



2020

## Impact of a Student-Athlete Career Preparation Program on Athlete Alumni Affinity

Heather L. Hunter  
*University of the Pacific*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop\\_etds](https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop_etds)

 Part of the [Development Studies Commons](#), [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Education Economics Commons](#), and the [Outdoor Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hunter, Heather L.. (2020). *Impact of a Student-Athlete Career Preparation Program on Athlete Alumni Affinity*. University of the Pacific, Dissertation. [https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop\\_etds/3727](https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop_etds/3727)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of the Pacific Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [mgibney@pacific.edu](mailto:mgibney@pacific.edu).

IMPACT OF A STUDENT-ATHLETE CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAM ON ATHLETE  
ALUMNI AFFINITY

By

Heather Lucia Hunter

A Dissertation Submitted to the

Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Benerd College

Educational and Organizational Leadership

University of the Pacific  
Stockton, California

2020

IMPACT OF A STUDENT-ATHLETE CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAM ON ATHLETE  
ALUMNI AFFINITY

By

Heather Lucia Hunter

APPROVED BY:

Dissertation Co-Advisor: Robert Calvert, Ph.D.

Dissertation Co-Advisor: Rod Githens, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Peter Schroeder, Ed.D.

Senior Associate Dean of Benerd College: Linda Webster, Ph.D.

IMPACT OF A STUDENT-ATHLETE CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAM ON ATHLETE  
ALUMNI AFFINITY

Copyright 2020

By

Heather Lucia Hunter

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Bill and Kathleen Hunter. Thank you for your unconditional support and love, and for always being by my side. Dad, I miss you every day.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee Chair Dr. Robert Calvert for his patience and support during my dissertation journey. I appreciate him teaching me the quantitative research process. His flexibility after my father passed will never be forgotten. I thank Dr. Rod Githens for accepting me into Benerd College and supporting my University of the Pacific experience. I am appreciative of his efforts as a teacher and committee member, and we have come full circle. I also would like to thank Dr. Pete Schroeder for the support and feedback he provided for my dissertation. His college athletics expertise was invaluable. A special thanks to Dr. Delores McNair for her ongoing encouragement and support. To my cohort mates who are an amazing group of men and women who have supported each other throughout the doctoral program. Thank you for making my experience special. I am grateful to my leadership team at UC Davis, Kelly Ratliff and Lisa Frace, who provided me the gift of time to complete this journey. To my colleague, Sam Bishop-Green, thank you for picking up the slack when I had class and for supporting my stats experience. I also would like to thank Mike Lorenzen, Rob Norris, and Veronica Hogland for their support. Thank you to my family and friends who provided me their unwavering support and encouragement during my dissertation journey. Darin and Noreen Hunter, my brother and sister-in-law, thank you for your support and boarding me on school nights. To my parents, Bill and Kathleen Hunter, thank you for always encouraging me to pursue my dreams and education. I am thankful to be your daughter. Christian and Madison Hunter, my nephew and niece, I hope my love of education inspires you to be lifelong learners.

# IMPACT OF A STUDENT-ATHLETE CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAM ON ATHLETE ALUMNI AFFINITY

## Abstract

By Heather Lucia Hunter

University of the Pacific  
2020

Previous research has indicated the majority of athlete alumni do not give charitable donations to their alma mater or athletics department. With over 4 million former National Collegiate Athletic Association student-athletes, these athlete alumni should have an inherent affinity for their athletics department. The purpose of this research study was to examine the relationship between a student-athlete career preparation program (“Career Program”) and athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department. This study uses the theoretical framework of Social Exchange Theory to examine if an athlete alumni’s affinity for their athletics department increases when they receive support for their career launch. The quantitative quasi-experimental study had two groups of athlete alumni, career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni, who graduated from one large, public university at the Football Championship Subdivision level. The intervention of the Career Program was provided to one group of athlete alumni. An athlete alumni affinity questionnaire was developed and administered to both groups. The questionnaire received a low response rate with 71 respondents. The Pearson chi-squared test did not show a relationship between athlete alumni affinity and the Career Program. There was no statistical difference indicated between the two groups for the five latent variables of (a) career preparedness, (b) communication, (c) connection, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate experience. Two athlete alumni affinity

statements did show significance, and they were related to student-athletes developing a LinkedIn profile and professional resume.

*Keywords: alumni affinity, athlete alumni, alumni loyalty, student-athlete career preparation program, athletics department*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	11
List of Figures .....	12
List of Abbreviations .....	13
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	14
Identifying the Problem .....	16
Purpose of the Inquiry.....	17
Research Questions.....	17
Significance of the Study .....	17
Theoretical Framework.....	18
Student-Athlete Career Preparation Program .....	20
Delimitations.....	21
Definition of Terms.....	21
Summary .....	22
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	24
Overview.....	24
Higher Education Enrollment and Funding Trends .....	24
University Alumni Population .....	27
Athletic Supporter Donor Motivations .....	31
Athlete Alumni Donor Motivations .....	36
Student-Athlete University Ambassadors.....	38
Social Exchange Theory .....	40

	9
Athlete Alumni Affinity Themes .....	42
Summary .....	51
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	52
Introduction.....	52
Description of Methodology .....	52
Researcher Role .....	53
Research Site, Access, and Benefit.....	54
Target Population.....	54
Data Collection Method and Tools.....	56
Summary .....	63
Chapter 4: Research Findings .....	64
Introduction.....	64
Trustworthiness of the Data .....	64
Measurement.....	65
Descriptive Statistics.....	66
Demographics .....	67
Results.....	69
Summary .....	75
Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, Limitations and Conclusions.....	77
Introduction.....	77
Implications of Findings .....	77
Recommendations for Future Research .....	83
Limitations .....	84

	10
Conclusion .....	85
References .....	86
Appendices	
A. Questionnaire Instrument.....	99
B. Questionnaire Protocol.....	101
C. Pilot Study Notification .....	103
D. Pilot Study Reminder Email .....	104
E. Questionnaire Email.....	105
F. Questionnaire Email Follow-Up.....	106
G. Questionnaire Athletics Department Follow-Up Email.....	107
H. Questionnaire Thank You .....	108
I. Document Protocol .....	109
J. Electronic Consent Form .....	110

## LIST OF TABLES

## Table

1. Target Population.....	55
2. Descriptive Statistics – Survey Response.....	66
3. Descriptive Statistics – Athlete Alumni Demographics.....	68
4. Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Career Preparedness.....	71
5. Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Communication.....	72
6. Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Connection.....	73
7. Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Student-Athlete Experience.....	74
8. Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Undergraduate Experience.....	75

## LIST OF FIGURES

## Figure

1. Social exchange theory .....	19
2. Athlete alumni framework model .....	43
3. Five-phase questionnaire administration procedure for career program varsity athlete alumni .....	58
4. Eight-phase questionnaire administration procedure for non-career program varsity athlete alumni .....	59

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIS	Advancement Services
CDSE	Career Decision-Making Self-efficacy
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRM	Customer-Relationship System
FBS	Football Bowl Subdivision
FCS	Football Championship Subdivision
FSADCS	Former Student-Athlete Donor Constraint Scale
GDP	Growth Domestic Product
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
RQSL	Relationship Quality-Based Student Loyalty
SACSI	Student-Athlete Career Situation Inventory
SADOM	Scale Model of Athletic Donor Motivation
SET	Social Exchange Theory
U.S.	United States

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Within the Division I level, there are colleges who participate in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), and non-football programs (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2019b). At the FBS Subdivision level, the five biggest conferences average a loss of \$2.3 million and all other FBS schools average \$17.6 million (Burnsed, 2014), whereas the FCS schools average a \$12.5 million loss annually (Fulks, 2017). In 2017, the IRS also removed the tax deduction for priority athletic seating, which eliminates an important donation revenue stream for athletic departments (Council for Aid to Education [CAE], 2018). The recent coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has compounded these budget deficits resulting in many intercollegiate athletic departments cutting sports and staffing (Smith, 2020). Stanford University dropped 11 varsity sports based on a projection of the department deficit exceeding \$12 million in the 2021 fiscal year (Tessier-Lavigne et al., 2020). Athletic department expenses are continuing to outpace revenue, and deficits are growing (Weiner, 2009).

Since intercollegiate athletic departments count on donations for more than 25% of their total budget, universities are looking to diversify revenue streams to strengthen their funding model (Hearn, 2003; Moran, 2019; Wolverton & Kambhampati, 2016). Hearn (2003) has asserted that a major challenge for university leadership is to stay competitive while overcoming ominous resource constraints. University leaders can also choose to explore new revenue streams to close the expense and revenue gap. One approach athletic department leaders can pursue to increase revenue is to cultivate new donors (Burnsed, 2014).

The university alumni community is a large and diverse potential donor population that has an existing connection to the university (Gallo, 2013). Stinson and Howard (2004) indicated that alumni charitable donations are influenced by their academic or athletic relationship to the university. A student's positive experience is a gauge for future support as a university alumnus (McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Pumerantz, 2005). Studies have also indicated as alumni affinity increased for the university, so did charitable giving (Gallo, 2012; Stephenson & Bell, 2014). Charitable donations to athletic departments are motivated by alumni's strong support and affiliation for the university (Gladden et al., 2005).

With the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athlete alumni population totaling over 4 million, it is surprising that former student-athletes donate charitable gifts in small numbers to their university and athletics department (NCAA, 2019a; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010). By playing their sport, it is reasonable to conclude that athlete alumni should have an inherent affinity for their athletics department and alma mater (Meer & Rosen, 2009; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010). As student-athletes, these athlete alumni were considered university ambassadors competing with the university name on their chest and representing the university to the broader college community. Ohio State described student athletes as "some of the University's most visible ambassadors" (Ohio State University, 2019, p. 66), and Boston University says student-athletes are "among the most visible students on campus and in the wider community" (Boston University, 2020, p. 1).

Although student-athletes are viewed as university ambassadors, former student-athletes have not developed a stronger affinity for their athletics department. This lack of strong connection may be due to athlete alumni feeling they have already given back by playing their sport, a terrible athletic or undergraduate experience, or not being prepared for life after

graduation (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). A terrible athletic experience can be the result of a negative relationship or bad experience with coaches and teammates. It can also be due to a lack of playing time or not feeling they were supported by their coaches or athletic department (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010).

Research studies have shown that a student-athlete's undergraduate experience influences their perceptions of their alma mater (Meer & Rosen, 2009; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Rankin et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2010). Their satisfaction with academic support services directly impacts a student-athlete's career decision-making self-efficacy (Burns et al., 2013). A student-athlete's ability to reach out to academic support services is impacted by the time constraints of their practice, competition, travel, and full academic load. These factors are also potential barriers that prevent a student-athlete's preparation for their transition from the playing field to a career path (Brown et al., 2000; Jolly, 2008; Sandstedt et al., 2004).

Previous studies have indicated a relationship between alumni affinity and charitable donations to universities (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Gallo, 2012; Iskhakova et al., 2017). It is important to understand why athlete alumni have not developed a stronger affinity for their athletics department (McAlexander et al., 2016; Meer, 2013). This research study examined the relationship between athlete alumni affinity and a student-athlete career preparation program ("Career Program").

### **Identifying the Problem**

Sports revenues often fall short of meeting the operating costs of athletic departments. The majority of athletic programs have to rely on student fees, state funding, and reallocation of university resources to continue to survive. The reliance on institutional resources to underwrite athletic programs is concerning with the continued decrease in both state and university funding

(Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). In 2014, a NCAA report also found that expenses exceeded revenue at all but 20 schools in the FBS.

As college athletics expenses continue to rise, there is an increasing need to secure charitable donations from new donors to help fund athletic departments. Although there are over 4 million former NCAA student-athletes, they have historically given at a lower percentage than the general alumni population (NCAA, 2019a; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). Shapiro et al. (2010), affirmed only 5% of student-athlete alumni gave a donation to the institution in their study. There is a myth that former student-athletes, who had the opportunity of representing their school in competition, are more likely to be active alumni ambassadors and give back to their university (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). With the athlete alumni population size and natural affinity for the athletics program, athletic departments should focus on this specialized group (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007).

### **Purpose of the Inquiry**

The purpose of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to examine the relationship between a Career Program and athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study are:

- RQ1: In what ways, if any, does athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department relate to the Career Program?
- RQ2: In what ways, if any, do career program varsity athlete alumni differ from non-career program varsity athlete alumni in their athletics department affinity?

### **Significance of the Study**

This research study is significant because it focuses on the literature gap of athlete alumni affinity for their athletics department and a Career Program, which is a new phenomenon emerging in Division I athletics. The study examined the relationship between athlete alumni

affinity and a structured Career Program. This research contributed to the literature by studying the significance of an athletic department providing undergraduate career preparation support to assist student-athletes with their career launch.

The study may impact college athletics leaders and development staff and can have a wider impact on alumni relations, advancement, and university leadership. Charitable donations are critical to the sustainability of both athletic departments and universities. The Career Program may be the answer to keeping athlete alumni engaged post-graduation and increasing their affinity for the athletics department. Thus, the findings from this study have the potential to be applied to the broader university environment for alumni engagement and charitable donations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social exchange theory (SET) is a well-known theoretical framework in both sociology and psychology. The theory asserts that people think a relationship is based on the exchange of costs and rewards. People desire to maximize their rewards while minimizing their costs (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The more value an individual receives, the more value they must return (Homans, 1958). The theory also proposes that a person will leave a relationship when the costs outweigh the benefits; however, an individual will commit to a relationship when something is gained in value (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

SET provides a useful perspective for analyzing the relationship between athlete alumni and intercollegiate athletic departments. Student-athletes and athletic departments exchange services during the athlete's undergraduate playing years. The services may include academic support, financial support, practice equipment, medical care, and strength and conditioning. The athlete alumni cost-benefit analysis of this exchange has an effect on their affinity for the

athletics department. Perhaps athlete alumni do not donate back in higher numbers to their athletics departments because of a terrible athletic experience or the feeling of isolation from the general student population (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). Shapiro et al. (2010) indicated that a poor student-athlete experience is an uncontrollable donor constraint. Athlete alumni also have the perception of already donating back to their university by playing their sport (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010). They believe they have already donated through their time and talent and required community service (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). By investigating the Career Program through the lens of the SET, the researcher examined if a relationship exists between a student-athlete's successful career launch and athlete alumni affinity. This research study examined whether if an athlete alumni benefits from a successful career launch they will exchange this value by having a stronger affinity for their athletics department. The theoretical framework is discussed in more depth in Chapter 2 literature review.

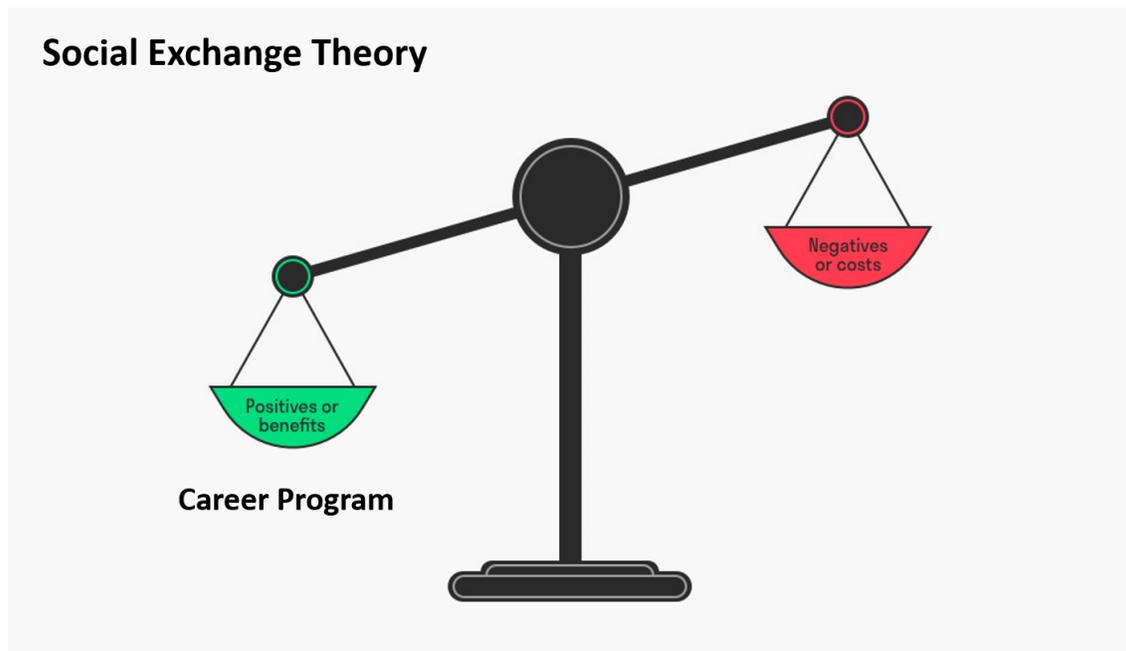


Figure 1. Social exchange theory. Adapted from toolshero.com.

