A PROFILE OF THE MAJOR SELECTION OF STUDENT ATHLETES AT A DIVISION I-AA INSTITUTION AND HOW THEY COMPARE TO STUDENTS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine what student athletes were majoring in, whether they differed from non-athletes at the same institution, and how being a student athlete influenced their major selection. This study addressed student athletes participating at a division I-AA University. The university is a member of the NCAA with approximately 250 student athletes participating in fourteen varsity sports. In the quantitative study a One-Sample Chi-Square was used to determine if student athletes differ significantly from students in the general population. Similar studies were conducted classifying the student athletes by gender and sport profile. A Contingency Chi-Square was used to determine if the student athletes differed from each other in the selection of a major when classified by gender, sport profile, and recruitment status. The qualitative study addressed how the experience of being a student athlete influenced their selection of a major. Results show that student athletes were not selecting the same majors as their non-athlete counterparts. Significant differences were also found when comparing student athletes to students in the general population after classifying them by gender and sport profile. Among student athletes, only gender was found to be a significant determinant of major. Results from the qualitative study found that athletic participation has impacted the major selection of college athletes in a variety of ways including: time available to devote to academics, the scheduling of classes during athletic practices, and the treatment of professors and advisors toward their athletic status.
Students decide to attend college for a variety of reasons and the academic programs offered at an institution may influence their selection of a university (2004, August 27. The Chronicle of Higher Education). One of the critical educational decisions made by college students is the selection a college major (Leppel, Williams, & Waldauer, 2001) and the choice of major is an important factor in career development and vocational choice (Turner & Bowen, 1999). Students may enter college having already chosen a major and career while others are undecided much later in their course work (Kim, Markham, & Cangelosi, 2002). Almost half of all college students will change their major (Healy, 1982). According to a study by Kramer, Higley, & Olsen (1994) two-thirds of freshman students change their academic major, with twenty percent of these students doing so more than once. In addition, nearly half of all sophomore students, a third of junior students, and a quarter of senior students change their academic major (Kramer, Higley, & Olsen, 1994).

College student athletes are seen by some as a unique population requiring special attention (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1996). The traditional motivations for selecting a university may not apply to college students who are recruited for their athletic talent, rather than their possible academic contributions (Mathes & Gurney, 1985). While college students have the opportunity to change their choice of major, this is an option that may not be as readily available for student athletes. To maintain their athletic
eligibility student athletes must make academic progress toward a degree, while non-athlete students have the opportunity to explore different majors by taking a variety of courses without time constraints (Clow, 2000).

According to bylaw 14.4.3.2 of the NCAA Division I Manual,

“A student-athlete who is entering his or her third year of collegiate enrollment shall have completed successfully at least 40 percent of the course requirements in the student's specific degree program. A student-athlete who is entering his or her fourth year of collegiate enrollment shall have completed successfully at least 60 percent of the course requirements in the student's specific degree program. A student-athlete who is entering his or her fifth year of collegiate enrollment shall have completed successfully at least 80 percent of the course requirements in the student's specific degree program.”

Student athletes are challenged to manage the dual roles of student and athlete (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000). With a highly structured lifestyle, often dictated by others, college athletes experience a great deal of constraints placed on their time (Martens & Cox, 2000). Student athletes are faced with the challenge of balancing academics and athletics, managing success and failure, optimizing physical health to minimize injury, maintaining multiple relationships with parents, coaches, friends, and community, preparing and coping with the termination of their athletic career, all the while being isolated from social and core “mainstream activities” (Parham, 1993).

“Time and energy constraints experienced by student-athletes may lead them to neglect academic and career planning activities which are part of the experience of other college students (Pendergrass, Hansen, Neuman, & Nutter, 2003, p. 212).”

To meet the obligations of their scholarship student athletes are forced to miss classes, exams, and run the risk of choosing majors that work best with their athletic schedules (Hollis, 2001).
Today’s college athletic administrators have many tasks including complying with NCAA regulations, providing services for their student athletes (Hamilton & Watt, 2001), and fielding competitive teams (Suggs, 2002). These administrators need to develop an understanding of what student athletes are majoring in.

