHIND STUDENT ATHLETE MAJOR
CHOICES

by

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ABSTRACT

DIONNE PAULA PARRIS. Cool down or warm up? understanding motivations behind student athlete major choices. (Under the direction of DR. ELIZABETH STEARNS)

The purpose of this study was to investigate how student athletes' choice in major is influenced by coaches, advisors, peers, and instructors and how these influences contribute to the likelihood of being cooled out. Personal narratives for 10 student athletes were collected via semi-structured individual interviews and analyzed employing various thematic coding and use of the qualitative research program NVivo. Findings suggest that the student athletes are not being cooled out by these influences. Reasons for major choice included personal connections to their major, personal connections to athletic academic advisors, social networks, and the participants' perceptions of their coaches, and instructors. The theme of the student athlete role and their perception of a higher standard also emerged as important factors in the participants' academic success. This paper presents implications and recommendations for academic personnel in athletic departments and how they can better aid the student athlete population.

INTRODUCTION

Participation in collegiate athletics presents some struggles, especially in ensuring student athletes take part in enriching educational experiences both inside and outside of the classroom (Gayles and Hu 2009). Some of the questions about balance between athletics and academics are particularly conditioned by race and gender when looking at African American male student athletes. (Benson 2000, Comeaux 2010) Some of these questions include how these athletes reconcile their sport and their academics, how much emphasis is placed on sports in comparison to their academics by their coaches and advisors, and whether these differences negatively affect the returns these athletes are seeing when they graduate from college (Schneider, Ross, Fisher 2010).

Like other college students, student athletes are required to meet with university appointed advisors when they arrive at college to select a major and to map out their courses. An important part of this process is choosing a major, and while a student athlete's interest in pursuing professional sports may influence their thought process and choice of major, when the time and effort needed to develop their skills as an athlete are put at the forefront, their academic success may suffer on the back burner. It is common to see student athletes enrolled in particular majors that will allow them the time to develop these skills with the larger goal of pursuing professional sports. This is how academic clustering—or the concentration of members of a single athletic team in a single major-- can occur.

There are several goals of this paper. The first is to examine academic clustering, and the factors that lead to this phenomenon. These factors are coaches, advisors, peers

and time commitment to sport. The second is to determine how these same factors differ for student athletes across race in various non-revenue generating sports. Finally, I also seek to understand whether these athletes are being “cooled out” by these factors.

Cooling out occurs when a student makes the change from a four year to a community college due to influence from their academic advisors and poor academic performance.

Understanding this definition, this study seeks to extend the cooling out phenomenon to student athletes and the influences over their choice in major. Depending on these influences, student athletes may be convinced to choose one major over another. In the sections to come, I define academic clustering and “cooling out” more specifically and discuss the factors that can contribute to academic clustering and the “cooling out” process. I close with a description of my research plan and an explanation of the limitations of my study.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The Cooling Out Process

Problematizing the filtering of minority students into less rigorous curricula is nothing new. Noting the inconsistency between the limited opportunities that individuals have and the encouragement to achieve, Burton R. Clark (1960) introduced the cooling out process and the role it plays in the university to community college transfer system. This discrepancy between education being seen as a means to the end of upward mobility, and the realities of unequal opportunities college students face is a major issue in American higher education. The idea that everyone should be able to go to college is a concept mainly reflected through both four year universities and community colleges and their open-door policies. This belief can result in students that are underprepared socially, culturally, and financially attending four year institutions that have standards they are unable to meet.

To combat this issue, institutions have the ability to go with either a “hard” or a “soft” response. The “hard” response is one that weeds students out in their first couple of semesters at college. Having been weeded out, the student’s failure is public, with college being seen as “difficult” and is coupled with a lack of motivation to continue further in their education. This results in their returning home, with the loss of achievement and status that accompanies being accepted to and attending college.

In contrast, the “soft” response provides the student with an alternative way to seek their education; it does not discourage them. Instead, they are encouraged to either choose an easier major, along with attending community college, which may be better equipped with the tools (such as small class sizes, flexible class schedules and academic

support) to aid students such as the ones described previously. Clark (1960) outlines a reorienting process that describes how a student lets go of their original goals for their college experience, and as they attend community college, they meet with counselors, take entrance and assessment tests. The student goes through this process all in an attempt to be groomed for the possible vocational career, a career that might not have been on their radar if they had not attended community college.

The main problem with this process is that decisions about the student's future rely on the academic advisors and their perceptions of the student. It even seems to involve a small amount of brainwashing and manipulation of the student, ie. the reorienting process (Clark 1960) to get students to accept going to a community college. While community colleges appear to support equal opportunity through their open door policy, the encouragement of certain students by advisors to attend community college under the guise of upward mobility, in reality steers them towards vocational education. According to Cushing (2008), the "cooling-out" of only certain student (those of minority or low socioeconomic status) academic and occupational opportunities only serves to reproduce inequality.

There have also been other articles that support the occurrence of the cooling out process, especially through the lenses of race, gender and socioeconomic status. Using a sample from two community colleges, Kaliszeski (1988) found that the frequency of cooling out occurs more often with minority students than with white students, with an even distribution between male and female students. Looking at minority students and pathways to success, in a study of the perceptions of community college students regarding barriers to education, Kingsley (2010) found that a nurturing environment was

pertinent part of their success, and suggested that the availability of support in the form of campus programs and the presence of minority faculty and administrators helps minority students to be successful in community colleges. Also, Bahr (2008) cited active counseling as a strategy that can be used to help overcome minority completion and achievement gaps.