## **Student-Athlete Career Preparation Program**

The Career Program is a 4-year highly structured and mandatory student-athlete undergraduate program built into a student-athlete's countable athletic related activities<sup>1</sup>. It is led by athletic department support staff in close coordination with team coaches. The program focuses on preparing student-athletes for a successful professional launch after graduation. The curriculum addresses the national problem of student-athletes being unprepared for life after graduation due to their academic and athletic demands (Stout, 2018).

The design of the Career Program is structured to put student-athletes on a successful path to financial and social prosperity, replacing sport as their primary identity. The program has four key elements for success: (a) developing skills of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, leadership, and cultural and social competence; (b) acquiring knowledge of what career paths exist; (c) providing opportunities for internships, jobs, and educational interactions with alumni; and (d) developing tools needed to secure these opportunities such as LinkedIn profiles, interviewing skills, professional headshots, resumes, and cover letters. Each student-athlete is provided a Career Program checklist with curriculum deliverables for their freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years. The Career Program partners with the campus career center where student-athletes have exclusive career fairs and a two-unit course on careers and identity.

The Career Program is also a platform to garner deeper university and athlete alumni engagement with the athletics department. Alumni can become pro members and donate their time, talent, and treasure. They can engage with student-athletes by volunteering to participate in career coffee talks, core clinics, podcasts, networking events, and career fairs. Alumni can lead corporate office field trips, offer experiential learning opportunities, and provide mentorship

---

<sup>1</sup> Countable athletic-related activities in season for student-athletes is no more than 20 hours per week with a maximum of 4 hours per day. Out of season for student-athletes is no more than 8 hours per week (NCAA, 2015).

or internships that accommodate a student-athletes practice and competition schedule. The Career Program stays connected with alumni pro members through dedicated emails, newsletters, websites, and social media posts.

### **Delimitations**

This research study involved a sampling frame of athlete alumni from one large, public institution at the FCS level. The specific university was chosen because the athletics department has a career preparation program for student-athletes and for its convenience. The Career Program is a 4-year structured program with the intention of successfully launching student-athletes into their career post-graduation. Due to the career preparation program being launched in 2017-2018, the study includes two classes of athlete alumni who participated in the program and two classes who did not participate in the career preparation program.

The Growth Domestic Product (GDP) of the U.S. is the measurement for choosing the graduation years for non-career program athletes. The GDP growth rate from 2018 and 2019 is used to find similar non-career program athlete graduating classes. The GDP growth rate is not exact and is the only economic measurement indicator. The research design is discussed in depth in Chapter 3: Methodology.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Alma Mater:* An alma mater is the college or university that a former student or student-athlete attended (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007).

*Athlete alumni:* A former student-athlete who has participated in an organized competitive sport sponsored by their educational institution (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007).

*Athletics department or intercollegiate athletics department:* A department or unit within the university that oversees and manages the intercollegiate sports teams including student-athletes, coaches, and support staff.

*Charitable donations:* The amount of financial support an individual provides to an organization or university (Baade & Sundberg, 1996).

*Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS)*: The highest level of college football, which was previously branded Division I-A (NCAA, 2019b).

*Football Championship Subdivision (FCS)*: Previously branded Division I-AA and is the secondary level of college football (NCAA, 2019b).

*Growth Domestic Product (GDP)*: A “comprehensive measure of U.S. economic activity. GDP is the value of the goods and services produced in the U.S. The growth rate of GDP is the most popular indicator of the nation’s overall economic health” (Bureau of Economic Analysis, n.d., para. 2).

*National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)*: An organization and governing body led by member institutions, universities, or colleges. The NCAA is committed to the welfare and lifetime success of college athletes (NCAA, 2019b).

*Public institution or university*: A university backed by public funds and overseen by the state government (Burrows, 2018).

*Student-athlete*: A participant in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the educational institution in which he or she is enrolled. Student-athletes are full-time students as well as full-time athletes (Rankin et al., 2016).

*Student-Athlete Career Preparation Program or Career Program*: An athletic department’s investment in preparing student-athletes for a successful career launch after graduation.

## Summary

Intercollegiate athletic department budget deficits are continuing to grow in the millions of dollars across the NCAA. With athletic departments increasingly relying on charitable donations for operational expenses, it is important for them to continue to cultivate new donors. Although there are over 4 million former NCAA student-athletes, athletic development officers have only been mildly successful cultivating charitable donations from this large and specialized donor group (O’Neil & Schenke, 2007). This is surprising considering that student-athletes are ambassadors representing the university. With studies indicating a relationship between affinity and charitable donations, there is minimal research in the area of athlete alumni affinity (Gallo, 2012; McAlexander et al., 2016; Meer, 2013; Stephenson & Bell, 2014). The purpose of this

study was to examine the relationship between a Career Program and athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department.

This study sought to add to the literature on athlete alumni affinity by focusing on athlete alumni and the significance of an athletic department providing support for a student-athlete's successful career launch. The research data are important to college athletic leaders and university administrators who are looking to increase their engagement and charitable donations from athlete alumni. This study applied SET with the intention to measure athlete alumni affinity and the relationship with the athletics department's support of the student-athletes' career launch.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

In this chapter, the review of literature analyzes the state of higher education, athletic and alumni donor motivations, alumni affinity, student-athlete university ambassadors, factors affecting athlete alumni affinity, and an examination of the study's theoretical framework. The first section provides a background of the state of higher education enrollment and funding trends. The second section discusses the university alumni population and examines alumni affinity and alumni loyalty due to the lack of research on athlete alumni affinity. The next section focuses on athletic supporter and university alumni athletic supporter donor motivations. The fourth section reviews a body of research on athlete alumni athletic donor motivations. The fifth section discusses the role of student-athletes as university ambassadors. The sixth section provides a background on the study's theoretical framework, SET. The final section focuses on the athlete alumni affinity themes including career preparedness, communication, connection, student-athlete experience, and undergraduate experience.

### Higher Education Enrollment and Funding Trends

Higher education is facing a looming student enrollment and funding crisis. According to Shaffer et al. (2018), Moody's<sup>2</sup> has public ratings for 226 4-year public institutions and 256 private institutions. Moody's 2019 annual outlook projects that the higher education sector credit conditions for the next 12-18 months is negative. The negative rating drivers are: (a) weak net tuition growth, (b) expenses outpace revenue growth due to rising labor costs, and (c) public institutions will have more difficulty than private institutions. With the decline in tuition

---

<sup>2</sup> Moody's Investors Services is the leading source of research, credit ratings and risk analysis (Moody's, n.d.).

revenue, the net operating revenue growth is projected to be only 3% to 4%. This revenue growth does not keep up with the rate of inflation (Shaffer et al., 2018).

The traditional business model of higher education institutions is also being threatened by market forces. Thirty-six states will experience slower growth or decline in high school graduates between 2016 and 2031 (Tannous, 2017). This will result in a decrease in the number of eligible college attendees and an increase in competition among universities for new students. In the fall 2017, 45% of U.S. universities have reported a 7% average decline in new international student enrollment. Tannous (2017) also reported that 69% of families have eliminated universities from their students' selection due to price sensitivity. The decline in both incoming freshmen and international students will have a negative impact on the operating revenue at the majority of universities. In addition, graduate certificates were awarded seven times more often than master's degrees from 2014 to 2015. The graduate certificates are a short program of study rather than a 2-year, full-time student commitment so university tuition revenue is negatively affected. Institutions are facing a challenging environment with the decline of tuition revenue and state funding combined with high fixed costs (Tannous, 2017).

The American Council of Education (ACE) and TIAA Institute Report (Zemsky & Rogers, 2019) discussed that not-for-profit colleges and universities are not businesses, and they are subject to consolidating markets. The large and rich universities will continue to grow because their prestige and rankings are important benchmarks in higher education. They will be able to adapt to the changing market where future growth is based on volume and not price; however, the universities that are losing in this competitive environment have declining first-year classes, difficulty with student retention, and risky pricing strategies with high discount rates. A discounted price with fewer students equates to less revenue for the university. These struggling

universities are also subject to declining state appropriations and are unable to have budget reductions that generate adequate savings (Zemsky & Rogers, 2019). This is exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and the continued decline of individual donors.

### **COVID-19 Impact**

Many universities across the U.S. have shifted to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020), undergraduate enrollment has declined by 2.5% for fall 2020. Undergraduate international student enrollment is down by 11%. This drop in student enrollment is resulting in millions of dollars of losses in tuition and auxiliary revenues for universities. The California State University 23-campus system expects coronavirus-related losses to be more than \$300 million (Burke, 2020). The University of Wisconsin system expects to lose \$212 million due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kremer, 2020).

The COVID-19 university budget losses are also impacting university athletic departments. According to Tessier-Lavigne et al. (2020), Stanford University projects their deficit to exceed \$12 million in the 2021 fiscal year. Based on these projections, Stanford dropped 11 varsity sports and cut 20 support staff. In addition, University of Wisconsin Athletics is projecting a revenue loss of at least \$60 million and it may exceed over \$100 million without a football season (Milewski, 2020). According to Svoboda (2020), the University of Michigan Athletic Department expects their fiscal year 2021 budget shortfall to be \$26 million after having a \$1 million surplus in fiscal year 2020.

### **Decline in Individual Donors**

According to EAB (2019), donor loyalty is declining and it is more difficult to retain donors. The overall donor retention is down from 63% in 2008 to 60% in 2017, and new donor

retention is down from 27% in 2008 to 24% in 2017. Between 2008 and 2017, there has been a 15% decline in new donors resulting in a shrinking donor pipeline. Giving USA (2019) has also reported a decrease in the number of donors while larger donations have increased. Individual giving has decreased from 70% in 2017 to 68% in 2018; however, the overall higher education donations totaled \$46.73 billion in 2018, increasing 7.2% from 2017 (Hazelrigg, 2019).

One reason for the drop in individual donors may be the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. The tax reform increased the standard deduction, which has many middle-class families opting not to itemize their deductions (Hazelrigg, 2019). While higher income individuals are more likely to itemize deductions, which may be related to the increase in large gifts to higher education institutions (Tax Policy Center, n.d.). Overall, the total number of taxpayers who itemized their deductions fell from 46 million to 19 million. This is a good indicator that many people did not realize the tax benefit from their charitable contributions (Dickler, 2019). With the drop in individual donors, university alumni, including athlete alumni, are a donor group that universities need to more effectively cultivate. The subsequent section examines university alumni, alumni affinity, and alumni loyalty.

### **University Alumni Population**

A university's large alumni population is targeted for both academic and athletic donations by university advancement officers. Between 2008 and 2017, there has been a 52% growth in higher education alumni (EAB, 2019); however, between 2009 and 2018, overall alumni giving has stayed steady with donations ranging from 24% to 26% (Hazelrigg, 2019). Although universities are relying more heavily on donors to fill the tuition revenue decline, advancement officers are not capitalizing on the growing alumni prospect pool.

The alumni population is a key donor segment for an athletic department to cultivate for charitable donations. It is important to examine alumni affinity's role in charitable donations. The literature on athlete alumni affinity is sparse and has not been well-studied. To understand athlete alumni affinity, general alumni affinity and alumni loyalty are examined.

### **Alumni Affinity**

The literature on alumni affinity has been explored through alumni and student engagement as well as donor motivations. Gallo (2013) discussed the alumni relationship building cycle of affiliation, affinity, engagement, and support. The affiliation stage includes senior students and recent graduates, and their alumni activity is proactive due to their recently completed college degree and their need to seek employment. In the affinity stage, the alumni graduates are reactive or inactive with limited alumni involvement with their university. Whereas, the engagement stage includes alumni who have celebrated university anniversary milestones or are involved for self-serving reasons. The engaged alumni activity level is active and their university involvement is for their own benefit. In the support stage, the alumni are established and have the means to give back to their university. Their alumni activity level is interactive and highly altruistic (Gallo, 2012).

Gallo (2012) indicated a narrow definition of affinity in these adapted stages, where the alumni activity is reactive or inactive. An alumnus in the affinity stage will possess nostalgia from their positive undergraduate student experience. Gallo (2012) asserted the importance for the university to build on the alumni's affinity to create informal university ambassadors.

Berquam's (2013) dissertation examined institutional experiences and student attributes that may contribute to university affinity. University affinity is defined as "one's sense of loyalty to the institution" (p. 32). Four factors are indicated to significantly contribute to

university affinity: (a) student service opportunities, (b) student services staff, (c) student impressions of the university, and (d) extracurricular involvement. The sense of belonging to the university helps with the development of university affinity (Berquam, 2013). Research studies have also asserted a relationship between alumni affinity and the alumnus intention to give a charitable donation to their alma mater (McAlexander et al., 2016; Meer, 2013). In McAlexander et al. (2016), the researchers examined university alumni and their affinity toward the institution and their giving intention. Older alumni 65 years and older have a significantly higher overall alumni affinity score, and they are more willing to make a gift to their university. In addition, there is a correlation found between an individual's affinity and their college roommate. If common experiences between roommates create a high affinity, there may be a correlation with an alumnus giving a donation (Meer, 2013).

### **Alumni Loyalty**

Developing alumni loyalty is a key goal for a majority of universities in the U.S. (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Iskhakova et al., 2017). It is widely accepted that alumni loyalty is an important factor in predicting alumni donations (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Iskhakova et al., 2017). Iskhakova et al. (2016) indicated that alumni give back to their institution through currency (e.g., donations and investments) and service (e.g., volunteering and mentoring).

Ridley and Boone (2001) developed an alumni loyalty survey. A loyal alumnus is described with the following characteristics: (a) recognizes and values their liberal education, (b) views their education as excellent quality and an outstanding investment, (c) is satisfied with student experience, (d) has minimal complaints or unmet needs, (e) is thankful for student/alumni services and faculty and staff efforts, (f) is thankful for alumni benefits and uses

them, (g) believes in the high value of their degree, (h) maintains good connections with the university based on time and distance, and (i) supports the university in suitable ways. Since the survey was only administered to 66 alumni, correlations were made between the variables. The results indicated that alumni have a problem sustaining loyalty the farther away they live from their university. A university's efforts to keep alumni up-to-date about current initiatives and news promotes their support and interest. Alumni loyalty also varies with each person, and continuous student outreach with a customer service emphasis is important (Ridley & Boone, 2001).

In addition, research studies have examined the importance of relationship quality in higher education for developing alumni loyalty (Henning-Thurau et al., 2001; Snijders et al., 2019). Henning-Thurau et al. (2001) developed a relationship quality-based student loyalty (RQSL) model. The model proposes that relationship quality helps determine student loyalty for their institution. The results have indicated teaching quality and emotional commitment by the student are important in determining student loyalty. There is also a relationship between a student's perceptions of their education quality and student loyalty (Henning-Thurau et al., 2001)

Furthermore, Snijders et al. (2019) explored non-monetary alumni behavior drivers and the perceptions of the relationship quality with the university. The findings indicated alumni's relationship quality satisfaction with the university is connected with alumni loyalty. Alumni loyalty is positively associated with a student's connection with faculty and staff and the degree to which students believe faculty and staff are concerned for their well-being (Snijders et al., 2019).

Although alumni affinity and alumni loyalty are predictors of alumni making charitable donations to their university, athletic departments must rely on support outside their alumni

population. An essential donor group for the intercollegiate athletic department are athletic supporters who can be both alumni and non-alumni of the university. The next section examines the donor motivations of athletic supporters and university alumni athletic supporters.