“The determinants of a student’s choice of major are not only important to college administrators and faculty for their academic planning, but they also have major implications for public policies concerning resource allocation in higher education. By understanding the students’ decision making processes, faculty and administrators can respond to current needs and anticipate future ones (Leppel, Williams, & Waldauer, 2001).”

According to several researchers (Blann, 1985; ect) vocational resources at a college or university generally do not prepare athletes for a career outside athletics. In addition, college athletes may lag behind their non-athlete peers in areas of career development (Martens & Cox, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

College administrators need to know what student athletes are majoring in. This information will be used to provide a foundation for the development of a profile of student athletes, which will be compared to the profile of general students at the institution to determine if they select majors at the same rates as the general population. If there is a difference between the profiles of student athletes and students in the general population then college administrators need to establish possible explanations for this discrepancy.

If such differences do exist how can the institution address them? Some key questions to be asked include: what are the barriers that are keeping student athletes from
majoring in certain programs? Are there external factors that keep student athletes from choosing certain majors? Are departments making adequate accommodations so student athletes can successfully major in their department?

Administrators’ knowledge of the factors effecting major selection will allow them to better assist student athletes with the major selection process. This information will be used to identify what majors are in demand for student athletes, and how should resources be allocated to respond to this demand. By understanding what factors influence student athletes selection of a college major, institutions will be able to address possible barriers, with the hope of giving student athletes equal access to all academic programs offered at the institution.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of the study was to determine what student athletes were majoring in, whether they differed from non-athletes at the same institution, and how being a student athlete influenced their major selection.

Research Questions

Quantitative Study

1. What is the current academic major of junior and senior athletes?

2. How does the major of junior and senior student athletes compare to junior and senior students in the general population at the same institution?
3. When classified by gender and the profile of their sport of participation is there a difference in major between junior and senior student athletes and junior and senior students at the same institution?

4. Among student athletes, how do female athletes compare to male athletes in their choice of a major?

5. Among student athletes, how do high profile athletes compare to low profile athletes in their choice of a major?

6. Among student athletes, how do recruited athletes compare to walk-on athletes in their choice of a major?

**Qualitative Study**

7. How did their experience of being a student athlete impact their selection of a college major?

**Significance of This Study**

This study is significant because student athletes are a unique sub-group of the larger population of college students. Student athletes are forced to comply with rules and regulations regarding many areas of their academic pursuits, including progression toward a degree. The purpose of this study was to see if a difference existed between the majors selected by student athletes and the majors selected by the general student population. College administrators can use this information to address the needs of this population.
Definitions

1. A student athlete is a student whose enrollment was solicited by a member of the athletics staff or other representative of athletics interests with a view toward the student’s ultimate participation in the intercollegiate athletic program. In order to be classified as a student athlete the student must be participating in a varsity level of sanctioned sport at an institution governed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

2. The NCAA is the National Collegiate Athletic Association. It is a voluntary association of about 1,200 colleges and universities, athletic conferences and sports organizations devoted to the sound administration of intercollegiate athletics.

3. A recruit is an athlete who was on the coach’s list at the time admission decisions were made.

4. A walk-on is an athlete competing on an intercollegiate athletic team who was not on the coach’s list at the time admission decisions were made.

5. A high profile sport refers to men’s basketball, football, and hockey, and may be called a “revenue producing sport.”

6. A low profile sport refers to all other sports; including but not limited to volleyball, women’s basketball, men and women’s track and field,
cross country, tennis, golf, swimming, and soccer. It may also be referred to as a “non-revenue producing sport.”

7. **Traditional majors** were defined as those included in the College of Business, the College of Education, Health & Human Development, and the males majoring in the College of Letters & Science where the results of the quantitative study showed student athletes were over enrolled.

8. **Non-traditional majors** were defined as those included in the College of Agriculture, the College of Arts & Architecture, the College of Engineering, the College of Nursing, and females majoring in the College of Letters & Science where the results of the quantitative study showed student athletes were under enrolled. These categories are based on the results of the quantitative section of this study.