Extending the concept of cooling out, Alexander, Bozick and Entwistle (2008) examined the expectation to complete a bachelor's degree among low-income, African American and white high school students at age 22 and again at age 28. Alexander et al. (2008) used Clark's (1960) cooling out function as a way to hypothesize about the student's expectations about college and adulthood and to see if and how their educational aspirations have changed over time. The authors cite the students' lack of socioeconomic and academic resources as a key contributor to cooling out or decrease in ambition. Although Clark's "cooling out" function predicted this decrease in ambitions, not only did the students in their sample not experience this phenomenon but experienced warming up, or an increase in their ambitions to finish college and pursue different careers.

Similar to Alexander et al. (2008) and their application of the cooling out function, it is my argument is that a version of the "cooling out" process occurs to student-athletes, with their being reoriented to choose easier, less demanding majors to help maintain eligibility. I employ the cooling out function as a means to understand how academic clustering of student athletes in less demanding majors occurs. To understand how the cooling out process might occur for a student-athlete, and how this process may lead to academic clustering, it is important to understand the different pressures and

factors that they are faced with that can contribute to this process. These include academic requirements from the NCAA, their coaches, their academic advisors, time commitment to their sport, and peers.

Student-Athletes and the Pressure of Maintaining Eligibility

In order for student-athletes to even compete, they must maintain their academic eligibility with the NCAA, which requires them to meet various criteria. These criteria range from meeting and maintaining the minimum required grade point average, completing certain general education, or core classes at their institution, and maintaining a certain number of study hall hours. Maintaining eligibility by the standards of the NCAA and the university the student is attending acts as a major underlying factor in the occurrence of academic clustering.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides universities and colleges participating in athletics with rules and guidelines for athletes to abide by. Key components of these guidelines include having a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.0, the Academic Progress Rate, and for Division I schools, the 40-60-80 rule. The 40-60-80 rule differs based on what division the institution is a part of; for the purposes of this paper, I will focus on Division I schools.

Understanding the definitions of the rules gives insight into the academic standards student athletes are held to and speaks to the amount of academic pressure they are under. Introduced in 2003, the 40-60-80 rule dictates that students should have 40% of their required coursework for a degree complete by the end of their second year, 60% by the end of the third year, and 80% completed by the end of their fourth year. The academic progress rate, or APR, is a metric used by the NCAA to measure the success of

college institutions' athletic teams in moving their student-athletes towards graduation (Division I, 2015). Along with these requirements, student-athletes also need to be enrolled for a minimum of twelve credit hours to be considered full time, all while maintaining their GPA.

While GPA and 40-60-80 requirements are helpful in keeping student-athletes on track with their schooling, these requirements also have the potential to deter students from certain majors, which influences the development of academic clustering. The rigid nature of these rules might influence a student athlete to seek a less demanding major, and this can act as a factor that contributes to the cooling out and eventual academic clustering of a student-athlete.

Although these policies have been created by the NCAA to ensure that the student athlete achieves academic success, they can be modified to accommodate their needs. For example, in an attempt to meet the pressure of these guidelines, student athletes might enroll in whatever classes or more importantly, whatever majors, make it easiest to meet these criteria. For coaches, academic advisors and student-athletes alike, rules such as the 40-60-80 and the APR prioritizes and places extremely high value on scholarships, with the threat of their being lost if standards are not met.

Regardless of the differences in conference or year, academic clustering is a real phenomenon, and one that the literature shows occurs mainly among minority football and basketball players. The desire to compete at the professional level is not the only cause of academic clustering. A student athlete's coach, advisors, peers and time commitment are all factors that can influence.

What is “Clustering”?

Academic clustering is defined as the occurrence of twenty-five percent or more of a single athletic team enrolled in a major (Fountain & Finley 2011). When these athletes cluster, it is usually in those majors that are seen as easy on campus, that allow the student athlete the ability to dedicate time and flexibility to their sport. This can be seen as a benefit for the student athlete while they are in school, because a less demanding major can grant them opportunities to achieve accolades that can positively affect their futures as professional athletes. On the other hand, it can also present major problems when the student-athlete graduates, especially because of the likelihood they will not be able to play at the professional level upon graduation. For example, in their findings on the estimated probability of competing in professional sports, the NCAA reported that only 1.2% of the 71,291 NCAA basketball players will actually make it to NBA, while only 1.6 % of 18,320 NCAA football players will make it to the NFL (NCAA, 2015).

The concept of clustering was first defined as “the grouping or clustering of a disproportionate percentage of athletes into selected majors when compared to the overall university percentage in the same major” (Case et al.: 48). Examining NCAA Division I men’s and women’s basketball teams, the authors found that both teams (71% of men’s teams and 51% of women’s teams) exhibiting evidence of clustering. More importantly, Case et. al (1987) also found that clustering was more likely to occur at academically “elite” institutions.

Expanding on the concept of clustering, Fountain and Finley (2009) analyzed the academic majors of NCAA football in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), and found

that clustering was present in all ACC football programs. The authors also found that the top programs that reported the most clustering included social science, liberal arts, and business management programs. Like Case et. al (1987), they also found that minority players were clustered into specific majors at greater rates than white players. Fountain and Finley (2011) also conducted a longitudinal study examining how football players' academic majors changed while they attended college. Conducted over a ten year period (2000-2009), the authors found that there was a larger number of players in a wide range of academic majors during their first two years in college, and as they moved into their last two years, the range decreased dramatically, with 53.2% of them clustering in the "Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management" major at their school.