### **Athletic Supporter Donor Motivations**

Athletic supporters are an important donor subgroup to intercollegiate athletic departments. These supporters have an emotional connection to the university, and fundraisers leverage this connection for potential major gifts (Stinson & Howard, 2010; Tsiotsou, 1998). An important motivational factor for athletic donations are the tangible benefits donors receive back from athletic departments (Chanmin et al., 2016; Gladden et al., 2005; Ko et al., 2014; Mahony et al., 2003; Stinson & Howard, 2010; Tsiotsou, 2007). These benefits can range from the right to purchase season ticket locations, parking, giving club membership benefits, and VIP experiences. Multiple studies have found a donor's access to priority seating is a key tangible benefit for motivating philanthropic giving (Mahony et al., 2003; Tsiotsou, 2006). The importance of priority seating for men's basketball or football depends upon the university (Mahony et al., 2003). With the 2017 Tax Cut and Jobs Act, athletic departments have had to change the priority seating incentive to a hospitality access incentive.

Athletic department development officers should also be aware that there is a negative correlation with required donations for access to tickets (Gladden et al., 2005). Stinson and Howard (2010) have acknowledged that transactional gifts such as requiring a donation for a right to purchase tickets often does not lead to donors growing their support of the university. For an athletic donor to move from transactional gifts to increased philanthropic giving, an athletic development officer needs to effectively cultivate the donor.

Wells et al. (2005) acknowledged that a development officer's number of years of experience and season ticket sales have a positive effect on annual fundraising. This correlation supports tangible benefits being a motivator for athletic supporters to give a donation (Gladden et al., 2005). In addition, it reinforces that service quality has a positive correlation with donor satisfaction (Shapiro, 2010). Coughlin and Erikson (1985) showed that attendance has a positive influence on donors giving gifts to the athletics department. These gifts are positively correlated with athletic development officers focusing their cultivation efforts on season ticketholders.

Another important motivational factor for athletic supporters giving a donation to the athletic departments is athletic success of key revenue sports (Coughlin & Erikson, 1985; Mahony et al., 2003). Coughlin and Erikson (1985) found that football success increases donations to intercollegiate athletic departments. A university's football team participating in a bowl game can also increase athletic donations; however, football winning percentage is not a motivational factor that increases annual athletic donations (Wells et al., 2005).

The success of non-revenue sports does not impact donations to an intercollegiate athletics department (Mahony et al., 2003). In most departments, non-revenue teams are not priority fundraising sports and have less resourcing support. This lack of donation correlated with their success may be related to athletic development officers spending the majority of their time cultivating donors from revenue sports (Mahony et al., 2003).

Other motivational factors related to athletic supporter donations are entertainment, commitment, and affiliation. Athletic donors are motivated by entertainment and enjoyment of college athletic events (Gladden et al., 2005; Tsotsou, 1998); however, this donor motivation can have the opposite effect when a professional sports team is in the marketplace. The

professional team competes for the athletic donors' attention, so it negatively affects gift contribution level to the athletics department (Coughlin & Ereksen, 1985).

Another donor motivation is commitment to provide support for the student-athletes and intercollegiate athletics department (Gladden et al., 2005). Several studies have found that school commitment and strong affiliation with the university are athletic donor motivational factors (Gladden et al., 2005; Mahony et al., 2003; Tsiotsou, 2007). Mahony et al. (2003) have acknowledged that school traditions are an important motivational factor and it reinforces the connection back to the university and intercollegiate athletics department. Tsiotsou (1998) asserted that involvement with the athletics department is a significant motivational factor for donations to athletic programs. Donors are more likely to provide support if they have trust in the university's leadership and believe in the athletic department's vision (Tsiotsou, 2007). Athletic supporter donor motivations and gender differences are further explored in the next section.

### **Gender Differences**

Differences exist between female and male athletic donor motivations and giving rates (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2006). Tsiotsou (2006) acknowledged that male athletic donors have given more money than female athletic donors to intercollegiate athletics. The female athletic donor annual gifts are 3.5 times less than that of a male athletic donor. In addition, the yearly salary of a female athletic donor is less than that of their male counterpart (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011).

In the Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) research study, they examined three Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) universities. The study found that the male athletic donor giving length was 11.4 years with an annual donation of \$1,360.57. Comparatively, the female

athletic donor average giving length was 9.5 years with an annual donation of \$728.76. Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) affirmed that female athletic donors give less money for fewer years than their male counterparts.

Other athletic donor motivation gender differences are that male donors have more sport experience and attend more games than female donors (Tsiotsou, 2006). Male athletic donors also view priority seating and professional contacts as motivations for giving (Tsiotsou, 2006), whereas female athletic donor emotional involvement with the athletics department is stronger than that of a male athletic donor (Shapiro & Ridinger, 2011). In Mahony et al.'s (2003) study, they found that business connections are not a motivational factor for donations. Tsiotsou (2006) also acknowledged the athletic donor motivators of tax deduction, personal contacts, and sports involvement showed no difference between males and females.

Since female athletic donors have different motivations for giving, they should be cultivated and marketed to differently than their male counterparts (Tsiotsou, 2006). Shapiro and Ridinger (2011) suggested female athletic donor engagement should include both intellectual and emotional involvement. The researchers also recommended that athletic development officers engage female athletic donors with volunteer opportunities and special meet and greets prior to asking for a gift.

### **University Alumni Athletic Supporter Donor Motivations**

The university's alumni population has different motivational factors for giving. Stinson and Howard (2004) studied the University of Oregon athletic donors and acknowledged that alumni giving is driven by their academic or athletic relationship to the university. The researchers showed that as the athletic program success increases, alumni increase their giving to the athletics department. While Stinson and Howard's (2004) study indicates a positive

correlation with alumni giving and athletic success, it should be noted that the study only focused on one Division I-A university.

Other studies have found that athletic success does not correlate to increased alumni giving to intercollegiate athletics (Baade & Sundberg, 1996; Gaski & Etzel, 1984; Meer & Rosen, 2009). Meer and Rosen (2009) examined a single university and acknowledged that football and men's basketball team success has a slight or statistically insignificant effect on alumni giving. This giving is also negatively affected by the success of the men's basketball team.

Baade and Sundberg (1996) asserted that football bowl game appearances have positively affected alumni giving at both private and public universities. At public research universities, higher alumni gifts have resulted from NCAA basketball tournament appearances. Additionally, a winning basketball record has a positive impact on alumni giving while a higher winning percentage has small effect on increased alumni giving (Baade & Sundberg, 1996). Walker (2015) indicated that Division I athletic success resulted in an increase in overall charitable donations to the university.

Shapiro (2010) examined intercollegiate athletic departments' service quality and how donors perceive the quality of service. There is a positive correlation with athletic alumni donor satisfaction when they receive good service quality; however, a direct relationship between service quality, number of donor years, and gifts back to the college is not significant (Shapiro, 2010). Ko et al. (2014) identified a way to measure variables of athletic donor motivations with the Scale Model of Athletic Donor Motivation (SADOM). SADOM is a tool that can help development officers identify additional motivational factors to develop recruitment and donor retention strategies.

While the university's alumni population is an important donor group for intercollegiate athletics departments, their former student-athletes have an emotional connection to the department's success. Athlete alumni are an important donor segment for an intercollegiate athletics department to cultivate for charitable donations. Their donor motivations are examined next, including a shallow exploration of athlete alumni affinity through the lens of these donor motivations.

### **Athlete Alumni Donor Motivations**

Nearly half a million student-athletes compete every year in college athletics, graduating at a higher rate than the general student body (Hosick, 2019; NCAA, 2019b, 2020b). By competing in their sport, athlete alumni have an existing connection to their athletics department (Meer & Rosen, 2009; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010); however, this alumni donor base has historically been under-cultivated. With the athlete alumni population size and inherent affinity for the athletics program, athletic development officers should focus on this specialized donor group (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007).

When examining athlete alumni motivations for giving, it is important to recognize a student-athlete's undergraduate experience as it influences their perceptions of their alma mater (Meer & Rosen, 2009; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Rankin et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2010). Shapiro et al. (2010) identified a way to measure former student-athlete donor constraints by measuring multiple variables with the Former Student-Athlete Donor Constraint Scale (FSADCS). The FSADCS classified the student-athlete experience as an uncontrollable donor constraint. O'Neil and Schenke (2007) found that a terrible athletic experience can negatively impact the amount athlete alumni donate back to their university. Additionally, the perceptions of feeling isolated from the general student population and lack of identification with their school

has a negative impact on athlete alumni giving back (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). Further, the athlete alumni's perception of campus climate can have an impact on both their academic and athletic donations (Rankin et al., 2016).

Other factors affecting athlete alumni donations back to their intercollegiate athletics department are age, income, and perception of donating. Young athlete alumni have donated less money than their older counterparts (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). Athlete alumni with higher household income have donated more than those with less household income (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). In addition, athlete alumni perceptions of already donating back by playing their sport is an uncontrollable donor constraint and has a negative impact on donation amount (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010). Further exploration of athlete alumni donor motivations and gender differences are examined below.

### **Gender Differences**

During their undergraduate career, male and female student-athletes identify differently with their university. Male athletes have a greater sense of athletic identity, whereas female athletes have a higher level of academic success (Rankin et al., 2016). These gender differences continue into the donor continuum where male athlete alumni give more donations to their alma mater than their female counterparts (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). Additionally, football players are the largest donors to their athletic departments with volleyball players giving the least amount of money (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007).

Male and female athlete alumni have different motivations for giving back to their intercollegiate athletics department. Male athlete alumni gave increases if their college team won a championship and they had a successful playing career (Meer & Rosen, 2009). Female athlete alumni giving is not impacted by their team's success. For both male and female athlete

alumni, the success of the football and men's basketball team has no effect on their giving (Meer & Rosen, 2009). To have a deeper understanding of athlete alumni donor motivations, it is important to acknowledge student-athletes' role as university ambassadors, particularly visibility in the campus community.

### **Student-Athlete University Ambassadors**

The concept of a student-athlete being a university ambassador is inferred because student-athletes compete with the university brand on their uniform and represent the institution to the broader community. It is surprising there is little research on this concept, except for student-athletes being compensated for the use of their names, likeness, and images by corporate brands (NCAA, 2020a). This review focuses on student-athlete handbooks and policies that highlight student-athletes' visible role in the university community.

The University of Oklahoma student-athlete handbook (2018) indicates that student-athletes make important contributions to the institution serving as a role model to other students and ambassador to people across the U.S. representing the university. The student-athlete should not cause harm or discredit to the university reputation. It further states that as a student-athlete "you are expected to conduct yourself in such a manner that would uphold or enhance the traditions and ethical standards of the University, the athletics program and your team" (University of Oklahoma, 2018, p. 80).

The *Ohio State Student-Athlete Handbook* (Ohio State University, 2019) mentions the values of the athletic department include community and states "will enhance the lives of those in our university, city and state communities by helping and paying forward to others" (p. 3). The athletics department student-athlete conduct policy indicates that a student-athlete is always representing the university and the athletics department.

As some of the University's most visible ambassadors, student-athletes at Ohio State are expected to uphold, at all times, high standards of integrity and behavior which will reflect positively upon themselves, their families, coaches, teammates, the Department of Athletics and The Ohio State University. (The Ohio State University, 2019, p. 66)

At Stanford University, the student-athlete handbook discusses the principles that support the athletic department's mission of Inspire Champions in Life. The student-athlete is a high-integrity role model that embraces the importance of being a great citizen of Stanford and acting with integrity (Stanford University, 2020). The athletic department rules state:

Student-athletes will conduct themselves in such a manner as to represent their team, the Athletic Department and the University with integrity and pride whether in competition, in the classroom or in the community, and both while on campus and while away. (Stanford University, 2020, p. 6)

The handbook further states that student-athletes have high visibility in the community and an increased responsibility for their actions as they reflect upon their team, athletic department, and university.

Also several universities place their student-athlete code of conduct on their athletics department website. The student-athlete code of conduct at Ohio Athletics (2020) indicates that student-athletes are the university's most visible ambassadors and must demonstrate high standards of integrity and behavior. The student-athlete rights and responsibilities at Cornell University also says that as a student-athlete:

You are more visible than the rest of the student population . . . pledge to demonstrate good citizenship, sportsmanship, honesty, integrity on and off the field, on the campus, in the local community, and to otherwise represent Cornell University in a manner that brings pride to me, intercollegiate athletics and the University. (Cornell University Athletics, 2020, para. 2)

The student-athlete code of conduct at Boston University further states that student-athletes travel as university ambassadors and have the responsibility to role-model a positive image of the university at all times (Boston University, 2020).

The role of student-athletes as university ambassadors indicates that athlete alumni should have a natural affinity for the athletic department. The study's theoretical framework, SET, provides a perspective for examining the relationship between student-athletes and the intercollegiate athletics department during their playing years.

### **Social Exchange Theory**

SET is a psychological and sociological theory and posits that people view a relationship based on the exchange of rewards and costs. This theoretical framework is applied to examine the relationship between athlete alumni and the athletics department and the development of athlete alumni affinity. The review of SET focused on four theorists: (a) Homans (1958), (b) Thiabut and Kelley (1959), (c) Blau (1964), and (d) Emerson (1976).

Homans (1958) considered "social behavior as an exchange of goods" (p. 587). These goods can be both material such as money and cars, and non-material goods such as prestige and approval. Persons are motivated by profit, and they will weigh the benefits versus costs before they engage in an activity. A person will also exchange a behavior in order to receive a reward in return. In addition, the more value a person receives, the more value they must return. And, the more a person gives, the more they will expect in return (Homans, 1958).

Thiabut and Kelley (1959) built on Homans's theory of social exchange. The researchers focused on a dyadic relationship and asserted that all social actions are a sequence of exchanges where there is a cost and a reward. Partners desire to maximize their rewards from their relationship while minimizing their costs. A commitment between two people occurs when value is gained from the relationship. For the relationship to be successful, the partners will need make mutual concessions (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Blau (1964) viewed SET similar to Homans; however, Blau's SET focuses on technical economic analysis and Homans focused on "psychology of instrumental behavior" (Emerson, 1976, p. 335). Blau (1964) said, "Social exchange differs in important ways from strictly economic exchange. The basic and most crucial distinction is that social exchange entails unspecified obligations" (p. 93). A social exchange does not have expected outcomes like an economic exchange and it is ultimately up to the individual what they want to give back. For instance, a person helps their friend move with no monetary or in-kind payment; there is an expectation the friend reciprocates the favor by helping them in the future. The assumption is the friend will repay the favor in equal or greater value (Blau, 1964).

Emerson (1976) regarded SET as a framework and not a theory and asserted SET is a framework where many theories come together both micro and macro in mutual support or disagreement. SET provides a "frame of reference that takes the movement of valued things (resources) through social process as its focus" (Emerson, 1976, p. 359). A resource is a relationship attribute between two persons. An exchange will occur if a resource flows and a person receives value back dependent upon this resource (Emerson, 1976). SET provides a practical perspective for examining the relationship between athlete alumni and the intercollegiate athletics department. During a student-athlete's undergraduate playing years, student-athletes and athletic departments exchange services. A student-athlete receives an opportunity to play their sport and compete in the NCAA. They are also provided academic support, financial support, practice equipment, medical care, and strength and conditioning training. The athletic department receives a student-athlete's time and talent competing under the university's name and contributing to the institution's reputational success.

The athlete alumni cost-benefit analysis of the exchange that occurred during their college playing years has an effect on their affinity for the athletics department. Maybe athlete alumni donate in small numbers to the athletic department because they have the perception of already donating back by playing their sport (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010). This notion of already donating back is through their time and talent and required community service (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Or, perhaps as student-athletes, they had a terrible athletic experience, which Shapiro et al. (2010) described as an uncontrollable donor constraint. Athlete alumni also may have experienced feeling isolated from the general student population trying to balance school demands along with their extensive competition and practice schedules (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007).

This research study investigated the Career Program through the lens of SET to examine if a relationship exists between a student-athlete's successful career launch and athlete alumni affinity. If an athlete alumnus benefits from a successful career launch, they will view this exchange through a cost-benefit analysis and have a stronger affinity for their athletics department. Career preparedness is one of the athlete alumni affinity themes explored next along with connection, communication, student-athlete experience, and undergraduate experience.

### **Athlete Alumni Affinity Themes**

The research on athlete alumni has focused on donor motivations and donor constraints so athlete alumni affinity is not well-studied; however, research studies have indicated a relationship between alumni affinity and charitable donations (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Gallo, 2012; Iskhakova et al., 2017). Through a review of the literature on general alumni affinity and loyalty and athlete alumni donor motivations and constraints, four athlete alumni affinity themes emerged: (a) communication, (b) connection, (c) student-athlete

experience, and (d) undergraduate experience (see Figure 2). The fifth theme of career preparedness is emerging programming in intercollegiate athletics where athletic departments are providing student-athletes with the support to launch their career. Although career preparedness has not been studied in the context of athlete alumni or alumni affinity, research indicated the importance of providing student-athletes career development support (Brown et al., 2000; Burns et al., 2013; Carodine et al., 2001; Martens & Lee, 1998; Sandstedt et al., 2004). The five themes are discussed in detail.