**Preview of Study**

This study addresses student athletes and their selection of a college major. The purpose of this descriptive study was to develop a profile of the academic major of junior and senior athletes from a Division I-AA institution. Quantitative methods were used to address the major selection of athletes and compared these results to the major selection of non-athletes. Qualitative methods were used to determine how the experience of being a student athlete impacted their major selection. The next chapter includes literature relevant to the current study.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature that has previously been written addressing this topic. The literature review begins by addressing the following: identity theory, the choice of major among college students, how socioeconomic and dual factors influence major selection. In addition, this chapter also looks at the factors influencing the selection of a college by student athletes, the career maturity of student athletes, the major selection of student athletes; and how this compares to non-athletes. Finally, this chapter also examines research that looks at the career development differences among varying groups of student athletes. The chapter concludes by examining what student athletes do after their degree is completed.

Identity Theory

Identity theory is based on the idea that in order for identity to be established, an individual must first demonstrate a willingness to engage in self-exploration and to consider different ideological and occupational possibilities, and then commit to one of these possibilities (Erickson, 1963; Marcia 1966 as cited in Hansen & Sackett, 1993). Marcia (1991) described college students in terms of four identity stages: “foreclosed student,” “identity diffused student,” “moratorium student” and an “achieved identity” student. Identity foreclosure occurs when an individual commits to an occupation or ideology before engaging in exploratory behavior (Marcia, 1966, Petitpas, 1978). It has
been suggested that student athletes are at an increased risk of identity foreclosure (Good, Brewer, Petipas, Van Raalte, & Mahar, 1993). NCAA regulations require student athletes to declare a major and progress toward a degree to maintain athletic eligibility (NCAA Division I Manual, bylaw 14.4.1). This forced commitment leaves student athletes two options: either identity achievement or identity foreclosure.

Choice of Major Among College Students

Socioeconomic Status

A study which addressed the effects of socioeconomic status and parental occupation on choice of major, found that having a father in a professional or executive position, had a larger effect on females than having a mother in similar positions. For males having a mother in a professional or executive position had a larger effect. Women from families with a high socioeconomic status are less likely to major in business, while the opposite holds true for males (Leppel, Williams, & Waldauer, 2001). In looking at how socio-economic status influenced major selection, Trusty & Ng (2000) reported that the relationship between socioeconomic status and postsecondary majors were stronger for men than for women. Men from families with high socioeconomic status were more likely to major in science than men from lower socioeconomic status (Ware & Lee, 1988).

Dual Factors

Humanitarian concern, femininity scores, and value systems, were significant predictors of major choices according to a study by Lackland & De Lisi (2001). In
addition to their values system, students also selected courses and majors based on their prior performance in a specific area as well as their future expectation of their academic success in that field (Lackland & De Lisi, 2001).

Job market and monetary rewards of careers significantly influenced the choice of major for many students (Mauldin, 2000). Characteristics such as perceived quality of the institution, departmental reputation, and departmental course requirements also influence major selection (Mauldin et al., 2000).

In a study designed to address the extent to which men and women differ in their pre-collegiate achievement, measured by their SAT verbal and math scores, accounted for differences in their choice of college major Turner & Bowen (1999) found for men and women, a higher math SAT score increased the probability of them majoring in engineering or math-physical sciences as compared to any other field. The SAT could only account for some of the variance in how different genders chose their academic major (Turner & Bowen, 1999).

When selecting a major, students’ take more than just their academic ability into account. Bergeron & Romano (1994) found students’ perceptions about their abilities and their feelings of self-efficacy have been shown to play a role in their selection of a college major.

The Population of College Athletes

Identification as an Athlete

Athletic identity may be defined as the degree to which an individual identifies with being an athlete (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Brewer, Van Raalte, &
Linder, (1993) found that identification with the role of athlete was stronger among males than females.

Brown & Hartley (1998) found no relationship between athletic identity and five career development variables: planning, exploration, decision-making, world of work information, and knowledge of a preferred occupational group. In contrast, prior research has suggested that athletes with a high athletic identity may engage in fewer exploratory behaviors (Petipas & Champagne, 1988) and see their role in life as one of an athlete therefore postponing career exploration and decision-making (Hinkle, 1994). These studies specifically cite the athlete’s commitment, dedication, and the demands of intercollegiate athletics, which interfere with the athlete’s opportunities for exploratory behavior, thus promoting identity foreclosure (Petipas & Champagne, 1988). Student athletes may have problems understanding the difference between athletic identity and occupational identity (Martin & Cox, 2000) and college student athletes may enter college without an understanding of the purpose of a college education or specific career aspirations (Wooten, 1994).