In their longitudinal investigation of academic clustering, Sanders and Hildenbrand (2010) also found that student athletes were more likely to migrate toward a clustered major between their sophomore and junior year. Between these years, African American student athletes were also found to be at the greatest risk of clustering, with results showing this occurring mainly within social science majors. In an attempt to add a level of precision to reporting of academic clustering, Otto's (2012) study on clustering found that the phenomenon was present in 70% of football programs, with clustering (authors defined this as over 40% or more football players in the major) occurring in majors such as sociology, American studies, and history. This supports Sanders and Hildenbrand's finding as well.

Sanders and Hildenbrand (2010) investigate academic clustering and ask several important questions, including why athletes cluster and what social and demographic factors contribute to academic clustering of student athletes. The authors provide their

own theoretical background for academic clustering, citing the selection and structure hypotheses. The selection hypothesis argues that athletes may begin their college career more likely to choose within a certain set of majors that fit better with their sport. On the other hand, the structure hypothesis relies more on the set up of college athletics. It infers that participation in athletics puts students in a certain environment that pressures them to pick a major that is seen as compatible with their student-athlete schedule.

This paper will focus on the experiences of student athletes and the decisions they make regarding their choice of major. Understanding the ways that student athletes, African Americans in particular, choose their majors will give insight into how the factors mentioned earlier influence the student athlete. These factors include their parents, peers, team mates and their college appointed academic and athletic advisors. Specifically, I am examining whether or not these student athletes experience a "cooling out" function that could lead to academic clustering. It is my argument that student athletes experience pressure to change their major from one that is perceived as "difficult" to one that is not as demanding on their athletic and academic schedules. Combining these two concepts, the cooling out of African American student athletes and possible clustering in easy majors can present a problem both while the athletes are in school, and when they graduate and attempt to seek jobs. Because there has been little exploration of how and if clustering occurs among student athletes that are in non-revenue generating sports, I will focus on male, African American and white student athletes from non-revenue generating sports such as track and field, baseball, soccer, and tennis.

Choosing a Major

The athletic director, coaches, academic services and other offices and personnel all work together to aid student-athletes and their pursuit of college degrees, with coaches and athletic academic counselors and advisors playing influential roles in how student-athletes spend their time and ultimately, how they choose their majors.

Coaches - Depending on how successful the school is regarding athletics, there is a large pressure placed on coaches to maintain the standings of the institution they are affiliated with. Fountain & Finley (2011) describe several ways that coaches can increase or maintain graduation rates in an attempt to fulfill NCAA requirements, APR, and ultimately, maintain the number of scholarships their institution has. Examining football coaches in particular, the authors found that these ways are shaped by the stance that on field performance is a key factor that drives their recruitment criteria. For example, a coach can recruit players who have the most desirable physical qualities, but not the best academic ability. To combat this, coaches may choose “the path of least resistance” (Fountain & Finley 2011) as far as professors or even departments with less difficult degree programs to ensure eligibility for their athletes.

Academic Advisors and College Counselors - Despres et al. (2008) examines the overall relationship between academics and athletics and what this relationship means for the relationship between a student-athlete and their college counselor or academic advisor. Despres et al. (2008) support the belief that athletics positively affects a student’s socialization and education progresses as they move through college. Some benefits of participating in sports can include encouraging successful academic achievement, acting as an agent for upward mobility, and raising a student athlete’s

overall educational aspirations. Although this is the case, Despres et al. (2008) note several ways in which athletics can have a negative effect: the encouragement of athletics over academics, and a student's identity, and personal and social development can all be stunted, with the last two ways mentioned shaping the first. With these negative effects in mind, the authors suggest different ways that college counselors can help student-athletes, especially as they interact with peers and teachers.

Time Commitment - According to Eitzen et al. (2009) there are several other reasons that can be cited for the phenomenon of academic clustering. These include the major's having fewer courses that conflict with practices or less strict admission requirements. Athletes might be at the school to solely play the sport, all leading them to choose a major that seems "easy." Factors ranging from the amount of pressure placed on athletes to the lack of time they can devote to activities besides their sport can impede an athlete's academic performance (Eitzen et al. 2009). The concept of being an "athlete" can also have a negative effect on students both as they enter into their university as freshmen, and throughout their time there. Eitzen et al. (2009) found that students who first entered into their university feeling idealistic about both the school and their major became disappointed and cynical about their sport by the end of their freshman year, as they realized how difficult it would be to juggle being both a student and an athlete.

Race and Institutional Support - Understanding how coaches, advisors and faculty view student athletes is useful in learning how a student athlete chooses their major and how this leads to their academic success. The literature on African American male college student athletes and their experiences in college classrooms with advisors and instructors

all speak to why noting the differences and similarities in these instances for white and African American athletes is necessary.

Understanding the relationship between black student athletes and faculty, black student athletes perceived that their instructors did not care about them, how they performed in their courses and also perceived a level of antagonism from them. The athletes also reported that they were aware that their instructors would not hold them accountable, nor were they available to provide help when the student athletes were struggling (Adler and Adler 1991, Benson 2000, Beamon 2014).

An application of critical race theory to a study of faculty perceptions of college student athletes outlined four major themes: color-blind ideology, success in spite of race, use of racially coded language, and success in spite of sport demands. While faculty were found to be supportive of students that achieved the goal of graduation, and maintained that they did not see color or race when asked about their student's academic goals, they were aware of racial differences between white and African American student athletes. Through use of coded language, the faculty was found to be aware of barriers to success faced by black student athletes, noting that African American student athletes have to work harder than their white counterparts (Comeaux 2010, Njororai 2012).