*Figure 2.* Athlete alumni framework model.

## **Career Preparedness**

With over 480,000 student-athletes competing in the NCAA, the chances of college athletes competing in professional sports is very low (NCAA, 2019a). The likelihood of a NCAA student-athlete graduating with a college degree is significantly higher. The NCAA student-athlete graduation rate is 89%, which is almost 9 out of 10 student-athletes earning college degrees (Hosick, 2019). These student-athletes have limited time outside academic and athletic requirements to pursue career development opportunities. They have time and scheduling demands filled with a full load of academic courses, mandatory practice, and training (Jolly, 2008). Many student-athletes do not seek assistance from the main university career services because of the amount of time they dedicate to their sport (Martens & Lee, 1998). They face extensive time commitments, which impacts their ability to devote time to planning their career (Carodine et al., 2001). Although extra-curricular activities have a positive effect on students' employability post-graduation (Buckley & Lee, 2018). Several studies have also examined the role of self-efficacy in student-athletes' career decision-making (Brown et al., 2000; Burns et al., 2013; Sandstedt et al., 2004).

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy is defined as a student-athlete's belief that they will experience success (Burns et al., 2013). In Sandstedt et al. (2004), the researchers developed an instrument that measures student-athletes' career situation. Career Development Self-Efficacy and Career versus Sport Identity are two of the five factors for the Student-Athlete Career Situation Inventory (SACSI). The researchers indicated these two factors help predict a student-athlete's college advances and experiences in relation to career development growth.

A relationship also exists between student-athletes' career decision-making self-efficacy (CDSE) and the support of university academic services (Burns et al., 2013). In Burns et al.

(2013), the researchers measured: (a) locus of control, (b) general self-efficacy, (c) academic support satisfaction, and (d) CDSE. Locus of control is one's belief concerning the causes of outcomes in their life, and CDSE is one's confidence to make decisions about their career. The researchers indicated that student-athletes have a higher CDSE when they are pleased with their university's academic support services. When their internal locus control and general self-efficacy lowered, student-athletes benefited from their positive interactions with academic services (Burns et al., 2013).

Brown et al. (2000) explored the relationship between the factors of CDSE and athletic identity. The researchers indicated student-athletes spend over 20 hours per week participating in their sport with no expectation to play professional sports. Lower career-decision making self-efficacy has an inverse relationship to the number of hours a student-athlete commits to their sport.

**Career program.** The Career Program is built into a student-athlete's countable athletic related activities and is a 4-year structured program. The program has a checklist of activities that the student-athlete completes in their freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years. It is led by athletic department support staff in coordination with team coaches. The Career Program focuses on preparing student-athletes for a successful launch after graduation.

### **Communication**

Communication is the contact between the athlete alumni and their athletic department and university. This communication can occur through their sports program, academic department, athletic department, or university. The communication channels are online newsletters, email, social media platforms, direct mail, and on- and off-campus events.

Studies indicated an institution's image has an effect on student and alumni value perception and loyalty (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Ridley & Boone, 2001). An alumni's loyalty to the university is supported by communication from the university (Ridley & Boone, 2001). Universities should continue to increase their visibility and national reputation because it is a good investment in developing long-term loyalty (Ridley & Boone, 2001). Establishing a relevant marketing and communications strategy is an important approach for universities to stay relevant within the competitive higher education marketplace (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009).

The type of communication received by university stakeholders influences their willingness to give charitable donations (Levine, 2008; Pentecost & Andrews, 2010). Levine (2008) examined the relationship between university communications and alumni donations. The number of communications sent had no correlation to increased alumni giving; however, the types and frequency of these communications did have an impact on alumni giving rates. In particular, alumni magazines and alumni digital newsletters have been associated with increased giving to the university (Levine, 2008).

**Career program.** The Career Program offers athlete alumni another way to remain connected to the athletic department through various communication channels. The alumni members receive dedicated emails, newsletters, and a year-in-review report. The program also hosts a dedicated website, posts social media updates on Instagram and Twitter, and has an online launch day that celebrates graduating student-athletes' successful launch. The Career Program communications highlight student-athlete academic success, internships, mentorships, and post-graduation career and academic plans. There are also feature stories on program events and alumni donors.

## Connection

Positive relationships formed by students while on campus impact their interest in staying connected with their alma mater (Hummel, 2010; Rubens et al., 2010). Hummel (2010) indicated an alumni's connection is primarily established through relationships developed as an undergraduate with faculty, staff, and other alumni. A student's connection with faculty and staff has been positively correlated with alumni loyalty (Snijders et al., 2019). This connection between an alumnus and the institution also has an influence on an alumnus's supportive behaviors (Stephenson & Bell, 2014). Universities can benefit significantly if they had a better understanding of alumni connections (Rubens et al., 2010).

Since athlete alumni have competed for their university, there is an existing connection to the university athletic department (Meer & Rosen, 2009; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007, Shapiro et al., 2010); however, several studies indicated that athlete alumni have a lack of connection with their alma mater (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010). This lack of connection can be attributed to many factors including coach and athletic department personnel turnover, terrible student experience, location barriers, lack of communication, and perception that they should have been paid (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010).

**Career program.** The Career Program offers athlete alumni the opportunity to stay connected or reengage with the athletics program. Athlete alumni can be Career Program members and donate their time, talent, and treasure to activities. Volunteer opportunities include participation in networking events, core clinics, podcasts, career coffee talks, and career fairs. Athlete alumni can also provide experiential learning opportunities, mentorships, internships, and corporate office field trips.

## **Student-Athlete Experience**

According to O'Neil and Schenke (2007), athlete alumni have a positive athletic experience during their playing career; however, they also identified that a terrible athletic experience has an impact on the athlete alumni's perception of their alma mater. Rankin et al. (2016) asserted that featured sport athletes have a lower sense of athletic success compared to non-featured sports athletes. Featured sport athletes and male athletes also have a greater sense of athletic identity. A higher level of academic success is experienced by female athletes (Rankin et al., 2016).

Athlete alumni also have the perception that they have already donated back to their university by participating in their sport (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). They perceive their time and talent as investments into the athletics department. In the Shapiro et al. (2010) study, the researchers identified a way to measure former student-athlete donor constraints by measuring multiple variables. The FSADCS classified the student-athlete experience as both an uncontrollable and semi-controllable donor constraint. The uncontrollable constraint is playing time and the semi-controllable constraint is off-field support. A terrible athletic experience is also an uncontrollable constraint based on interactions with their teammates and coaches. Other factors that affect the student-athlete experience are inflexible scheduling and time demands (Jolly, 2008). Student-athletes have to set their academic classes and social lives around a highly structured practice and playing schedule.

Berquam (2013) indicated that extracurricular involvement is one factor that significantly contributes to university affinity. The development of university affinity is strengthened by a sense of belonging to the university. A student-athlete's participation on a varsity sport is an

extracurricular activity. They are also a member of an intercollegiate athletics team and are heavily involved in athletic department activities.

**Career program.** The Career Program enhances the student-athlete experience by providing student-athletes with four key elements for success: (a) developing skills of emotional quotient, self-awareness, leadership, and social and cultural competence; (b) learning about different career paths; (c) providing opportunities for internships, mentorships, and jobs; and (d) developing career tools including professional resumes, cover letters, LinkedIn profiles, professional headshots, and interviewing skills.

### **Undergraduate Student Experience**

Undergraduate student experience is defined as a student-athlete's academic and social experience on campus. Several studies indicated that a student-athlete's undergraduate experience influences their perceptions of their alma mater (Meer & Rosen, 2009; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Rankin et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2010). Gallo (2013) indicated that an alumnus in the affinity stage feels they had a positive undergraduate student experience; however, O'Neil and Schenke (2007) asserted that student-athletes have the perception of feeling isolated from the general student population as well as lacking identification with their school. An athlete alumnus's perception of campus climate can have an impact on both their academic and athletic success (Rankin et al., 2016).

In Pumerantz (2005), the researcher examined performance factors from alumni fundraising and the university factors associated with greater alumni giving at Cal State University (CSU) system. One of the key factors contributing to greater success with alumni fundraising was the alumnus's experience as a student including connections to faculty and staff.

Although this study only focuses on one public university system, the research indicates that an alumnus's student experience can affect future donations to the university.

**Student involvement.** In Fresk and Mullendore (2012), the researchers explored if undergraduate students perceive their on-campus employment as being involved with the university community. The researchers argued that if students view their on-campus employment as involvement, they are more likely to develop an affinity for their on-campus work employment area and the university. The study's findings indicate that a student perceives on-campus employment as involvement at varying levels. The study identified six factors that influenced campus involvement: (a) time spent working, (b) personal interest area, (c) co-worker relationships, (d) supervisor relationships, (e) work area affiliation, and (f) campus community interaction. These factors can be applied to a student-athlete's experience as such: (a) time spent working/practicing, (b) sport interest area, (b) team relationships, (c) coach relationships, (d) sports team affiliation, and (f) campus community interaction.

Studies have also indicated the relationship between student involvement and future financial donations to the university (Gaier, 2001; Thomas & Smart, 2005). A student's university experience has an effect on future alumni giving (Thomas & Smart, 2005). Their involvement with campus leadership and social activities has a relationship to future charitable donations to their alma mater. Whereas a student's involvement in athletics, religious groups, academic groups, and performance groups has no significant relationship to alumni giving. In Gaier's (2001) study, the results support the notion that involvement is linked to the relationship alumni have with their alma mater. Students involved with student alumni associations have a greater awareness of the benefits of being an alumnus (Gaier, 2001).

**Career program.** The Career Program partners with the campus career center for exclusive student-athlete career fairs and a two-unit course on careers and identity. By being integrated with the career center, it offers students-athletes another intersection with faculty and staff support outside the athletics department.

### **Summary**

This literature review gives an overview of higher education funding trends, athletic supporter donor motivations, university alumni athletic supporter donor motivations, athlete alumni donor motivations, student-athlete university ambassadors and the SET. It also provides background for universities and athletic departments needing to pursue new donors. With athlete alumni affinity not being extensively studied, the chapter reviews university alumni affinity and loyalty and its relationship to charitable donations. In addition, the SET provides a framework to examine athlete alumni affinity through five themes: (a) career preparedness, (b) connection, (c) communication, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate student experience. Given that athlete alumni give charitable donations in small numbers, it is reasonable to believe universities and athletic departments have not found the fair exchange of goods and services.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to examine the relationship between a Career Program and athlete alumni affinity for the athletic department. The research questions guiding this quasi-experimental study were:

- RQ1: In what ways, if any, does athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department relate to a Career Program?
- RQ2: In what ways, if any, do career program varsity athlete alumni differ from non-career program varsity athlete alumni in their athletic department affinity?

This chapter outlines and discusses the methodology of the quantitative quasi-experimental study. The chapter organization includes a description of the methodology, researcher role, research site, and target population. It also comprises the data collection process and tools and how data analysis was conducted. The chapter ends with a discussion on ethical conditions, trustworthiness, and threats to validity for the study.

### **Description of Methodology**

This research study was a quantitative quasi-experiment. A quasi-experimental study is when the research includes assignment of groups that are not random (Creswell, 2015; Gibbons & Herman, 1997). According to Creswell (2015), quantitative research is “useful for describing trends and explaining the relationship between two variables” (p. 26). Quasi-experimental was the appropriate approach because the researcher compared two athlete alumni groups that were not randomly assigned from specific varsity playing years at one public university. The researcher could not use random assignment of the research participants because the sample populations were small and from specific graduation years based on their Career Program

participation or GDP for their graduation year. The aim and goal for choosing the quasi-experimental methodology was to examine if a Career Program at one public university had an effect on athlete alumni affinity for the intercollegiate athletics department.

The design was posttest only with nonequivalent groups. “The non-equivalent, posttest only design consists of administering an outcome measure in two groups or to a program/treatment group and a comparison” (Gribbons & Herman, 1997, p. 2). The outcome measure or intervention was the Career Program and the measure was administered to the career program varsity athlete alumni, who were compared with the non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The athlete alumni groups were intact and there was no random assignment (Creswell, 2015).

### **Researcher Role**

In quantitative research, the researcher “identifies a research problem based on trends in the field or the need to explain why something occurs” (Creswell, 2015, p. 13). The role of the researcher is almost non-existent because the participants act independently of the researcher (Simon, 2011). The research participants completed an online questionnaire so there was no direct interaction with the researcher.

The researcher was positioned in relation to the social setting of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher had an insider’s perspective of a university employee, athlete alumna, athletics donor, and volunteer. To avoid bias, the researcher used the appropriate statistical tests, analyzed all the data, and interpreted data only if there was statistical significance. The researcher also had the dissertation chair review the statistical testing procedures and findings.

### **Research Site, Access, and Benefit**

The research site was one large, public university at the FCS level. The target population was athlete alumni who lettered in a varsity sport at the university. The study had two groups: (a) athlete alumni who participated in the Career Program for one or two years and graduated in 2018 and 2019 (“career program varsity athlete alumni”) and (b) athlete alumni who did not participate in a Career Program and graduated in 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2015 (“non-career program varsity athlete alumni”). Access to the athlete alumni data was provided by intercollegiate athletics and advancement services (AIS). The researcher’s insider’s perspective as a university employee, athlete alumna, athletic donor, and volunteer allowed her to receive specialized athletic department support and assistance for data requests and questionnaire deployments. The athletics department supported the research study by sending follow-up emails with the questionnaire to the career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni; however, this additional support did not result in a high questionnaire response rate.

This research study benefits the intercollegiate athletics department and university by examining the significance of an athletics department providing undergraduate career preparation support to assist student-athletes with their career launch. The researcher examined the relationship between a Career Program and athlete alumni affinity. The research findings may potentially impact how athletic administrators, university administrators, alumni relations, and development officers steward athlete alumni.

### **Target Population**

The target population was career program varsity athlete alumni who graduated in 2018 and 2019 and non-career program varsity athlete alumni who graduated in 2010, 2012, 2014, and

2015 (see Table 1). The athlete alumni were selected because they participated in a men's or women's varsity sport, graduated from the public university and were a participant or non-participant in the Career Program. The participants' age range was 21-33 years old. The GDP of the U.S. is the measurement for choosing the graduation years for non-career program athletes. The 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2015 sample populations were chosen because the GDP growth rate was similar to that of the 2018 and 2019 graduating classes as shown in Table 1 (BEA, n.d.). The athlete alumni were also selected from this one public university because the undergraduate career preparation program was aimed at preparing student-athletes for their professional career.

Table 1  
*Target Population*

Groups	Graduation Years	GDP Growth Rate
Career Program Varsity Athlete Alumni	2018	3.0%
	2019	2.2%
Non-Career Program Varsity Athlete Alumni	2010	2.6%
	2012	2.2%
	2014	2.5%
	2015	3.1%

The selection of the participants occurred using purposeful sampling, where the “researcher intentionally selects individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2015, p. 626). The career program varsity athlete alumni were selected intentionally because the Career Program was part of their mandatory countable athletic-related activities. The sampling frame was derived from 611 athlete alumni from various athletic teams who graduated in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2019.

The participants were emailed a questionnaire from the researcher and also received a questionnaire email follow-up from the university athletics department. This email

correspondence was sent to 174 career program varsity athlete alumni from the 2018 and 2019 classes and 437 non-career program varsity athlete alumni from the 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2015 classes.

### **Data Collection Method and Tools**

In quantitative data collection, the researcher used “an instrument to measure the variables in the study” (Creswell, 2015, p. 14). For the purposes of this research study, the researcher collected data through a questionnaire instrument to examine the relationship between Career Program and athlete alumni affinity. The instrument was a web-based questionnaire and was available on the computer and mobile device. The questionnaire was administered to both control groups, career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The online survey platform was Qualtrics.

The questionnaire included 29 Likert-type scale statements that measured athlete alumni affinity (see Appendix A). The Likert-type statements were equated with five themes of athlete alumni affinity: (a) career preparedness, (b) communication, (c) connection, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate experience. The quasi-interval scale included: (a) agree, (b) disagree, and (c) prefer not to answer. To protect confidentiality, the questionnaire did not contain information that personally identified the research participants.