Selection of a College and Student Athletes

Non-athletic factors may be just as influential for student athletes in their decision to attend a university as athletic factors (Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003). The degree programs offered at the university were specifically cited as having an influence on their selection of a college. In addition, the head coach, academic support systems, type of community in which the campus was located, and sports traditions at the
school were also important factors in their decision to attend (Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003).

**Career Maturity and Student Athletes**

It has been suggested by Murphy & colleagues (1996) that male and female Division I student athletes’ reported significantly higher identity foreclosure scores than non-athletes. Males participating in high-profile sports scored higher identity foreclosure scores than male athletes participating in low-profile sports and female athletes (Murphy, Petipas, & Brewer, 1996). Athletes in revenue producing sports showed significantly lower career maturity levels than did non-athletes (Kennedy & Dimick, 1987).

Student athletes may neglect exploratory behavior due to their identification as an athlete, and the privileges that accompany their involvement in athletics at the collegiate level (Hansen & Sackett, 1993). Petipas & Champagne (1988) suggested that the college experience of student athletes is “characterized by overprotection, depersonalization, and segregation” and that they experience fewer opportunities for the exploratory behaviors necessary to reach the “achieved identity” stage.

Due to the conflict of multiple roles, the roles of student as well as the role of athlete, some student athletes never have the opportunity to choose an occupation and therefore choose a major for which they are not prepared (Adler & Adler, 1987). Student athletes often commit to the career choice of an athlete, before exploring possible alternative options therefore choosing their career options by default (Etzel, Barrow, & Pinkney, 1994).
Major Selection of Athletes vs. Non-athletes

There have been several studies addressing whether student athletes differ from non-athletes in regard to their major selection. Women athletes chose their majors in roughly the same proportions as the female students at large (Bowen & Levin, 2003). In the Ivy League Universities female athletes are less likely to major in the sciences than female students from the general population. Women at women’s colleges are somewhat more likely to major in the sciences than women in the general population and somewhat less likely to major in the social sciences (Bowen & Levin, 2003). A study of two separate cohorts found no significant difference between the major fields chosen by female athletes and non-athletes (Einarson & Matier, 2002) meanwhile,

“in both cohorts male athletes were more likely to major in professional fields and less likely to major in engineering and natural sciences than non-athletes (Einarson & Matier, 2002, p. 16).”

A study of three cohorts of student athletes graduating from 30 select institutions found that over time, students majoring in the social sciences cluster increased while students majoring in the mathematic cluster among Ivy League student athletes and the humanities cluster among liberal arts student athletes’ decreased (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). This study also found that women who were recruited to play sports were somewhat less likely than other women students to major in the humanities and more likely to major in psychology. There were no differences between female athletes and other students in their likelihood to major in math, science, or engineering (Shulman & Bowen, 2001).
A possible explanation for the noted discrepancy between the chosen majors of college student athletes and those of the general student population

“One commentator suggested that the low proportion of athletes in science and engineering majors may be related to the difficulty in reconciling laboratory and practice schedules (Bowen & Levin 2003, 124).”

Sellers (1992) offered another possible explanation suggesting that athletes are perceived to be underdeveloped socially and not successful in the classroom. Faculty at a major division I institution may be prejudice toward revenue and non-revenue athletes in regards to their ability to perform in the classroom (Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995).

Researchers have suggested that the participation in intercollegiate sports places demands on the student athlete, which exceed those placed on a non-athlete student (Ferrante & Etzel, 1991). The demands of playing, training, and traveling generally compete with adequate career exploration (Ogilvie & Howe, 1982).

“The noted discrepancy between the chosen majors of college student athletes and those of the general student population may warrant further research addressing: why college student athletes are not selecting the same majors as their non athlete counterparts (Bowen & Levin 2003, 124).”

Major Selection of Recruits vs. Walk-ons

There have been some studies addressing whether there are differences in the majors selected by athletes recruited to participate in collegiate athletics and those who chose to “walk-on” to the athletic team. Walk-ons of lower profile sports were more like male students from the general population than they were like recruited athletes in their choice of major (Bowen & Levin, 2003). Walk-ons from low profile sports were more
likely to major in science and less likely to major in social science or business. Male walk-ons in high profile sports were more inclined to study science than the recruits. Walk-ons in the high profile sports were less likely than the students at large to study social science and business (Bowen & Levin, 2003).