Looking at the athletic program as a whole, in a qualitative study of African American student-athletes, Singer (2009) examined the concept of institutional integrity and its relationship with critical race theory. According to Singer (2009), institutional integrity analyzes an athletic program's commitment to the educational interests of student-athletes. Although the mission statement of the university being analyzed included being committed to providing "quality educational opportunities," results

showed that the student-athletes did not think there was enough of an emphasis on education at their university, with the participants focusing on topics such as the institutional atmosphere at their school, financial support, and the lack of African American administrators, coaches, and academic support. The interviewees also argued the need for an open forum to voice their opinions.

It is already well documented in the literature how time commitment, coaches, and advisors can positively or negatively affect student athletes, especially those that are in revenue generating sports such as basketball and football (Sanders and Hildenbrand 2010, Benson 2000, Comeaux 2010). Understanding how these factors also influence student athletes in nonrevenue generating sports such as soccer, swimming, and track and field and if students in these sports cluster is necessary, especially to add the literature on the student athlete population.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology

A phenomenological approach is used in qualitative research to highlight experiences of individuals and give them a voice (Seidman 2013). The use of this approach for this study was necessary in capturing the voices and thoughts of student athletes and how they make decisions regarding their major. Specifically, the student athletes' stories were collected through open-ended, in depth interviews. The interview protocol, designed with the advice and approval of the thesis chair and the school's research compliance office, investigated current academic experiences. To gain access to this group I employed a snowball sampling frame. The purpose of this sampling frame was to gain access to a population that the researcher did not have access to prior. Starting with a peer of mine that is a student athlete, I asked her to introduce me to several of the male teammates on her team. Recruitment of the student athletes occurred either while they were in study hall, in between practices, or during downtime they had during their practices. After receiving their contact information, the student athletes were sent an email that explained the purpose of the study, and how long the interview would last. This email also included the prizewinner and consent forms to be filled out and returned to me prior to conducting the interview.

Participants

I conducted a qualitative interview study at a large, predominantly white, public university in the southeast with a highly ranked, Division I athletics program. To preserve participants' confidentiality, actual school and respondent names are not used. The participants are undergraduates, ranging from freshman to senior class standing (N = 10).

There were five African American and five white males from four different non-revenue generating sports. These sports are track and field, baseball, tennis, and golf. The main criteria for these students included that they are current student athletes playing in non-revenue generating sports.

All participants were asked the same questions, which focused on their experiences with choosing their majors, conversations with coaches, advisors and teammates, and their schedules and study habits. The open-ended nature of the interview protocol encouraged the researcher to ask follow-up and probing questions based on the students' responses. Each of the interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted an average of 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded using Google Voice and transcribed with the participants' awareness and consent.

After transcription of each interview, the data were analyzed using common topic and themes that emerged across the content of the respondent's answers to the questions. After the initial process of creating themes, the data was organized into thematic categories, and further created into a codebook. The data was also analyzed using qualitative analysis software NVivo to provide the researcher with a systematic way to code the interviews and further organize the data.

RESULTS

This study drew on student-athlete's personal interpretations of experiences to further explore what events most influence the respondent's choice in major and how these influences relate to the potential of being cooled out. These reflections provided a further understanding of what and how certain factors influenced their choice in major. Analysis of the interviews answered the major research question of why the student athlete chose their major and presented several sub themes: academic autonomy, reinforcement of messages related to academics, fulfilling the student athlete role, and social networks.

Themes

Each of the themes generated from the interviews were created from a combination of the questions and the interview responses, and how they relate to the research questions previously stated. After analyzing the results from Nvivo, if a particular reason for major choice was coded for more than once, it was deemed a major theme. There were also several sub themes that emerged from the interviews and supporting quotes are explained below. The theme of the student athlete role and their perception of a higher standard also emerged as important factors in the participants' academic success.

Reasons for Major Choice

Understanding that the 10 student athletes interviewed came from a variety of majors, it is important to learn why they chose their particular major. The response for this question varied across each of the participants, and fell into these larger categories: personal connection to their major, personal connection with their athletic academic

advisors, importance of social networks, and the reinforcement of important messages related to academics and their sport. Each of these themes and the quotes that embody them are explained below.

Personal Connection to Major

Several of the respondents referenced a personal connection to their major. For example, John, a white engineering major, mentioned that his experiences in a STEM focused high school helped shaped his decision to choose engineering as a major:

I was a part of my high school's robotics program for four years. I was the head of the mechanical division of our robotics program. And it's just something that comes easily to me. There's a lot of critical thinking, a lot of applied sciences in it, and it's just fun. You get to solve real world problems every day and you get to help people out with everyday life.

Another white participant, Michael, talked about the personal issue of his injury and the major that he chose because of it provided him with a way to help other people with their own injuries:

I picked Exercise Science because I really have a passion for helping people and I love learning about the body. So I think being in sports, I've been through a few injuries that were quite debilitating when it came to playing my sport, and a few times I went to physical therapy and it honestly really helped. So that concept got me in the mindset that I wanted to pursue Exercise Science.

John and Michael's personal connections to previous experiences with the academic content of the major were important in shaping their decision to choose their majors of exercise science and engineering. In particular, Michael's experience is tied directly into his sport, which translated into a positive push for him to pursue his major of choice.

Importance of Social Networks

Being on a sports team allowed all of the student athletes to create a social network of friends and peers that include student athletes that are both on and off of their team. While some student athletes reported not talking with their teammates about their major, it is clear that the respondents are aware of the benefits or usefulness of having teammates in their classes or to go to study hall with. An example of a respondent's use of their social network and common bond of being a student athlete came when making new friends in classes they were unfamiliar with. When asked if he studied with other people in his classes, James, an African American sociology major, responded:

Say if (there's) another student that's an athlete in my class, we might exchange numbers, and say if we have a test, so we can have a test review on a Thursday if the test is on a Friday. I don't know a lot of people on the tennis team, but if I see a tennis player or just another athlete, I might introduce myself and see if we can study, so it just depends on who you know and if you're comfortable with meeting new people.