### **Pilot Survey**

According to the questionnaire protocol (see Appendix B), preliminary pilot testing of the questionnaire was deployed to a sampling frame of 188 softball athlete alumna (see Appendix C). Five emails bounced back so the questionnaire was sent to 183 softball athlete alumna. The softball athlete alumna did not include the graduating classes of 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2019. The researcher did not remove graduating classes of 2010 and 2012 because these class years

were added to the research study after the researcher had low response rate from the 2014 and 2015 classes.

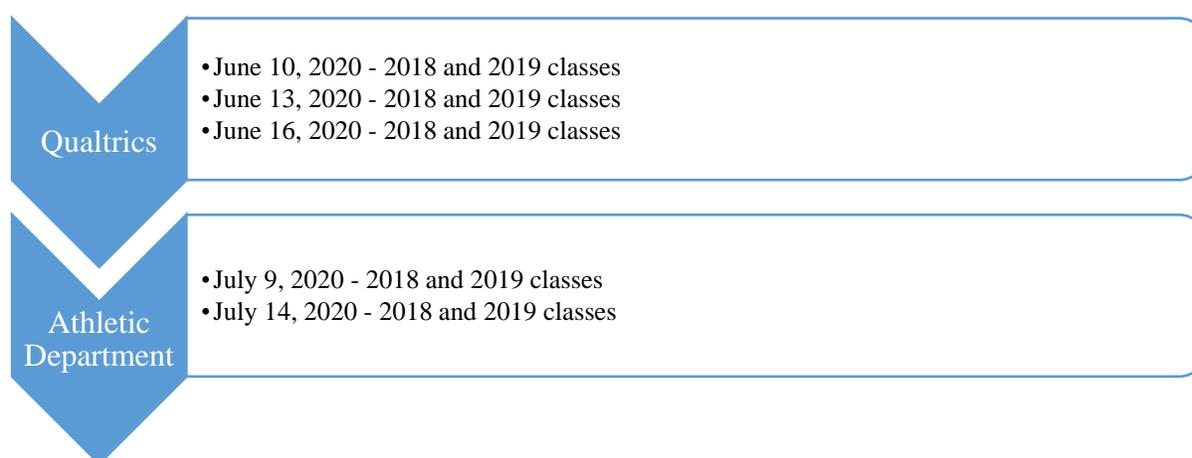
The university data procedures allowed the researcher to receive personal contact information for athlete alumni. The researcher managed the direct communication for the pilot survey through the university's Qualtrics survey platform. The researcher uploaded the data received from the head softball coach including contactable email address and graduation year into a Qualtrics mailing list. The researcher, who is a softball alumna and donor, worked directly with the softball head coach for the communications approval and deployment timeframe of the pilot survey. The pilot survey was deployed from Qualtrics to 183 softball athlete alumna on April 27, 2020, and a reminder email was sent on May 5, 2020 (see Appendices C & D). The researcher received 28 completed pilot survey responses and direct feedback from one questionnaire respondent. The questionnaire was not revised based on pre-testing results.

### **Questionnaire Deployment**

The researcher requested career program and non-career program athlete alumni data from AIS through an internal data request process. The original data for the career program 2018 and 2019 graduating classes included 368 athlete alumni. This data list was scrubbed by the athletic department of any athlete alumni who did not participate in the Career Program or only participated in a varsity sport for one year. The final career program varsity athlete alumni email list comprised 174 research participants.

The original data for the non-career program 2014 and 2015 graduating classes included 233 athlete alumni. The data list was scrubbed by the athletic department of any athlete alumni who only participated in a varsity sport for one year. The first non-career program varsity athlete alumni list comprised 211 research participants. When the researcher did not receive sufficient

questionnaire responses from the 2014 and 2015 classes, another data request was submitted to AIS for the 2010 and 2012 athlete alumni graduating classes. The original data for the non-career program 2010 and 2012 classes included 253 athlete alumni. The data list was scrubbed of softball athlete alumna who received the pilot test survey and the athletic department removed any athlete alumni who only participated in a varsity sport for one year. The 2010 and 2012 non-career program varsity athlete alumni list comprised 226 research participants. The total non-career program varsity athlete alumni list included 437 research participants. The researcher used a 5-phase questionnaire administration for career program varsity athlete alumni (see Figure 3).

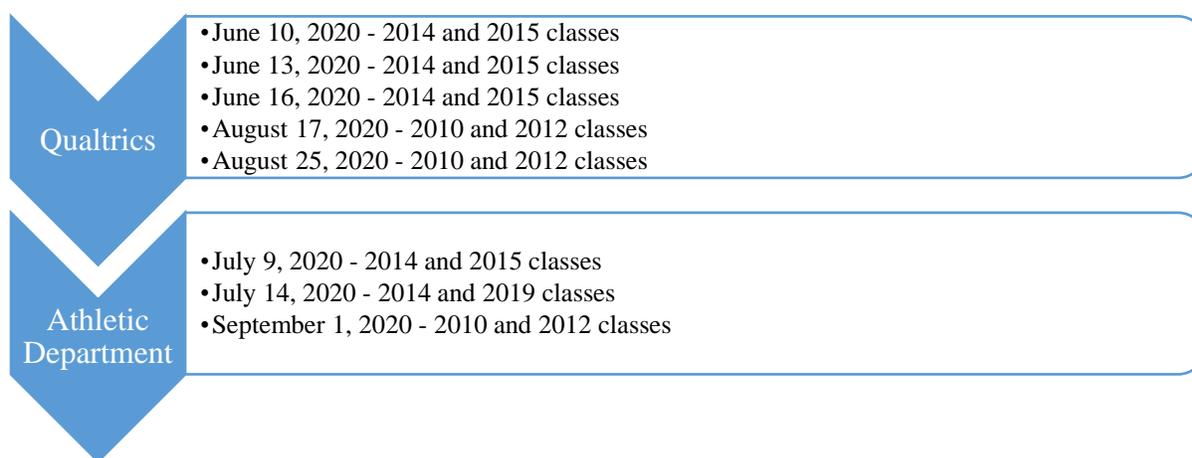


*Figure 3.* Five-phase questionnaire administration procedure for career program varsity athlete alumni.

The researcher uploaded the career program athlete alumni data received from AIS including Advance ID, contactable email address, gender, ethnicity, age, graduation year, giving history, and varsity sport participated in to a Qualtrics mailing list. The email sent to the career program varsity athlete alumni communicated the purpose of the study (see Appendices E & F).

The questionnaire was sent by the researcher from the university's Qualtrics survey platform on June 10, 13, and 16, 2020. The athletic department sent two follow-up emails from the athletic department email address on July 9 and 14, 2020 with an anonymous questionnaire link (see Appendix G).

The researcher used an 8-phase questionnaire administration for non-career program varsity athlete alumni (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Eight-phase questionnaire administration procedure for non-career program varsity athlete alumni.

The researcher uploaded the non-career program varsity athlete alumni data received from AIS including Advance ID, contactable email address, gender, ethnicity, age, graduation year, giving history, and varsity sport participated in to a Qualtrics mailing list. The email sent to the non-career program varsity athlete alumni communicated the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was sent by the researcher from the university's Qualtrics survey platform to the 2014 and 2015 graduating classes on June 10, 13, and 16, 2020 (see Appendices E & F). The athletic department sent two follow-up emails from the athletic department email address on July

9 and 14, 2020 with an anonymous questionnaire link (see Appendix G). The non-career program graduating classes of 2014 and 2015 had a low response rate so the research participants were expanded to include the 2010 and 2012 classes. The questionnaire was sent by the researcher from the university's Qualtrics survey platform to the 2010 and 2012 graduating classes on August 15 and 27, 2020 (see Appendices E & F). The athletic department sent one follow-up email from the athletic department email address on September 1, 2020 with an anonymous questionnaire link (see Appendix G).

All research participants were sent a thank-you email and automatically entered into a drawing to win a \$100 Starbucks gift card for completing and returning the web-based questionnaire (see Appendix H). A total of four \$100 digital Starbucks gift cards were awarded and emailed directly to the awardees. The researcher destroyed all participant winners' email addresses after sending gift cards digitally through the Starbucks app.

## **Documents**

Documents are also an important source of data in assisting researchers to understand the central phenomena of the research study (Creswell, 2015). Document records were collected from the university athletics department, and they included demographic information, Career Program participation, and program background details (see Appendix I for protocol). The athletics department development officers used an Advance customer-relationship system (CRM) to record all alumni demographic and giving information. An athlete alumni data record report was pulled from this CRM system with an Advance ID, first name, last name, contactable email address, giving history, sport, and demographic information for graduating class years 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2019. For the Career Program, the athletics program director uses ARMS to record all student-athlete participation in their programming and events. ARMS

is a web-based compliance software for athletic departments that tracks student-athlete data. For the 2018 and 2019 athlete alumni graduating class years, the researcher manually cross-checked the Career Program participation data records with the Advance records with first name, last name, sport, and one identifiable piece of information (e.g., email). Any Advance athlete alumni who did not match the Career Program records were removed from 2018 and 2019 graduating lists. Additionally, the Career Program background information was collected from both the athletics department and external publications.

### **Threats to Validity**

Threats to validity are “specific reasons for why we can be wrong when we make an inference in an experiment because of covariance, causation constructs, or where a causal relationship holds over variations in persons, settings, treatments and outcomes” (Creswell, 2015, p. 303). The threat of statistical conclusion validity was whether the right statistical tests were run for the data comparison. The threat to external validity was that the sample was not random and the research data were only from one public university. The research findings are not generalizable to a wider population.

According to Creswell (2015), the threats of internal validity are more significant in a quasi-experimental approach than a true experiment. Since the researcher does not randomly assign individuals to groups, “the potential threats of maturation, selection, morality and the interaction of selection with other threats are possibilities” (Creswell, 2015, p. 310). The athlete alumni assigned to the two groups may have other factors or confounding variables<sup>3</sup> that go uncontrolled in the quasi-experiment (Creswell, 2015). In addition, the response rate to the

---

<sup>3</sup> Confounding variables are “attributes or characteristics that the researcher cannot directly measure because their effects cannot be easily separated from other variables, even though they may influence the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable” (Creswell, 2015, p. 618).

questionnaire is a threat to internal validity and an acceptable response rate is 20% per control group.

### **Data Analysis, Ethical Conditions, and Trustworthiness**

Data management is an important part of managing the information collected from questionnaires and document records. Creswell (2015) discussed that two of the three activities post-experiment include data coding and analyzing the data. The researcher set up a computer data file with the post-questionnaire results and cleaned the data of any errors or mistakes. The statistical program, R, was used to run statistical analysis on the data frame. The first phase of analysis was to run descriptive statistics to gain an understanding of the questionnaire responses from the career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The second phase was to compare the two control groups, and the statistical test used to compare the categorical variables was the Pearson chi-squared test.

The questionnaire was sent in June, July, August, and September of 2020 and the researcher performed data analysis in September of 2020. The participants were advised on the nature of the study and informed of their rights (see Appendix J). Gender, ethnicity, age, graduation year, and varsity sport participated in were identified in this research study.

The validity and reliability of the data were ensured by the researcher conducting the questionnaires and data analysis in an ethical manner. The researcher used protocols for questionnaire administration and data analysis. The validity of the questionnaire instrument was measured by how accurately athlete alumni affinity was measured. The questionnaire instrument's reliability was measured by examining its homogeneity, stability, and equivalence (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

The researcher's reflexivity was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Creswell (2015) defined researcher's reflexivity as "the means that the researcher reflects on their own biases, values, and assumptions and actively wrote them into their research" (p. 626). The researcher was a university employee, athlete alumna, athletic volunteer, and donor. There may have been perceived ethical concerns with the researcher's involvement and relationship with the athletics department. The researcher was aware of her influence on the research and openly reflected on this possible impact throughout the study.

### **Summary**

This quantitative quasi-experimental study examines the relationship between a Career Program and athlete alumni affinity for the university athletic department. The research design was post-test only and the researcher compared two athlete alumni groups, career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The sampling frame was derived of approximately 611 athlete alumni from various athletic teams. The career program varsity athlete alumni graduated in 2018 and 2019, and non-career program varsity athlete alumni graduated in 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2015. Research data were collected from an online questionnaire and document records. The research data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis and Pearson chi-squared test. The trustworthiness of the findings was validated through statistical analysis and researcher's reflexivity.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to examine the relationship between a Career Program and athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department. This study examined two athlete alumni groups – career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni – to understand if a Career Program at one large, public institution at the FCS level had an effect on their athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department. The career program varsity athlete alumni were from graduating classes 2018 and 2019, and the non-career program varsity athlete alumni were from graduating classes 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2015. The questions guiding this research study were:

- RQ1: In what ways, if any, does athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department relate to the Career Program?
- RQ2: In what ways, if any, do career program varsity athlete alumni differ from non-career program varsity athlete alumni in their athletics department affinity?

### **Trustworthiness of the Data**

The researcher received the athlete alumni data for the classes of 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2019 from Advancement Services. The original questionnaire deployment was scheduled to occur over a two-week period with a total of three emails (see Appendix B). Due to low survey response from both the career program and non-career program athlete alumni, the researcher asked the athletic department to send two follow-up emails to both participant groups with an anonymous questionnaire link from the department email address. Due to the athletic department communication schedule, the questionnaire deployment timeline was extended from two weeks to five weeks. The researcher received back 35 completed responses from career program varsity athlete alumni, with a 20% response rate, from 174 recipients. For the non-

career varsity athlete alumni, the researcher received back 19 completed responses with a 9% response rate from 211 recipients. The response rate for non-career program participants was low so the researcher had to expand the non-career program participants to include the 2010 and 2012 athlete alumni graduating classes. The researcher submitted a second AIS data request that took 12 days to process.

The questionnaire deployment timeline was extended from five weeks to 11 weeks with a total of three emails being sent to the 2010 and 2012 classes. The researcher deployed two emails from Qualtrics and the athletic department sent one follow-up email with an anonymous questionnaire link. The researcher received 17 additional non-career program questionnaire responses for a total of 36 completed questionnaires. The non-career program questionnaire was sent to a total of 437 recipients from the 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2015 classes and received an 8% response rate. By sending an anonymous questionnaire link, the researcher was unable to capture demographic data from 10 career program varsity athlete alumni and nine non-career program varsity athlete alumni.

The Pearson chi-squared test was used to examine if there was a relationship between categorical variables. The null hypothesis for the chi-square test was no relationship exists between the categorical variables and they were independent. Due to the low response rate, the power of the analysis was low so only a large effect would pass the  $p$ -value significance test.

### **Measurement**

Based upon literature, 29 athlete alumni affinity statements were created to measure five themes of athlete alumni affinity: (a) career preparedness, (b) communication, (c) connection, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate experience. All variables were measured on a

3-point Likert-type scale: (a) agree, (b) disagree, and (c) prefer to not answer. The wording of the statements is provided in Table 4.

## Descriptive Statistics

### Questionnaire Response

Table 2 provides a breakdown of survey distribution, respondents, response rate, and response time. The total questionnaire responses for both the career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni was 71 respondents. The survey respondent breakdown was 35 career program varsity athlete alumni and 36 non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The questionnaire was distributed to 174 career program varsity athlete alumni and 437 non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The career program varsity athlete alumni response rate was 20% versus an 8% response rate from non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The overall questionnaire response rate was 12% and this low response rate was a threat to internal validity.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics – Survey Response*

	Career Program	Non-Career Program	Total
Distribution	174	437	611
Respondents	35	36	71
Response Rate	20%	8%	-
Response Time	161 seconds	179 seconds	170 seconds*

*Note.* \*Average response time for career program and non-career program athlete alumni

The questionnaire response time averaged 170 seconds for both career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. Career program varsity athlete alumni averaged 161 seconds to complete the questionnaire and non-career program varsity athlete alumni averaged 179 seconds. The researcher removed outliers from both groups of

259,067 seconds and 283,804 seconds before calculating the average time to complete the questionnaire.