Compared to non-athletes, recruited athletes were more heavily clustered in the institutions’ equivalent of a business major, while both recruited athletes and walk-ons had a proportionally greater enrollment in political science than non-athletes (Einarson & Matier, 2002).

Major Selection of High Profile Participants vs. Low Profile Participants

There have been studies addressing whether there are differences in the majors selected by athletes participating in high profile sports and those participating in low profile sports. As previously mentioned, high profile male athletes, defined as those athletes participating in football, basketball, and ice hockey are more likely than students at large to major in the social science and business cluster of departments and less likely to major in the humanities or science cluster (Bowen & Levin, 2003). A similar pattern was found for male athletes participating in lower profile sports, defined as athletes participating in all other sports (Bowen & Levin, 2003). High profile athletes are majoring in fields such as economics and political science at a much larger rate than the general population of college students (Shulman & Bowen, 2001).
Student Athletes Post Graduation

A study addressing whether or not student athletes differ from non-athletes in terms of their post graduation achievement found no significant differences between the advanced educational attainment of female athletes and non-athletes (Einarson & Matier, 2002). Male athletes in the class of 1989 were more likely than non-athletes to receive a master’s degree; in the class of 1994, a significantly smaller proportion of athletes than non-athletes obtained a master’s degree. This study also addressed the job choices of athletes and non-athletes, where only one significant difference was observed. Male athletes from the class of 1989 cohort were significantly less likely than non-athletes to be employed as physicians or surgeons. When comparing the earnings of athletes and non-athlete alumni, male athletes in both cohorts reported significantly higher earnings on average than non-athletes. In both cohorts, female athletes were represented in the lower income ranges when compared to female non-athletes, however these differences were not significant (Einarson & Matier, 2002).

A similar study by Shulman & Bowen (2001) reported that:

“On the whole male athletes were less likely to attain advanced degrees, specifically doctorates, than their non athlete counterparts. They were increasingly likely to be employed in business and finance, and less likely to work in scientific fields than other professional occupations. They also have consistently higher incomes than non-athletes. Female athletes in earlier cohorts had higher or comparable advanced degree attainment, were more likely to be doctors or academics, and earned significantly higher salaries than non-athletes. These advantages diminished in more recent cohorts.”

In a study based on the observation that student athletes were having difficulty in making the transition from school to work, Boone & Walker (1987) found a majority of the participants (19-32) felt the university did not adequately prepare them for their post
graduation pursuits. This emphasis on sports leads many to question exactly what role and how athletic departments are addressing the needs of these student athletes, specifically preparing them for their future (Boone & Walker, 1987).

Summary of Literature

In summary, student athletes are less prepared to make career and vocational decisions than their non-athlete counterparts. The literature suggests that due to the multiple roles of student athlete, they are less prepared to make major and or occupational decisions. Once student athletes decide on a collegiate major their choices often differ from those made by the general population. Gender as well as sport of participation influences whether or not these discrepancies occur. In addition, the following factors may influence the major selection of college students: students’ values systems, prior performance in a specific field, future expectation for academic success in a specific field, preferences for courses of study, labor market prospects, previous academic achievement levels, and their perceptions about their abilities.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

This study used mixed methods to explore the career choices of student athlete. Using quantitative methods, this study addressed the major selection of athletes and compared these results to the major selection of non-athletes. Qualitative methods were used to examine how the experience of being a student athlete impacted their selection of a college major. This chapter will first describe the quantitative study methods then the qualitative study methods.

Quantitative Study

Setting

This study addressed student athletes participating at a division I-AA university. This university is a land grant institution with an enrollment of approximately 12,000 students. A member of the NCAA, approximately 250 student athletes participate in fourteen varsity sports.

Population and Sample

The colleges within the institution include: the College of Agriculture, the College of Arts & Architecture, the College of Business, the College of Education, Health &
Human Development, the College of Engineering, the College of Letters & Science, the College of Nursing, and University College.