James' response that "it depends on who you know" makes it clear that his position as a student athlete made it easier for him to make connections with other athletes in his classes, with one of the common bonds between them being their athletics. His use of his social network also helped him in finding study partners for any tests or exams he may have, which contributed to his overall academic success.

Another key reason why student athletes chose their particular major is due to the help and advice from older teammates. Several student athletes remarked and reflected on how the guidance they received from older teammates who were also in the same major they were interested in helped make sure that the major they chose was right for them. This supports Sanders and Hildenbrand's (2010) structure hypothesis, which argues that

participation in sports places students in an environment that pressures them to pick a major that fits with their schedule. For these respondents, their environment, which is their team and social network, heavily influenced their choice in major. It was important to them to have confirmation from their older teammates: this confirmation provided them with assurance that they were choosing the right major. Also, the ability to build these relationships with their teammates was important in shaping their experience in college. For example, William, a white Accounting major, stated:

Like I said I wanted to do something in Business and at first, I was going to do Economics, but I took my first Accounting class my sophomore year, and I had a couple guys on my team that were Accounting majors that were juniors and seniors, and learning from them, they kind of directed me in that way to do Accounting. And ever since then I've loved it.

When asked how his teammates “directed” him, William said that their conversations about career aspirations, especially how they planned to use their Business degree once they graduated, were important in helping him figure out his own career path as well. His teammates’ ability to answer any questions that he had also helped him feel more comfortable about his major choice.

Other respondents cited their family as a major reason why they chose their major. For Timothy, a white Business Management major, it was a particular combination of influence from both his parents and from other student athletes around him:

Well a lot of golfers I feel like have that major and I didn't really know what to study in college, and my parents were like I should do Business Management. I took a few classes when I got here and enjoyed it.

When asked how his parents influenced him in particular, he stated that although he was interested in pursuing golf professionally, he chose his major more so because his parents thought it would be a good “backup plan.” For these student athletes, their social

networks were a crucial part of their major choice process. James, Timothy and William relied on individuals in their social networks such as their parents and peers to help reaffirm that the major they chose was the best suited for them.

Another major theme that emerged as an answer to why the student athlete chose their major was the reinforcement of important messages related to academics and their sport. Some student athletes chose their major based on the different messages that they received about both academics and their sport ranging from coaches and advisors to peers and family. The following subthemes capture these messages, which were noted in the respondent's answers to questions such as "Do you think your instructors care about you and your learning?" And "Does your coach talk to you about academics?"

Perceptions of Coaches and Instructors

This sub theme and its examples show that these athletes are receiving positive reinforcement from their athletic department, especially from their coaches and instructors. Some student athletes reported they enjoyed classes in their major, but were less enthusiastic about their general education courses. When asked what in particular they found interesting about these courses, the respondents talked about topics such as the structure of the courses, the instructor's teaching styles, and being able to interact with other athletes outside of the field. For example, once in his major, Timothy also realized that he appreciated his major through the way his instructor challenged his students to interact with each other in ways his other classes didn't:

Well, my Management class, my professor, it's a pretty big class, there's 40, 50 people in there. On the first day he told us to get up and greet one another and introduce ourselves. It was a different type of class, it's not like you go in and just take notes and don't talk to anybody. You get to meet new people and I thought that was pretty interesting. I [really] liked that.

Other athletes talked about the positive reinforcement they received from their coach, advisor, or instructor. These positive messages, combined with their overall relationship with these personnel can provide even more incentive for the student athlete to perform well both on and off of the field. When asked whether he thought his instructors in his major courses cared about him or his learning, Anthony, an African American Criminal Justice major, responded:

...Their energy level in class is usually pretty high and I feel like if they didn't enjoy teaching it would be hard for their energy to consistently be at a high level. And another thing is their willingness to help you if you reach out to them. Because my professors are very willing to work with me and to make sure I've got the information that they're trying to teach me I know that they're passionate about what they're actually doing because they're willing to take extra time to make sure the student is properly prepared.

It was important for Anthony to see that his instructors are motivated and willing to work with him, because it makes it apparent to him that they care about him both a student and an athlete.

James, an African American sociology major, was also aware of the way that his professors might perceive him because of his status as a student athlete:

Interviewer: Do you think your instructors treat you differently based on your status as student athlete?

James: Um, no, I don't feel that they, well I can say that they do to a certain extent because some professors have been athletes throughout their time, so those certain instructors may put us to a higher standard and may want us to do better than the so-called norm student. They would like to see us better ourselves, instead of just being like, "oh they're a student athlete, they're not just gonna do just enough to get by." Because I feel that some instructors do push athletes to do better than the so-called norm, but other than that here at [...] it's not like we get privileges or anything like that.

James' awareness of the negative stereotypes surrounding student athletes and his belief that instructors want him to succeed in spite of those stereotypes act as a clear indication to him that they care about him as a student athlete and his overall academic success.

The respondents were also asked if they talked to their coach about their major. All of the student athletes stated that they either have no or almost no conversation with their coach about their major. As this study focuses mainly on major choice, when asked if their coach talks to them about their major, all of the student athletes also reported that they while they do not talk to them about their major, their conversations revolve mainly around grades and eligibility.