### **Demographics**

Table 3 provides the demographic breakdown for the career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The career program varsity athlete alumni were 49% female (17), 23% male (8), and 28% unknown (10). The median age of the career program participants was 23 years old, derived from 25 of the 35 questionnaire respondents. The ethnicity of the career program participants was 37% Caucasian (13), 11% Mexican-American (4), 6% Latino (2), 6% African-American (2), 6% Chinese-American (2), and 31% unknown (11). The career program varsity athlete alumni had three participants each from men's football, men's track, women's lacrosse, women's swimming, and women's water polo. Two participants each were from women's track and women's volleyball, and one participant each was from men's baseball, men's tennis, women's field hockey, women's gymnastics, women's soccer, and women's softball. Career program varsity athlete alumni from an unknown sport was 10. The median monetary donation to the athletic department from nine Career Program participants was \$15.60.

Table 3  
*Descriptive Statistics – Athlete Alumni Demographics*

	Career Program			Non-Career Program		
	Percentage	Frequency	Mean	Percentage	Frequency	Mean
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	23	8		39	14	
Female	49	17		36	13	
Unknown	28	10		25	9	
<i>Age</i>						
		25	23 y/o		27	30 y/o
<i>Ethnicity</i>						
African-American	6	2		3	1	
Caucasian	37	13		56	20	
Chinese-American	6	2		3	1	
Filipino-American	3	1		-	-	
Japanese-American	-	-		3	1	
Latino	6	2		-	-	
Mexican-American	11	4		3	1	
Unknown	31	11		31	11	
Vietnamese	-	-		3	1	
<i>ICA Varsity Sport</i>						
Men's Baseball	3	1		3	1	
Men's Football	9	3		25	9	
Men's Soccer	-	-		6	2	
Men's Tennis	3	1		-	-	
Men's Track	9	3		3	1	
Men's Water Polo	-	-		3	1	
Women's Field Hockey	3	1		-	-	
Women's Golf	-	-		3	1	
Women's Gymnastics	3	1		3	1	
Women's Lacrosse	9	3		8	3	
Women's Soccer	3	1		6	2	
Women's Softball	3	1		-	-	
Women's Swimming	9	3		3	1	
Women's Track	6	2		11	4	
Women's Volleyball	6	2		3	1	
Women's Water Polo	9	3		-	-	
Unknown Sport	29	10		25	9	
<i>Athletic Dept. Donation</i>						
		9	\$15.60		10	\$209

*Note.* Total Responses = 71 (35 career program/36 non-career program). Variable names in italics.

The non-career program varsity athlete alumni were 39% male (14), 36% female (13), and 25% unknown (9). The median age of the non-career program participants was 30 years old, derived from 27 of 36 survey respondents. The ethnicity of the non-career program participants was 56% Caucasian (20), 3% African-American (1), 3% Mexican-American (1), 3% Japanese-American (1), 3% Vietnamese (1), and 31% unknown (11). The non-career program varsity athlete alumni had nine participants from men's football, four participants from women's track, three participants from women's lacrosse, and two participants each from men's and women's soccer. One participant each was from women's swimming, women's volleyball, men's water polo, men's baseball, women's gymnastics, women's golf, and men's track. Non-Career program varsity athlete alumni from an unknown sport equaled nine. The median monetary donation to the athletic department from 10 non-career program participants was \$209.

## **Results**

### **RQ1: In What Ways, if Any, Does Athlete Alumni Affinity for the Athletics Department Relate to the Career Program?**

Tables 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 provide career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni statement response breakdowns and *p*-value results comparing the two groups. The results of Pearson chi-squared test do not show a relationship between athlete alumni affinity and the Career Program. No statistical significance was indicated between the two groups for the five latent variables of (a) career preparedness, (b) communication, (c) connection, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate experience. The *p*-value was greater than .05 so the null hypothesis was not rejected.

## **RQ2: In What Ways, if Any, Do Career Program Varsity Athlete Alumni Differ from Non-Career Program Varsity Athlete Alumni in Their Athletics Department Affinity?**

Tables 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 indicate there was no significant difference between career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni as related to their athletics department affinity. The five themes of athlete alumni affinity examined are: (a) career preparedness, (b) communication, (c) connection, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate experience.

### **Career Preparedness**

Six statements measured an athlete alumni's career preparedness (see Table 4). The Pearson chi-squared test was run to examine if there was a relationship between the career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career-program varsity athlete alumni. The four statements of (a) I felt prepared to interview for jobs or graduate school when I finished my college athletic career ( $p = .78$ ), (b) the athletic department prepared me to enter the workforce or graduate school post-collegiate playing career ( $p = .28$ ), (c) I was employed or attending graduate school within 6 months of graduation ( $p = .139$ ), and (d) being a college student-athlete helped me develop skills that I use in my professional career ( $p = 0.61$ ) do not show significance between the two groups with the  $p$ -value greater than .05. The two statements that indicated significance are: (a) the athletic department helped me develop a LinkedIn profile ( $p < .001$ ) and (b) the athletic department helped me develop a professional resume ( $p < .001$ ). Both statements had a  $p$  value of less than .05 so the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 4  
*Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Career Preparedness*

Athlete Alumni Affinity Statements	Career Program			Non-Career Program			Difference <i>p</i> -value
	A	D	PNA	A	D	PNA	
The athletic department helped me develop a LinkedIn profile.	26	9	-	1	35	-	$p < .001^*$
The athletic department helped me develop a professional resume.	21	14	-	1	35	-	$p < .001^*$
I felt prepared to interview for jobs or graduate school when I finished my college athletic career.	22	11	2	22	13	1	0.78
The athletic department prepared me to enter the workforce or graduate school post-collegiate playing career.	20	13	2	14	20	2	0.28
I was employed or attending graduate school within six months of graduation.	31	4	-	27	9	-	0.139
Being a college student-athlete helped me develop skills that I use in my professional career.	34	1	-	34	1	1	0.61

*Note.*  $*p < .05$ . A = Agree; D = Disagree; PNA = Prefer Not to Answer

## Communication

Six statements measured athlete alumni's communication with the athletics department (see Table 5). The Pearson chi-squared test was run to examine if there was a relationship between career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The statements are: (a) I receive information from the athletic department ( $p = .59$ ), (b) I receive information from my former team ( $p = 0.51$ ), (c) I am up-to-date on athletic department news ( $p = .59$ ), (d) I follow the athletic department on social media ( $p = .687$ ), (e) I follow my team on social media ( $p = .27$ ), and (f) I visit the athletic department

website ( $p = .24$ ). All statements had a  $p$  value greater than .05, so they do not show a significant relationship between the two groups.

Table 5  
*Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Communication*

Athlete Alumni Affinity Statements	Career Program			Non-Career Program			Difference $p$ -value
	A	D	PNA	A	D	PNA	
I receive information from the athletic department.	31	3	1	33	3	-	0.59
I receive information from my former team.	27	8	-	30	6	-	0.51
I am up-to-date on athletic department news.	20	15	-	21	14	1	0.59
I follow the athletic department on social media.	12	23	-	14	22	-	0.687
I follow my team on social media.	26	9	-	21	14	1	0.27
I visit the athletic department website.	32	3	-	28	7	1	0.24

*Note.* A = Agree; D = Disagree; PNA = Prefer Not to Answer

### Connection

Seven statements measured an athlete alumni's connection to the athletic department and university (see Table 6). The Pearson chi-squared test was run to examine if there was a relationship between career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The statements are: (a) the success of the athletic department is important to me ( $p = .97$ ); (b) the success of my team is important to me ( $p = .48$ ); (c) I have pride in the athletic department ( $p = .765$ ); (d) I have pride in the university ( $p = .307$ ); (e) I attend my alumni game, athletic events, or university events ( $P=.756$ ); (f) I am interested in staying connected to my

former team ( $p = .231$ ); and (g) I am interested in staying connected to the athletics department ( $p = .51$ ). All statements had a  $p$  value greater than .05, so they do not show a significant relationship between the two groups.

Table 6

*Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Connection*

Athlete Alumni Affinity Statements	Career Program			Non-Career Program			Difference <i>p</i> -value
	A	D	PNA	A	D	PNA	
The success of the athletic department is important to me.	32	3	0	33	3	-	0.97
The success of my team is important to me.	32	2	1	35	1	-	0.48
I have pride in the athletic department.	31	3	1	32	2	2	0.765
I have pride in the university.	34	2	-	36	-	-	0.307
I attend my alumni game, athletic events or university events.	22	11	2	25	10	1	0.756
I am interested in staying connected to my former team	31	4	-	34	1	1	0.231
I am interested in staying connected to the athletics department.	27	8	-	29	6	1	0.51

*Note.* A = Agree; D = Disagree; PNA = Prefer Not to Answer

### Student-Athlete Experience

Five statements measured an athlete alumni's student-athlete experience (see Table 7). The Pearson chi-squared test was run to examine if there was a relationship between career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The statements are: (a) I felt supported by the athletic department ( $p = .555$ ), (b) I was treated fairly by the athletic department ( $p = .61$ ), (c) I had a good experience playing my college sport ( $p = .30$ ), (d)

my coaches were supportive during my playing career ( $p = .725$ ), and (e) I felt supported by my teammates ( $p = .56$ ). All statements had a  $p$  value greater than .05, so they do not show a significant relationship between the two groups.

Table 7  
*Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Student-Athlete Experience*

Athlete Alumni Affinity Statements	Career Program			Non-Career Program			Difference $p$ -value
	A	D	PNA	A	D	PNA	
I felt supported by the athletic department.	29	5	1	26	8	2	0.555
I was treated fairly by the athletic department.	31	4	-	31	4	1	0.61
I had a good experience playing my college sport.	29	4	2	30	6	-	0.30
My coaches were supportive during my playing career.	24	6	5	26	7	3	0.725
I felt supported by my teammates.	31	4	-	32	3	1	0.56

*Note.* A = Agree; D = Disagree; PNA = Prefer Not to Answer

### **Undergraduate Experience**

Five statements measured an athlete alumni's undergraduate experience (see Table 8). The Pearson chi-squared test was run to examine if there was a relationship between career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni. The statements are: (a) I felt supported by the university ( $p = .938$ ), (b) I was treated fairly by the university ( $p = .217$ ), (c) my college academic experience was positive ( $p = .59$ ), (d) my college social experience was positive ( $p = .289$ ), and (e) I value my university degree ( $p = .367$ ). All

statements had a  $p$  value greater than .05, so they do not show a significant relationship between the two groups.

Table 8  
*Difference in Career Program and Non-Career Program Athlete Alumni – Undergraduate Experience*

Athlete Alumni Affinity Statements	Career Program			Non-Career Program			Difference $p$ -value
	A	D	PNA	A	D	PNA	
I felt supported by the university	26	8	1	28	7	1	0.938
I was treated fairly by the university.	30	5	-	34	2	-	0.217
My college academic experience was positive.	32	2	1	30	4	2	0.591
My college social experience was positive.	32	3	-	35	1	-	0.289
I value my university degree	34	1	-	35	-	1	0.367

*Note.* A = Agree; D = Disagree; PNA = Prefer Not to Answer

### Summary

This chapter presented data and findings from career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni as related to the Career Program at one, large public institution at the FCS level and its effect on their athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department. The five athlete alumni affinity themes examined were: (a) career preparedness, (b) communication, (c) connection, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate experience. The low survey response rate of 71 respondents may have impacted the results of this study.

The first research question asked if athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department relates to the Career Program, and the results showed the Career Program did not show a relationship to athlete alumni affinity. The second research question asked if career program

varsity athlete alumni differ from non-career program varsity athlete alumni in their athletics department affinity. The results indicated no significant difference between career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni as related to athletic department affinity.

## CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### **Introduction**

This chapter addresses the implications, recommendations, and conclusions related to examining the relationship of a Career Program to athlete alumni affinity as well as how career program varsity athlete alumni differ from non-career program varsity athlete alumni in their affinity for the athletics department. The purpose of this quantitative quasi-experimental study was to examine the relationship between a Career Program and athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department. The research questions that guided this study were:

- RQ1: In what ways, if any, does athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department relate to the Career Program?
- RQ2: In what ways, if any, do career program varsity athlete alumni differ from non-career program varsity athlete alumni in their athletics department affinity?

An online questionnaire was sent to career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program athlete alumni measuring five themes of athlete alumni affinity: (a) career preparedness, (b) communication, (c) connection, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate experience. To protect confidentiality, the questionnaire did not contain information that personally identified the research participants.

### **Implications of Findings**

This section discusses the research questions of the study and the implications of the results.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question of this study was: In what ways, if any, does athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department relate to the Career Program?

The results indicate the Career Program does not show a relationship to athlete alumni affinity. This was a surprising result when examining the Career Program through the lens of SET. The theory asserts that the more value an individual receives, the more value they must return (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The Career Program's goal is to prepare student-athletes for launch after graduation by growing their leadership skills, developing professional tools, and providing professional learning opportunities. It would seem logical that athlete alumni who participated in this program would develop a stronger affinity for the athletics department; however, the career program varsity athlete alumni may not see the value in the exchange of the services taking place with the athletic department.

Athletic department leadership may want to consider getting deeper insights into how athlete alumni view their Career Program experience. This specific university performs senior exit interviews to learn more about the student-athlete's experience. Athletics leadership should consider adding specific questions about the Career Program to these interviews and following up with the athlete alumni 5 and 10 years into their career. This may provide helpful insights on the value athlete alumni believe they gained from the program post-graduation, early and mid-career.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question of this study was: In what ways, if any, do career program varsity athlete alumni differ from non-career program varsity athlete alumni in their athletics department affinity?

There was no significant difference between career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni as related to athletic department affinity. The five themes of athlete alumni affinity are subsequently discussed.

### **Career Preparedness**

Two statements showed a significant difference under the career preparedness theme and are related to specific program elements that are part of the Career Program. Prior to the Career Program, the athletics department did not provide standardized support to create LinkedIn profiles or professional resumes. From a tactical perspective, the Career Program may be providing additional support for student-athletes who do not have time to seek out assistance or devote time to planning their career (Carodine et al., 2001; Martens & Lee, 1998). The other three statements under career preparedness did not show significance. It is interesting to note that both career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni believe that being a college student-athlete helped them develop skills they use in their professional career. This finding is consistent with Buckley and Lee's (2018) assertion that extra-curricular activities have a positive effect on students' employability post-graduation.

While no significant relationship was shown between the two groups for communication, connection, student-athlete experience, and undergraduate experience themes, there are interesting insights that may be useful for the athletic department.

### **Communication**

Ridley and Boone (2001) indicated that an alumnus's loyalty to the university is supported by communication from the university. It is interesting to note that both career program and non-career program athlete alumni receive information from the athletic department (90%) and former team (80%). These athlete alumni are more likely to follow their team (66%)

on social media than the athletic department (37%). Eighty-five percent of the athlete alumni visit the athletic department website so it is an important communication tool.

As Levine (2008) indicated, there is a relationship between university communications and alumni donations. Athletic department leaders may want to get deeper insights into the most effective way to communicate with athlete alumni. Whether athlete alumni prefer to be communicated with by their team, athletic department, or university. They should also examine the type of content athlete alumni prefer to consume, such as a student-athlete career launch story or team update.

### **Connection**

Staying connected to the athletic department and their former team is important to athlete alumni. Ninety-two percent of athlete alumni agree that the success of the athletic department and their former team are important. The athlete alumni also have pride in the university (99%) and the athletic department (89%). This is consistent with university alumni having an existing connection to the university (Gallo, 2013). In addition, athlete alumni are more interested in staying connected to their former team (92%) than the athletics department (79%). With only 66% of athlete alumni attending an alumni game, athletic event, or university event, it shows the importance of staying connected through digital communications.

The Career Program is a perfect engagement point for alumni to stay connected with the university. Athletic department leaders who do not have a structured program can still work with each team to engage their athlete alumni. Typically, teams connect once a year with an alumni game, but they can also have athlete alumni speak to the team about their career path and provide mentorship opportunities.

### **Student-Athlete Experience**

For the student-athlete experience theme, 82% of career program varsity athlete alumni felt supported by the athletic department compared to 72% of non-career program varsity athlete alumni. Athlete alumni felt they were treated fairly by the athletic department (87%), and the majority had a good experience playing their college sport (83%). It is important to highlight that only 70% of athlete alumni felt supported by their coaches compared to 89% of athlete alumni who felt supported by their teammates. Athlete alumni feeling not supported by their coaches may be contributing to a terrible athletic experience, influencing athletic department donations (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Shapiro et al., 2010). Shapiro et al. (2010) indicated that a student-athlete experience is an uncontrollable (e.g., lack of playing time) and semi-controllable (e.g., off-field support) donor constraint. Athletic department leaders should continue to put their efforts into providing off-field support. The Career Program is one of those efforts that should continue to be examined.