The population for this study was junior and senior students attending a division I-AA university. The sample of 101 student athletes, participated in ten varsity sports including: men’s basketball (n=9), women’s basketball (n=7), men’s football (n=26), women’s golf (n=4), women’s skiing (n=3), men’s tennis (n=3), women’s tennis (n=4), men’s track (n=16), women’s track (n=14) and women’s volleyball (n=5). Of the participants, sixty four percent of them were male (n=64) and thirty-seven percent were female (n=37). All participants were of junior or senior status, as of the fall semester of 2004.

For this study individuals participating in cross country, indoor track, and outdoor track were grouped under track participants for their respective gender. There are no participants in men’s skiing included in the study because it is a new program and none of its athletes were of junior or senior status.

Data Collection

These data were obtained from the registrar for both the general students and the student athletes. The registrar provided college of major and gender information on junior and senior students attending the institution. Student athlete data consisted of gender, college of major, and sport of participation. Recruitment status was obtained from the athletic department.

All students who enter the university declare a major. Students who are unsure of what they want to major in declare University Studies as their major. In order to change
their major from University Studies, and all other major changes, to their chosen field they must obtain a change of curriculum card from the registrar. Their current advisor as well as the advisor in their new major must sign this form. This form must then be returned to the registrar’s office.

Prior to collecting the data for this study the permission was sought from the Athletic Director and the Vice President for Student Affairs. This study used existing data collected by the institution. For this study information was gathered from two groups. The first group is junior and senior students. The following information was obtained from the registrar’s office at the university being studied: the average number of male and female students enrolled in the seven different colleges. The male and female numbers were totaled to determine the total number of students enrolled in each college.

The second group of students for whom information was collected was junior and senior student athletes. The following information was collected: gender, major, college of major, and sport of participation. This information was collected from the registrar. Additional information on recruitment status was obtained from the athletic department.

**Research Questions**

For the quantitative study these were the research questions addressed:

What is the current academic major of junior and senior athletes?

How does this compare to junior and senior students in the general population at the same institution?
When classified by gender and the profile of their sport of participation is there a difference in major between junior and senior student athletes and junior and senior students at the same institution?

Among student athletes, how do female athletes compare to male athletes in their choice of a major?

Among student athletes, how do high profile athletes compare to low profile athletes in their choice of a major?

Among student athletes, how do recruits compare to walk-on athletes in their choice of a major?

Data Analysis

After the data were collected, it was analyzed using One-Sample Chi-Square to determine if student athletes differ significantly in proportion majoring in a college from students in the population as a whole. A Contingency Chi-Square was used to determine if the student athletes differed from each other in the selection of a major.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Quantitative Study

For particular analyses, certain colleges were either eliminated or combined due to a small sample size. A detailed explanation is provided in the results section when colleges were combined or eliminated.

While this study was able to determine differences among the major selection of athletes as classified by gender, recruitment status, and profile of sport, due to the small sample size it was unable to distinguish between the different sports represented.
Students attending colleges and universities often change their major; student athletes are no exception to this rule. This study is addressing the current major of student athletes as of October 15, 2004.

Another potential limitation centers on transfer students. Many times students who are of junior or senior status may have begun their college curriculum at another institution and then transferred to their current college. This study included transfer students who are currently attending the institution; it did not take into account how transferring to their current institution affected their selection of a college major.

Qualitative Study

Researcher Positionality

I, the researcher who conducted the interviews, am a graduate student pursuing a Masters of Education Degree in Adult and Higher Education, with an emphasis in Student Affairs and am working full time in the university’s Career Services Office. A former athlete at a NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) institution, and I am similar in age to the participants in the study; which may have an effect on rapport development. The student athletes may see me more as a peer, and therefore be willing to share information with me they would not be willing to share with someone whom they see as an adult.

Population and Sample

The participants were purposefully selected from the population of junior and senior athletes attending a division I-AA University. The sample consisted of thirteen
student athletes. The quantitative study conducted prior to the interviews was used to
determine the participants. Major, sport of participation, and gender were all taken into
consideration when participants were selected. The selection of participants continued
until saturation of interview results.