In one of his responses, Timothy outlines the chain of command from athletic director to the coach, stating that if a student athlete is not doing well in their classes, the coach is also used as a conduit from the larger athletic department to the student athlete. They are used as an individual that is immediately accessible to the student athlete who can ask them questions to figure out what's causing their grades to falter, and to suggest tutors for the particular classes they might be having difficulty in:

Interviewer: Does your coach ever talk to you about your major?

Timothy: Not really, all they really cared about was to make sure your grades were good, but they didn't really care to see what your major was, as long as you were doing good in classes. So at the end of each semester, they get a report about how we did and basically if we know that we're doing badly, he'll suggest that you get a tutor, and if we had a good semester then he compliments us on that. So he mainly just gets a report from the student athletic director, she sends it down to him, so he knows how we're doing.

Similarly, other athletes mentioned that they did not go to their coach for advice on their majors nor did they receive any when coaches did talk to them about their academics.

The concern with keeping their grades up was a concept that was echoed by several of the respondents:

Interviewer: So have you discussed your major with your coaches? Or your advisors?

Anthony: I have with my academic advisors that were assigned to me from the (team) but not with my coaches. Usually if they ask I'll tell them but we don't usually talk about school unless it's about grades, not really what you're doing.

Interviewer: Okay, so do you discuss your major with your coaches?

Timothy: Not really, they know what we're taking, and they're not really too big into it, they're more worried about how we do on the course and how we play in tournaments.

Other student athletes felt more strongly about the position of their coaches in relation to their academics:

Interviewer: Do you discuss your major with your coaches?

Mark: Our coaches don't ask about school at all. The way I feel, coaches think you're there for one thing, and one thing only and that's to play your sport and as long as they're not getting any emails about... [I mean] they're only concerned about class when it's going bad and it affects your sport. But other than that I feel like they don't care.

There were several instances where coaches were seen as doing a good job, even if they did not talk to the respondents about their majors, especially in terms of providing motivation and accountability to the student athletes:

Interviewer: So has your coach ever talked to you about your academics?

James: Yeah, my ... coach, he talks to everybody. ... He makes sure that everybody is on track with their grades and no one wants to be ineligible for grades; that looks bad on the person as an athlete, and it looks bad on the coach because it looks like he's not doing his job of making sure everyone is being accountable. So I feel that my coach does a great job at that.

In this response, James taps into the particular academic pressure to succeed that student athletes experience, and even views his academic failures as a reflection not only of himself but also as a reflection of his coach, specifically as an indication that he is not

doing his job. Here we see that the James clearly states that his coach's main concern is about grades and eligibility, because neither he nor the coach wants to look bad. It seems that the fear of not being eligible is a major motivation for student athletes not only to do well, but to choose a major where success is feasible.

After talking about the increase in the amount of work for his major from his freshman year to his sophomore year, Andrew, a black Criminal Justice major, mentioned that at first he thought it would be difficult to get his Bachelor's as a student athlete. As a senior he no longer feels this way, and cited the support that he receives from his athletic department as a major factor in his success:

Interviewer: So what kind of caused that change from freshman to sophomore year for you?

Andrew: I see the support that I still have. I still have people that are invested in me, from the school, in terms of my coach, my athletic advisor, and all of those people that work in the academic centers, they're definitely committed to making sure student athletes are getting their work done and passing their classes so they can graduate. But my friends, they don't have that, so it's just relying on [them] to keep their motivation up and get their work done and make sure they stay on top of everything.

Development of a Personal Connection with Athletic Academic Advisors

Through questions about the amount of support an advisor or coach provided the student athletes the topic of a personal connection between several of the student athletes and their athletic academic advisors emerged from the interviews. When asked about the nature of the conversations the student athletes would have with their advisors, the athletic academic advisor was referenced as the one seen more frequently in comparison to their academic advisor, and because they met more often, some of the student athletes were able to develop a personal connection with their athletic academic advisors. All of

the student athletes met with their athletic academic advisors at least once a week in comparison to once a month/semester with their academic advisors.

One student athlete, a senior, reported that he never met with his academic advisor in all four years of attending his university, and that he mainly relied on his athletic academic advisor for any questions he had regarding issues with classes. Mark, an African American English major, said this:

Yes I meet with an advisor once a week, they make sure that I'm on schedule to graduate,(...) I mean the advisors are really here to not even help us just academically, they're really here to see if we're fine personally, like with our personal life we can go talk to them at any time. They're here to help us as a person first, and then academically, and then as an athlete. So I feel like they're here more on a personal level than an academic level.

Mark's experience with his athletic academic advisor does not fit with the rhetoric surrounding the term student athlete, which implies that they are supposed to be a student first. Mark's belief that his athletic academic advisor is there to help him be a person first, and a student second helps him both create a connection and rely on his athletic advisor in ways that he cannot with his academic advisor.

John, a white engineering major, explained how his athletic academic advisor reminds him of his mother, in an attempt to distinguish between his academic and athletic academic advisors:

One is major specific, for me to go do Engineering, that's what they're there for, to help me out and guide me in that direction. And my athletic advisor is there to kind of make sure I keep my grades up, keep on doing my homework, stuff like that. They kind of remind me of my mom back home, they kind of hover over me, asking "Are you getting stuff done?"

For John, the distinction between the two types of advisors are very clear, with the more removed, more strict nature placed only on his academic advisor, stating that their job is mainly to just guide him on his path to getting his engineering degree. Noting the

personal connections that exist between the student athletes and their advisors is important because this indicates to the student that they care about their education. This is a trait that is helpful for student athletes, as it aids them in placing value on their academics as well as their sport (Benson 2000).