### **Undergraduate Experience**

Athlete alumni value their university degree (97%) and had a positive college academic (87%) and social experience (94%). They also felt they were treated fairly by the university (90%); however, only 76% of athlete alumni felt supported by the university, and 77% felt supported by the athletic department. This is concerning because research studies have indicated that a student's experience is an indication of developing alumni loyalty and providing future support as a university alumni (Alves & Raposo, 2007; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Iskhakova et al., 2017; McDearmon & Shirley, 2009; Pumerantz, 2005).

Athletic department leaders should continue to build relationships with Student Affairs and other undergraduate support units on-campus. Student-athletes not feeling supported by the

university and the athletic department may be a result of them feeling isolated from the general student population (O'Neil & Schenke, 2007). This feeling of isolation could be due to the lack of communication and coordination between the athletic department and university.

### **Other Considerations**

This study's findings showed that career program and non-career program varsity athlete alumni were generally happy with the athletic department as it related to the athlete alumni affinity statements. This may be an indication that intercollegiate athletic departments and universities are already providing strong support for their student-athletes. Chen et al. (2010) asserted that student-athletes take advantage of their on-campus athletic status to receive career preparation services and internships. In Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) national study, they found student-athletes believed that athletics participation contributed to their university experience in preparing for life post-graduation. Their athletic participation positively influenced their personal and educational growth as well as the development of leadership, teamwork, responsibility, decision-making and time management skills. Student-athletes also believed that the university or athletic department provided the support they needed to help them succeed academically (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007).

Research studies have also indicated that participation in intercollegiate athletics may be providing student-athletes starting their career a salary advantage (Henderson et al., 2006; Sauer, et al., 2013). Through the first ten years of their career, athlete alumni make higher salaries than non-athlete alumni (Sauer, et al., 2013). Henderson et al. (2006) also asserted that athlete alumni on average earn higher wages than their non-athlete counterparts. Within the first five years of graduation, female athlete alumna salaries were higher than male athlete alumni salaries (Sauer et al., 2013). In addition, Long and Caudill (1991) estimated that male athlete alumni made four

percent higher salaries than their non-athlete counterparts. So, the mere fact that student-athletes participate in intercollegiate athletics may be enough for them to obtain a successful career launch.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

For more reliable results, researchers should consider increasing the survey population by including other private and public universities that have a Career Program for student-athletes. While Career Programs are relatively a new phenomenon, these programs are starting to pop up at many Division I schools for the entire athletic program or revenue-generating sports (e.g., football). Having a more diverse athlete alumni survey population may result in a higher response rate and more dependable results.

A qualitative approach can also be taken, rather than asking athlete alumni to fit their perspectives into limited response options provided by the researcher. In-depth interviews with athlete alumni who have gone through the Career Program may result in a deeper understanding of the program's impact on their affinity for the athletics department. Additionally, it could help uncover the athlete alumni's impressions of the Career Program as well as them elaborating on the connection and affinity they feel for the athletics department.

While this research study focused on athlete alumni who participated in the Career Program, future research should consider examining athlete alumni and university alumni who volunteer for the program. The Career Program offers a different engagement point with the athletic department for alumni who may not have been actively involved with the athletic department previously. A study could track athlete alumni Career Program engagement over a specified period of time and whether it influenced a charitable donation to the athletic department.

As stated, athlete alumni affinity is not well-studied. The focus of athlete alumni research has been on donor motivations and constraints (Meer & Rosen, 2009; O'Neil & Schenke, 2007; Rankin et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2010). Researchers should consider developing a validated athlete alumni affinity scale that can be used in future studies. A validated and reliable scale may provide researchers a powerful tool resulting in additional research on athlete alumni affinity.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation to this study was low response rate. The study included 35 career program varsity athlete alumni respondents and 36 non-career program varsity athlete alumni respondents. The questionnaire was distributed to a total of 611 athlete alumni with 71 athlete alumni respondents. The 12% response rate was a threat to internal validity and may have affected the study's results. This low response rate may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic or an indication of athlete alumni having low engagement with the athletic department. Gallo (2012) asserted that engagement is part of the alumni relationship building cycle prior to reaching the support stage to give back. If athlete alumni are not reaching the engagement stage, this is consistent with Shapiro et al. (2010) and O'Neil and Schenke's (2007) assertion that athlete alumni donate in small numbers to their university or athletics department. The athlete alumni surveyed also have been out of school for 10 or fewer years. Their level of alumni affinity may be different based on the years they have been away from the university (Gallo, 2012, 2013).

Other limitations include that all findings were based on athlete alumni self-reported measures, and the quasi-experimental research design may have been influenced by confounding variables the researcher cannot control or measure. The athlete alumni were also from one large, public university and the study's sample only included two classes of athlete alumni who

participated in the Career Program. The research participants participated in one or two years of a 4-year structured program. The athlete alumni may not have experienced the true impact of the Career Program.

### **Conclusion**

The quantitative quasi-experimental study examined the relationship between a Career Program and athlete alumni affinity for the athletics department. The study used SET to examine the relationship between a student athlete's successful career launch and athlete alumni affinity. The athlete alumni who graduated from one large, public institution at the FCS level were contacted with an online questionnaire with 29 Likert-type scale statements that measure athlete alumni affinity. With the questionnaire only being distributed to six graduating classes of athlete alumni from one university, the low response rate was a threat to the reliability and validity of the findings.

The study's findings showed no relationship between the Career Program and athlete alumni affinity. There was also no statistical significance indicated between the career program varsity athlete alumni and non-career program varsity athlete alumni for the five latent variables of (a) career preparedness, (b) communication, (c) connection, (d) student-athlete experience, and (e) undergraduate experience. Under career preparedness, two athlete alumni affinity statements showed significance relating to the athletic department helping student-athletes with their LinkedIn profile and professional resume. Thus, the Career Program is providing student-athletes support building professional tools to help them launch post-graduation. It is important that athletic leaders continue to examine the role of the Career Program and its effect on athlete alumni's relationship with the athletic department.

## REFERENCES

- Alves, H., & Raposo, M. (2007). Conceptual model of student satisfaction in higher education. *Total Quality Management, 18*, 571-588. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14783360601074315>
- Baade, R. A., & Sundberg, J. O. (1996). Fourth down and gold to go? Assessing the link between athletics and alumni giving. *Social Science Quarterly (University of Texas Press), 77*, 789-803. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42863532>
- Berquam, L. M. (2013). *Affinity development in undergraduate students at a large research institution* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Colorado State University, Fort Collins.
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Boston University. (2020). *Student life: Student athlete code of conduct*. <http://www.bu.edu/policies/student-athlete-code-of-conduct/>
- Brown, C., Glastetter-Fender, C., & Shelton, M. (2000). Psychosocial identity and career control in college student-athletes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 56*(1), 53-62. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1999.1691>
- Brown, R. M., & Mazzarol, T. W. (2009). The importance of institutional image to student satisfaction and loyalty in higher education. *The International Journal of Higher Education Research, 58*, 81-95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9183-8>
- Buckley, P., & Lee, P. (2018). The impact of extra-curricular activity on student-experience. *Active Learning in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787418808988>
- Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). (n.d.). *Gross domestic product*. <https://www.bea.gov/data/gdp/gross-domestic-product>

- Burke, M. (2020, May 5). California State University \$300 million in coronavirus-related losses. *EdSource*. <https://edsource.org/2020/california-state-university-faces-more-than-300-million-in-coronavirus-related-losses/630905>
- Burns, G. N., Jasinski, D., Dunn, S., & Fletcher, D. (2013). Academic support services and career decision-making self-efficacy in student athletes. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *61*(2), 161-167. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2013.00044.x>
- Burnsed, B. (2014, August 20). *Growth in Division I athletics expenses outpaces revenue increases*. NCAA. <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/growth-division-i-athletics-expenses-outpaces-revenue-increases>
- Burrows, B. (2018, January 8). *What is the difference between a public and private university?* Study in the USA. <https://www.studyusa.com/en/a/1290/what-is-the-difference-between-a-public-and-private-university>
- Carodine, K., Almond, K. F., & Gratto, K. K. (2001). College student athlete success both in and out of the classroom. *New Directions for Student Services*, *93*, 19-33.
- Chanmin, P., Yong Jae, K. O., Hee Youn, K. I. M., Sagas, M., & Eddosary, M. (2016). Donor motivation in college sport: Does contribution level matter? *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, *44*, 1015-1032. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2016.44.6.1015>
- Chen, S., Snyder, S., & Magner, M. (2010). The effects of sport participation on student-athletes' and non-athlete students' social life and identity. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, *3*, 176-193.

- Cornell University Athletics. (2020). *Student-athlete rights and responsibilities*.  
<https://cornellbigred.com/sports/2018/4/24/student-athlete-rights-and-responsibilities.aspx>
- Coughlin, C. C., & Erekson, O. H. (1985). Contributions to intercollegiate athletic programs: Further evidence. *Social Science Quarterly (University of Texas Press)*, 66(1), 194-202.
- Council for Aid to Education (CAE). (2018). *Colleges and universities raise \$43.60 billion in 2017* [Press release]. <https://cae.org/images/uploads/pdf/VSE-2017-Press-Release.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd.
- Dickler, J. (2019, June 18). Charitable contributions take a hit following tax reform. *CNBC News*. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/18/post-tax-reform-charitable-contributions-took-a-hit-in-2018.html>
- EAB. (2019). *Advancement's State of the Union: A look at fundraising and engagement trends for 2019* [Power Point Slides]. [https://eab.com › Advancement's-State-of-the-Union-2019\\_JM-1.18.19.pptx](https://eab.com › Advancement's-State-of-the-Union-2019_JM-1.18.19.pptx)
- Emerson, R. M. (1976). Social exchange theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2, 335-362.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.002003>
- Fresk, K. L., & Mullendore, R. H. (2012). Connecting student employment, involvement, and alumni affinity. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 36(2), 140-151.  
<https://doi.org/10.1123/rsj.36.2.140>
- Fulks, D. L. (2017). *Revenues and expenses 2004-2016*. National Collegiate Athletic Association. [http://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/2017RES\\_D1-RevExp\\_Entire\\_2017\\_Final\\_20180123.pdf](http://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/2017RES_D1-RevExp_Entire_2017_Final_20180123.pdf)

- Gaier, S. E. (2001). *Increasing alumni involvement and alumni financial support through a Student Alumni Association* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ERIC Database. (ED451767)
- Gallo, M. (2012). Beyond philanthropy: Recognizing the value of alumni to benefit higher education institutions. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 18(1), 41-55.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2011.611892>
- Gallo, M. (2013). Higher education over a lifespan: A gown to grave assessment of a lifelong relationship between universities and their graduates. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38, 1150-1161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.833029>
- Gaski, J. F., & Etzel, M. J. (1984). Collegiate athletic success and alumni generosity: Dispelling the myth. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, 12(1), 29-38.
- Giving USA. (2019, June 18). *Giving USA 2019: Americans gave \$427.71 billion to charity in 2018 amid complex year for charitable giving*. [Press release].  
<https://givingusa.org/giving-usa-2019-americans-gave-427-71-billion-to-charity-in-2018-amid-complex-year-for-charitable-giving/>
- Gladden, J. M., Mahony, D. F., & Apostolopoulou, A. (2005). Toward a better understanding of college athletic donors: What are the primary motives? *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 14(1), 18-30.
- Gribbons, B., & Herman, J. (1997). True and quasi-experimental designs. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 5(14), 1-7. <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/pare/vol5/iss1/14>
- Hazelrigg, N. (2019, June 20). Larger donations, fewer donors. *Insider Higher Education*.  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/06/20/donations-colleges-are-number-donors-down>

- Heale, R., & Twycross, A. (2015). Validity and reliability in quantitative studies. *Evidence-Based Nursing, 18*(3), 66-67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102129>
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Langer, M. F., & Hansen, U. (2001). Modeling and managing student loyalty: An approach based on the concept of relationship quality. *Journal of Service Research, 3*, 331-344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109467050134006>
- Hearn, J. C. (2003). *Diversifying campus revenue streams: Opportunities and risks*. American Council of Education.
- Henderson, D.J., Olbrecht, A., & Polachek, S.W. (2006). Do former college athletes earn more at work? A nonparametric assessment. *The Journal of Human Resources, 41*(3), 558-577. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40057269>
- Homans, G. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology, 63*, 597-606. <https://doi.org/10.1086/222355>
- Hosick, M. B. (2018, November 14). *College athletes graduate at record high rates: Improvements among men's basketball, football players contribute to increase*. NCAA. <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/college-athletes-graduate-record-high-rates>
- Hummel, R. (2010). *Factors influencing alumni connection and commitment*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Lethbridge. Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. MR68767, ProQuest document ID 822408775)
- Iskhakova L., Hilbert, A., & Hoffmann, S. (2016). An integrative model of alumni loyalty: An empirical validation among graduates from German and Russian universities. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing, 28*(2), 129-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2015.1006490>

- Iskhakova, L., Hoffmann, S., & Hilbert, A. (2017). Alumni loyalty: Systematic literature review. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 29, 274-316.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2017.1326352>
- Jolly, J. C. (2008). Raising the question #9: Is the student-athlete population unique? And why should we care? *Communication Education*, 57(1), 145-151.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520701613676>
- Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. (2010). *Restoring the balance: Dollars, values, and the future of college sports*. <https://www.knightcommission.org/restoring-the-balance>
- Ko, Y. J., Rhee, Y. C., Walker, M., & Lee, J. H. (2014). What motivates donors to athletic programs: A new model of donor behavior. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43, 523-546. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012472065>
- Kremer, R. (2020, May 7). UW system estimates \$212M in losses through summer due to COVID-19. *Wisconsin Public Radio*. <https://www.wpr.org/uw-system-estimates-212m-losses-through-summer-due-covid-19>
- Levine, W. (2008). Communications and alumni relations: What is the correlation between an institution's communications vehicles and alumni annual giving? *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 8, 176-197. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ijea.2009.2>
- Long, J.E., & Caudill, S.B. (1991). The impact of participation in intercollegiate athletics on income and graduation. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 73(3), 525-531.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2109580>
- Mahony, D. F., Gladden, J. M., & Funk, D. C. (2003). Examining athletic donors at NCAA Division I institutions. *International Sports Journal*, 7(1), 10-27.

Martens, M. P., & Lee, F. K. (1998). Promoting life-career development in the student athlete:

How can career centers help? *Journal of Career Development*, 25(2), 123-134.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/089484539802500205>

McAlexander, J. H., Koenig, H. F., & DuFault, B. (2016). Millennials and boomers: Increasing

alumni affinity and intent to give by target market segmentation. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 21(2), 82-95.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1544>

Meer, J. (2013). The habit of giving. *Economic Inquiry*, 51, 2002-2017.

Meer, J., & Rosen, H. S. (2009). The impact of athletic performance on alumni giving: An

analysis of microdata. *Economics of Education Review*, 28(3), 287-294.

McDearmon, J. T., & Shirley, K. (2009). Characteristics and institutional factors related to young

alumni donors and non-donors. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 83-

95. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ijea.2009.29>

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and*

*implementation* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Milewski, T. D. (2020, July 22). Wisconsin Athletics' revenue hit from COVID-19 could pass

\$100 million without a football season. *Wisconsin State Journal*.

[https://madison.com/wsj/sports/college/football/wisconsin-athletics-revenue-hit-from-covid-19-could-pass-100-million-without-a-football-season/article\\_8bdf70cc-1927-53b1-a70d-ae5f77482064.html](https://madison.com/wsj/sports/college/football/wisconsin-athletics-revenue-hit-from-covid-19-could-pass-100-million-without-a-football-season/article_8bdf70cc-1927-53b1-a70d-ae5f77482064.html)

Moody's. (n.d). *Home page*. <https://www.moody's.com/Pages/atc.aspx>

Moran, E. (2019, September 3). *College athletics departments looking to add revenue going*

*forward*. Front Office Sports. <https://frntofficesport.com/college-athletics-revenue/>

- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). (2015). *Countable athletically related activities, NCAA Bylaw No. 17.02.1*. <https://web3.ncaa.org/lstdbi/bylaw?bylawId=101633>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). (2019a). *NCAA after the game*.  
<http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/former-student-athlete>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). (2019b). *What is the NCAA?*  
<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/what-ncaa>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). (2020a, April 29). *Board of Governors moves toward allowing student-athlete compensation for endorsements and promotions*.  
<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/board-governors-moves-toward-allowing-student-athlete-compensation-endorsements-and-promotions>
- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). (2020b). *How we support college athletes*.  
<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/how-we-support-college-athletes>
- National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2020, September 24). *COVID-19 stay informed with the latest enrollment information*. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/>
- Ohio Athletics. (2020). *Ohio athletics student-athlete code of conduct*.  
<https://www.ohiobobcats.com/information/compliance/ohio-athletics-codeofconduct>
- Ohio State University. (2019). *Ohio State student-athlete handbook*.  
<https://ohiostatebuckeyes.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-2019-Student-Athlete-Handbook.pdf>

- O'Neil, J., & Schenke, M. (2007). An examination of factors impacting athlete alumni donations to their alma mater: A case study of a U.S. university. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12(1), 59-74. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.274>
- Pentecost, R., & Andrews, L. (2010). Differences between students and non-students' willingness to donate to a charitable organization. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 15(2), 122-136. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.362>
- Potuto, J.R., & O'Hanlon, J. (2007). National study of student-athletes regarding their experiences as college students. *College Student Journal*, 41(4), 947-966.  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db-a9h&AN=2835193&site=ehost-live>
- Pumerantz, R. K. (2005). Alumni-in-training: A public roadmap for success. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 5, 289-300.
- Rankin, S., Merson, D., Garvey, J. C., Sorgen, C. H., Menon, I., Loya, K., & Oseguera, L. (2016). The influence of climate on the academic and athletic success of student-athletes: Results from a multi-institutional national study. *Journal of Higher Education*, 87, 701-730.
- Ridley, D. R., & Boone, M. R. (2001). *Alumni loyalty: A survey investigation*. Virginia Beach: Virginia Wesleyan College. Retrieved from ERIC Database. (ED456720)
- Rubens, N., Russell, M., Perez, R., Huhtamaki, J., Still, K., Kaplan, D., & Okamoto, T. (2010, April 4-6). *Alumni network analysis*. IEEE Global Engineering Educational Conference EDCON 2011, Amman, Jordan.

- Sandstedt, S. D., Cox, R. H., Martens, M. P., Ward, D. G., Webber, S. N., & Ivey, S. (2004). Development of the student-athlete career situation inventory (SACSI). *Journal of Career Development, 31*(2), 79-83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10871-004-0566-5>
- Sauer, S., Desmond, S., & Heintzelman, M. (2013). Beyond the playing field: The role of athletic participation in early career success. *Personnel Review, 42*(6), 644-661. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-08-2012-0149>
- Shaffer, S., Fitzgerald, S., & Smith, K. (2018, December). 2019 US higher education outlook *2018 Higher Education Government Relations Conference*. Talk conducted at the meeting of American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Atlanta, GA.
- Shapiro, S. L. (2010). Does service matter? An examination of donor perceptions of service quality in college athletics. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 19*(3), 154-165.
- Shapiro, S. L., & Ridinger, L. L. (2011). An analysis of donor involvement, gender, and giving in college athletics. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 20*(1), 22-32.
- Shapiro, S. L., Giannoulakis, C., Drayer, J., & Wang, C.-H. (2010). An examination of athletic alumni giving behavior: Development of the former student-athlete donor constraint scale. *Sport Management Review (Elsevier Science), 13*, 283-295.
- Shulman, J. L., & Bowen, W. G. (2001). *The game of life: College sports and educational values*. Princeton University Press.
- Simon, M. K. (2011). *Role of the researcher* [PDF file]. Dissertation Recipes. <http://www.dissertationrecipes.com/author/mksimon/>

- Smith, C. (2020, August 17). Nonrevenue sports grapple with an uncertain future. *Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal*.  
<https://www.sportsbusinessdaily.com/Journal/Issues/2020/08/17/Colleges/Nonrevenue.aspx>
- Snijders, I., Wijnia, L., Rikers, M. J. P., & Loyens, S. M. M. (2019). Alumni loyalty drivers in higher education. *Social Psychology of Education, 22*, 607-627.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-019-09488-4>
- Stanford University. (2020). *Stanford University student-athlete handbook*.  
[https://gostanford.com/documents/2019/10/29/2019\\_20\\_Student\\_Athlete\\_Handbook.pdf](https://gostanford.com/documents/2019/10/29/2019_20_Student_Athlete_Handbook.pdf)
- Stephenson, A. L., & Bell, N. (2014). Motivation for alumni donations: A social identity perspective on the role of branding in higher education. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 19*(3), 176-186.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1495>
- Stinson, J. L., & Howard, D. R. (2004). Scoreboards vs. motorboards: Major donor behavior and intercollegiate athletics. *Sports Marketing Quarterly, 13*(2), 129-140.
- Stinson, J. L., & Howard, D. R. (2010). Intercollegiate athletics as an institutional fundraising tool: An exploratory donor-based view. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing, 22*, 312-335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10495140802662572>
- Stout, M. (2018). *Does participation in college athletics prepare student-athletes for careers and life after college sports? A review of the literature*. (Master's synthesis project). The College at Brockport.

- Svoboda, K. (2020, June 29). *Revenue losses from COVID-19 make U-M Athletics deficit likely in FY '21*. Michigan Athletics. <https://mgoblue.com/news/2020/6/29/general-revenue-losses-from-covid-19-make-u-m-athletics-deficit-likely-in-fy-21.aspx>
- Tannous, J. (2017, December). State of the union: Redefining leadership in the face of market and mission shifts. *Business Affairs Forum*. On-Demand Webconference conducted at EAB.com.
- Tax Policy Center. (n.d.). *Briefing book*. <https://www.taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/what-are-itemized-deductions-and-who-claims-them>
- Tessier-Lavigne, M., Drell, P., & Muir, B. (2020, July 8). An open letter to the Stanford community and the Stanford athletics family. *Stanford News*.  
<https://news.stanford.edu/2020/07/08/athletics/>
- Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Thomas, J. A., & Smart, J. (2005, May-June). *The relationship between personal and social growth and involvement in college and subsequent alumni giving*. Paper session presented at the Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, San Diego, CA. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED491032>
- Tsiotsou, R. (1998). Motivations for donation to athletic programs. *The Cyber Journal of Sports Journal*, 2(2).
- Tsiotsou, R. (2006). Investigating differences between female and male athletic donors: A comparative study. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 11(3), 209-223. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.34>

- Tsiotsou, R. (2007). An empirically based typology of intercollegiate donors: High and low motivation scenarios. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis of Marketing*, 15(2), 79-92. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jt.5750037>
- University of Oklahoma. (2018). *There's only one Oklahoma: Student-Athlete handbook*. <https://soonersports.com/sports/2019/8/8/208789384.aspx>
- Walker, A. G. (2015). Division I intercollegiate athletics success and the financial impact on universities. *SAGE Open*, 4(5), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015611186>
- Weiner, J. (2009, October). *College sports 101: A primer on money, athletics, and higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. <https://www.knightcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/cs101.pdf>
- Wells, D. E., Southall, R. M., Stotlar, D., & Mundfrom, D. J. (2005). Factors related to annual fund-raising contributions from individual donors to NCAA Division I-A institutions. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 6(1), 3-10.
- Wolverton, B., & Kambhampati, S. (2016, 27 January). Colleges raised \$1.2 billion in donations for sports in 2015. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Raised-12-Billion/235058>
- Zemsky, R., & Rogers, P. (2019). *Too important to fail, too big to be complacent. An analysis of higher education market risks and stressors*. Washington, DC: American Council of Education (ACE) and TIAA Institute.

## APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENT

## Athlete Alumni Affinity Questionnaire

## Likert Scale

Agree, Disagree, Prefer Not To Answer

## Career Preparedness

The athletic department helped me develop a LinkedIn profile

The athletic department helped me develop a professional resume

I felt prepared to interview for jobs or graduate school when I finished my college athletic career

The athletic department prepared me to enter the workforce or graduate school post-collegiate playing career

I was employed or attending graduate school within six months after graduation

Being a college student-athlete helped me develop skills that I use in my professional career

## Communication

I receive information from the athletic department

I receive information from my former team

I am up-to-date on athletic department news

I follow the athletic department on social media

I follow my team on social media

I visit the athletic department website

## Connection

The success of the athletic department is important to me

The success of my team is important to me

I have pride in the athletic department

I have pride in the university

I attend my alumni game, athletic events or university events

I am interested in staying connected to my former team

I am interested in staying connected with the athletics department

## Student-Athlete Experience

I felt supported by the athletic department

I was treated fairly by the athletic department

I had a good experience playing my college sport

My coaches were supportive during my playing career

I felt supported by my teammates

Undergraduate Student Experience  
I felt supported by the university  
I was treated fairly by the university  
My college academic experience was positive  
My college social experience was positive  
I value my university degree

## APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE PROTOCOL

## Pilot Survey Deployment

April 27, 2020 Pre-testing of questionnaire sent by email from Qualtrics to 188 softball athlete alumni\*  
\*Years excluded 2014, 2015, 2018 and 2019

May 5, 2020 Reminder email

## Pilot Survey Analysis

May 11-15, 2020 Pre-testing pilot survey statistical analysis

May 18-22, 2020 Questionnaire revisions (no revisions)

## Questionnaire Deployment

June 10, 2020 First questionnaire instrument sent by email from Qualtrics to both groups of athlete alumni (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019)

June 13, 2020 Second questionnaire follow up sent by email from Qualtrics to both groups of athlete alumni (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019)

June 16, 2020 Third questionnaire follow up sent by email from Qualtrics to both groups of athlete alumni (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019)

July 9, 2020 Fourth questionnaire follow up sent by email by the athletics dept. to both groups of athlete alumni (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019)

July 14, 2020 Fifth questionnaire follow up sent by email by the athletics dept. to both groups of athlete alumni (2014, 2015, 2018, 2019)

August 17, 2020 First questionnaire instrument sent by email from Qualtrics to non-career program athlete alumni (2010, 2012)

August 25, 2020 Second questionnaire follow up sent by email from Qualtrics to non-career program athlete alumni (2010, 2012)

September 1, 2020 Third questionnaire follow up sent by email from Qualtrics to non-career program athlete alumni (2010, 2012)

September 3, 2020 Starbucks gift cards digital email disbursement

Survey Platform Qualtrics.com

## Questionnaire Analysis

September 2-9, 2020

Questionnaire statistical analysis (Descriptive statistics and  
Pearson chi-squared test)  
Results added to spreadsheet

## APPENDIX C: PILOT STUDY NOTIFICATION

*Subject Line:* Support Needed for Your Fellow (Mascot and sport) Alumna

Hello (Mascot name),

I hope this email finds you and your family well.

I wanted to reach out and ask you to support your fellow (Mascot name and sport) alumna, Heather Hunter (XXXX-XXXX). Heather is currently a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific and she is conducting a research study on athlete alumni affinity.

Heather is inviting you to participate in a pilot study for an online questionnaire on athlete alumni affinity. By participating, it will allow her to refine her survey instrument for the larger research study. Her hope is that her research can help enhance the student-athlete experience.

The questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes to complete and your answers will be kept strictly confidential. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Heather directly at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or reply to this email.

**Follow this link to the Survey:**

[\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${1://SurveyURL}](#)

Thank you for helping a fellow (Mascot name) with her research project and your continued support of (Institution name) Softball. We look forward to seeing you at a game next season.

Go (Mascot name)!

(Head softball coach name)

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Office of the Research at (209) 946-3903 or [irb@pacific.edu](mailto:irb@pacific.edu).

## APPENDIX D: PILOT STUDY REMINDER EMAIL

Fellow (Mascot name):

This a friendly reminder asking you to participate in the *Athlete Alumni Affinity Survey*. Your support of my pilot study will help refine my survey instrument for my larger research study.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and your answers will be kept in strict confidentiality. If you have any questions, you can reach me on my cell phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or reply to this email.

**Follow this link to the Survey:**

[\\${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${l://SurveyURL}](#)

I appreciate you supporting my research and doctoral journey at the University of the Pacific.

With (Mascot name) Pride,

Heather Hunter

(Institution name) Softball Alumna (Playing years)

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Office of the Research at (209) 946-3903 or [irb@pacific.edu](mailto:irb@pacific.edu).

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${l://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

## APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE EMAIL

*Subject Line:* Support Needed For a Fellow (Mascot name) Athlete Alumna

Dear Fellow (Mascot name),

I am a former (Institution name and sport) alumna and I am currently a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific. I am conducting a research study on athlete alumni affinity. My hope is that my research can help enhance the student-athlete experience.

I am inviting you to participate in an online questionnaire because you are a former student-athlete who competed on a (Institution name) varsity sports team. I would appreciate you taking ten minutes to fill out my online questionnaire on athlete alumni affinity. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential.

You will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 Starbucks gift card for completing the questionnaire. A total of four gift cards will be awarded in September.

You can find the questionnaire link below. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or reply to this email.

Thank you in advance for your time supporting my research study. I am humbled and grateful that I belong to the (Mascot name) community.

With (Mascot name) Pride,

Heather Hunter  
(Institution and graduation year)

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Office of the Research at (209) 946-3903 or [irb@pacific.edu](mailto:irb@pacific.edu).

## APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRE EMAIL FOLLOW-UP

*Subject Line:* Follow Up: (Institution) Athlete Alumni Affinity Questionnaire

Dear Fellow (Mascot name),

I am a former (Institution name and sport) alumna and I am currently a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific. I am conducting a research study on athlete alumni affinity. My hope is that my research can help enhance the student-athlete experience.

I am inviting you to participate in an online questionnaire because you are a former student-athlete who competed on a (Institution name) varsity sports team. I would appreciate you taking ten minutes to fill out my online questionnaire on athlete alumni affinity. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential.

You will automatically be entered into a drawing for a \$100 Starbucks gift card for completing the questionnaire. A total of four gift cards will be awarded in September.

You can find the questionnaire below. By clicking on the questionnaire link, you are providing your electronic consent. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by replying to this email.

Thank you in advance for your time supporting my research study. I'm humbled and grateful that I belong to the (Mascot name) community.

With (Mascot name) Pride,

Heather Hunter  
(Institution and graduation year)

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Office of the Research at (209) 946-3903 or [irb@pacific.edu](mailto:irb@pacific.edu).

## APPENDIX G: QUESTIONNAIRE ATHLETICS DEPARTMENT FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

Hello (Mascot name) Alumni,

We hope this email finds you and your family safe and healthy.

We are reaching out to you today to ask for support for fellow (Institution name) athlete alumna, Heather Hunter (Sport and graduation year) who is currently working to complete her doctoral degree at the University of the Pacific. As a part of a research study she is working on, Heather is evaluating student-athlete alumni affinity to help improve the student-athlete experience. As an athlete-alumnus yourself, feedback on your experiences are exactly the type of information she is looking for.

You can help support her research by completing a short questionnaire, which should take between 5-10 minutes. Please note, your responses to this questionnaire will be confidential and not share with (Insert institution) Athletics.

Athlete Alumni Affinity Questionnaire ([Hyperlink](#))

Thank you for your support of the (Mascot name) Family.

Go (Mascot)!

If you have any questions, or would like to follow up with Heather Hunter about this project, please reach out to her at: (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

## APPENDIX H: QUESTIONNAIRE THANK YOU

Thank you for completing the athlete alumni affinity questionnaire. Your contact information will be kept in strict confidentiality.

## APPENDIX I: DOCUMENT PROTOCOL

## Document Procurement:

- Email athletics staff contact for 2018 and 2019 Career Program Varsity Athlete Alumni participation list from ARMS. Ask the staff contact to email the downloaded data in an Excel document
- Submit an Advance records data request for athlete alumni who graduated in 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018 and 2019 to AIS
- Cross-check 2018 and 2019 athlete alumni Advance records with the athletics ARMS list to confirm Career Program participation
- Submit a data request for athlete alumni giving statistics to the Advancement Services Department
- Search for documents via athletics website

## Document Analysis:

- Scan through documents to assess value to research
- Read thoroughly identifying important information
- Record important information and transfer to spreadsheet

## APPENDIX J: ELECTRONIC CONSENT FORM

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are agreeing to provide the most honest answers that you can. Your participation and contact information will be kept in strict confidentiality.

By selecting “I agree”, you are consenting to the conditions described above and you are 18 years of age or older.

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline by clicking on the “I disagree” button.

I agree

I disagree