This explanation of the reasons why the participants chose their major and wide range of topics and experiences that have influenced them, at least for this sample, negates the argument of cooling out as a preliminary step before academic clustering occurs. The participants made the decision to find success in the majors they have chosen on their own, with no mention of receiving negative feedback from coaches, instructors, or advisors about their choices. The positive messages the participants received from their advisors, coaches, peers and instructors helped and motivated the participants in the area of their major choices and overall academic success and also did not seem to guide the student-athletes toward less rigorous majors.

Student vs. Athlete – Fulfilling the Student Athlete Role

Another major theme that my research tapped into was about the student athlete role and identity. The sub-themes of perception of higher standard and differential treatment based on their identities as student athletes emerged from the respondents' responses and are explained below:

Perception of Higher Standard.

It is clear that the respondents care about their academics, through their use of the athletic academic advisors, tutoring and/or study halls. Many of them reported using at least one of these sources to help them study, with one of the athletes (Timothy) even acting as a tutor for one of the more difficult classes in his major.

The athletes also mentioned being held to a “higher standard” both by themselves and by others. For example, Timothy talked about the high standard that he and fellow athletes on the team were held to, in the form of having to maintain a 3.0 GPA every semester. When asked if they thought there were any differences between themselves and non-student athletes in reference to the pursuit of a Bachelor’s degree, several of the student athletes talked about time management as a major component of the higher standard they are held to. One example of how this higher standard is viewed in Mark’s response:

I definitely think so, just because even though you have some students that are working, or are involved in other activities or groups within the school, but for the most part, I feel that your general student has a lot more free time than your student athlete does. As a student athlete you are expected, in a sense, to have your degree or to come out with a degree.

When probed further about this level of expectation he is referring to, he stated this:

Just generally, when you look at athletes, especially, like in high school, you get the sense of the word like a jock, or someone who is just athletic but they have no book smarts or they aren’t really academically inclined, whereas when you get to college, your coaches, advisors and everything really pride themselves on making sure that the team doesn’t look incompetent, and doesn’t look [like] they’re trying to only get the best athletes, they are also getting people who will contribute to society as well.

Mark’s comment about the stereotype of the jock, which is one that is specific to student athletes (Simons et al. 2007, Njororai 2012), is important because it shows how the pressure that being both a student and an athlete can affect an individual. His awareness of this stereotype and how this may influence how others see him and other student athletes acts as a driving force behind his pursuit of his degree and being a successful student.

When asked about his coaches and if they talk to him about his academics, Timothy mentioned the academic standard that his team is held to, and that his coach makes sure this standard is maintained:

The ... team has pretty high academic standards, I think our team GPA has been over 3.0 for a long time. We're held to a high standard, so [my coach] makes sure we're reaching that goal every semester.

John, the engineering major, made sure to mention that balance is an important part of being successful as a student athlete:

Well definitely as a student athlete you have to be able to balance your major. So while academically, what you want to do is very important and to a lot of people athletics is the only the way they got to college or the way they helped themselves stay in college, you still have to be able to find something that will allow you to be successful in both the academic realm and the athletic field because for a lot to people it is easy to say "Hey I'm going to practice and I'm going to do the work", it is a very demanding lifestyle of be an athlete and a student.

John's response makes it clear that being able to juggle both being a student and an athlete and maintenance of the higher standard are both essential to achieve academic success. It is also clear that John made the decision to major in engineering completely aware of the level of commitment necessary. The combination of John, Mark, and Timothy's perception of the higher standard they are held to as students and athletes and the fulfillment of the student athlete role is important in understanding the ways that they may have chosen their majors.

Differential Treatment based on Student-Athlete Status

When asked whether or not they felt like their instructors treated them differently based on their status as a student athlete, over half of the respondents stated that they were not treated differently, and they felt like they were treated the same as other students in their classes that are not student athletes. These same athletes that reported they were

not being treated differently referenced different reasons why they thought this was the case. For example, Mark responded:

No, because I usually don't even mention the fact that I am an athlete to teachers for that reason because I don't want them to treat me better or treat me worse because athletes get this image or stereotype that they are lazy, or that they're not intelligent. Or if they are in school, it's because of their sport or that they feel like they should get some sort of extra privilege or something like that. So most times I don't even mention the fact that I play a sport.

It is important to note that while Mark reported no, he mentions the stereotype of the student athlete and how that has even led him to conceal his role at the university as an athlete while he is in a classroom setting. Mark's response also relates to the concept of the higher/high standard that some of the athletes also mentioned they were being held to.

Andrew, the criminal justice major, had a similar response to Mark's:

As a student athlete I still face the everyday struggles of being a regular student but at the same time, I travel on the weekends to compete, I got to practice every day, and I gotta do stuff to make sure that I'm able to ... (stay eligible) to compete that they don't have to do. Like, I have to go to these things called Life Skills, I have to go to six of those a year, I gotta get community service hours, stuff like that. It's kinda like an extra time commitment that I have that they don't have. But I still have the same time commitments that they have.

Andrew's response lists all of the major differences between him and a non-athlete student, all of which contributes to the extra time commitment he references. Similar to my discussion about coaches and their concern about eligibility, Andrew's response also taps into the amount of academic pressure he is under as a student athlete to maintain eligibility and compete.

This concept of a higher standard or a general standard was also experienced when the student athletes interacted with their instructors. In his response, Gerald, an

African American engineering major, talks about how his identity as an athlete does not grant him any passes or benefits in the classroom:

No I don't think so, a lot of times, even in class, if anything they hold us to the same standard they hold everyone else to. Because not only do we still have to do the work, a lot of times, we are in a sense, more time constricted than the other students, so it's not like they would give us any breaks or anything just because we're athletes. They make sure that we are still on top of our work.

Not only does Gerald's response tap into the concept of a higher standard, his response is similar to the other respondents in the sample that referenced the issue of being time constricted as a student athlete.

DISCUSSION

Academic clustering occurs among 25% of sports teams, (Fountain and Finley, 2011) and is most likely to occur among African American student athletes, who are also majoring in subjects that are perceived as less demanding (ie. history, English, sociology). The cooling out function argues that low income, minority students that are doing poorly in their four year universities are reoriented and encouraged by their advisors to attend community colleges and pursue less rigorous degrees (Clark 1960, Cushing 2008). This study is an extension of the cooling out function, and noting the parallels between the type of student that is more likely to academically cluster and more likely to be cooled out provided a basis for the argument that student athletes, African Americans in particular, might be cooled out from one major to another.

This qualitative investigation of the cooling out function as a precursor to academic clustering is an attempt to investigate whether cooling out might influence academic clustering among student athletes. The decision to target non-revenue generating sports provided a focused look at this sub-section of the student athlete population that is neglected in the literature.

Understanding why student athletes choose their major and also the type of influence their coaches, peers, advisors, and instructors have on this decision can speak to cooling out and ultimately to academic clustering. Overall, all of the respondents noted that they did not receive negative messages from their coaches, advisors, peers or instructors, and made their choices in major on their own, with the influences listed used as varying levels of support. Although the respondents were not cooled out by these influences, they all referenced time management and being able to juggle sports and

academia as mitigating factors that shaped their academic success and set them apart from the rest of the student population.

While this investigation did not find support for cooling out, at least among these student athletes, several other important themes emerged instead. The reasons why the student athletes chose their major included personal connection to their major, personal connection with athletic academic advisors, social networks, and their perceptions of their advisors, coaches, peers and instructors. The theme of the student athlete role also emerged from the interviews, with perception of a higher standard and differential treatment as a student athlete as subthemes that emerged as well. Both of these themes spoke to the academic pressures that student athletes experience while they attempt to maintain both academic success and success in their sport.

Although the literature supported examining the student athletes by race (Benson 2008, Njororai 2012, Beamon 2014), there were no major differences between the black and white student athletes in the sample. Looking at the general statistics for this sample, 6 out of the 10 athletes were from the same sport, all with different majors. All of the participants that actually changed their major (3 out of the 10) cited their social network as a key influence. Of these 3, one of the respondents (Timothy) wanted to pursue his sport professionally. There were no patterns by sport, race or class standing for the sample. Also all of the respondents were aware and made use of the academic resources available to them on campus, with their major dictating how often they would use them.

The two groups shared similarities across answers to the questions asked and also across each of the themes that emerged. Both the African American and white student athletes received similar, positive messages from their advisors and instructors about their

academics. These messages and connections built between the participants and these influences were found to be helpful and a source of motivation for the respondents. On the other hand, while all of the respondents agreed that their coaches did not talk to them about their majors, there were mixed feelings about the level of support the respondents felt they received from their coaches regarding their academics overall.

There are several limitations of this study. One of these is related to the type of Division school that I have chosen for this project. The school chosen for this study is a Division I school, and it is possible that student athletes that attend schools that are either Division II or III may experience the same or drastically different factors and motivations for choosing a college major. Because Division II and III schools, (especially Division III) are seen as more focused on academics than sports, it is possible that student athletes at these schools may also receive varying levels of support and influences, which can have a different effect on motivations behind their major choices.

Another limitation of my study is the sampling method and sample size. Choosing a different sampling method, such as a survey may have allowed access to a larger sample size. Gaining access to a larger sample size may have also aided me in generating a wider variety of themes and concepts to further tap into the concept of cooling out.

Although the participants were not being cooled out, research shows that academic clustering is still a problem among student athletes, with minority student athletes more likely to cluster in less demanding majors. More research needs to be done to figure out why academic clustering occurs among student athletes, and also to see if this phenomenon occurs among student athletes in different divisions. Future research should include interviews with athletes from football and basketball teams and compare

the answers and see if the same or different concepts and themes emerged. Also, research centered on the academic relationship (or lack thereof) between student athletes and their coaches is necessary as well.

The significance of this study lies in the issue of academic clustering, and the possible gap in the return on their education that African American student athletes may experience while they are attending and once they graduate from college (Comeaux 2010, Njororai 2012) Understanding the relationship between the cooling out function, their motivations for going to college, and the factors that are influencing how African American student athletes make decisions regarding their major is useful in understanding why academic clustering in less demanding majors occurs.

A major policy implication that arose from this study included ways in which the pressure of the student athlete's time commitments and constraints can be lessened, with an emphasis on how to properly and effectively manage their time. These could be in the form of workshops that are directly tailored to student athletes and even more so to different sports, with coaches and athletic advisors providing extra attention to this area and reinforcing the necessity of this skill to student athlete's sport and academic success.

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APPENDIX A: TABLE OF RESPONDENTS

<u>Respondent Pseudonym</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Sport</u>
Timothy	White	Business Management	Golf
Michael	White	Exercise Science	Tennis
John	White	Engineering	Track and Field
William	White	Accounting	Baseball
Steven	White	Business	Baseball
Anthony	Black	Criminal Justice	Track and Field
Mark	Black	English	Track and Field
James	Black	Sociology	Track and Field
Gerald	Black	Engineering	Track and Field
Christopher	Black	Business	Track and Field