Six of the participants were female and seven of the participants were male. They
represented five different varsity sports including women’s basketball, men’s football,
women’s golf, women’s skiing, men’s tennis, and women’s track. All thirteen
participants have selected a major, and they were all of junior or senior status as of the
fall semester of 2004. Seven of the participants were majoring in a traditional major
while six of the participants were majoring in a non-traditional major. Of the thirteen
participants, seven were transfers from another college or university and six have spent
their entire collegiate careers at the university in which the study took place. Nine of the
student athletes were recruited to play sports at the institution while four of the athletes
were considered walk-ons. A brief profile of each of the participants is provided below.
The names of the participants have been changed to protect their identity.

Chris is enrolled in a non-traditional major and participates in a low profile sport.
While he was initially drawn to the strength of the academic programs available at the
university, the opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics also played a factor. His
family, as well as external factors, influenced him in his selection of a major. While he
often contemplates why he did not select an easier major, he believes that the experiences
he gained through participating in collegiate athletics will provide him with valuable
leadership and communication skills.
Jo Ann is enrolled in a non-traditional major and participates in a low profile sport. She chose to attend the institution for the outdoor recreational opportunities available, but the opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics was also a factor in her decision. Through an entry-level class and career exploration she found a major, which would allow her to combine her skills and interests. While her major has been demanding, looking back on it she would not change a thing because she loves being a collegiate athlete.

Jon is enrolled in a traditional major and participates in a high profile sport. After transferring from a junior college, he knew this university was the right fit for him after his first recruiting visit. He was so impressed with the coaches and the program that he cancelled his trips to other interested institutions. As his athletic career comes to an end he is excited about his future plans.

Kara is enrolled in a non-traditional major and participates in a low profile sport. She has known since she was very young what she wanted to do with her life and specifically chose the institution because of the academic programs available. In the future she plans to go attend graduate school.

Kim is enrolled in a traditional major and participates in a low profile sport. It was the athletics that initially brought her to the university. She has been involved with sports her whole life and in the future she would like to be a teacher and coach.

Lisa is enrolled in a non-traditional major and participates in a low profile sport. When she decided to attend the university she was not even sure if she was going to participate in athletics, it was the location, which initially drew her to the institution. While she was taking her general courses she had one professor who recognized her work
and encouraged her to take additional classes in that area. Before she knew it she had almost completed the courses necessary for that major. She has a variety of diverse interests and still is not sure what the future will bring in either her athletic or academic pursuits.

*Michaela* is enrolled in a traditional major and participates in a low profile sport. It was an athletic scholarship and opportunity to participate in her favorite sport, which brought her to the university. For her sports have always been an area of interest and after completing graduate school she would like to work in the field of athletics.

*Mikki* is enrolled in non-traditional major and participates in a low profile sport. If it were not for her athletic scholarship she would not have had the opportunity to attend college. Her upper level classes and athletics take up a great deal of her time. She thinks things will be easier for her when her athletic career is complete.

*Phil* is enrolled in a non-traditional degree and participates in a high profile sport. He initially chose the institution for the athletics and decided upon his major after looking at the programs available. As his athletic career ends he is ready to complete school and looks forward to applying his degree in real life settings.

*Steve* is enrolled in a traditional major and participates in a high profile sport. He chose to attend the institution because it was the only school to offer him a scholarship. He is a junior college transfer who is extremely proud of the fact that he will be the first member of his family to graduate from college.

*Troy* is enrolled in a traditional major and participates in a high profile sport. He decided to attend college because it seemed like the next step and chose the university for the opportunity to participate in sports. He is a walk on athlete who selected a sports
related field of study. In the future he would like to continue with athletics, start a family, and get a job in his field.

*Tyler* is enrolled in a traditional major and participates in a high profile sport. He specifically chose the university for its athletic program. After transferring from a junior college he had to take summer classes to get enough credits to be eligible to participate. He would like to use his degree in the future, but is also considering other options to support himself financially. He has strong religious beliefs that guide his decisions.

*Vick* is enrolled in a traditional major and participates in a high profile sport. He initially started in another program and has since switched. He had a coach who influenced his career decisions.

**Procedures**

Prior to collecting the data for this study the permission was sought from the Athletic Director and the Vice President for Student Affairs. Student athlete contact information was obtained from the athletic department.

I used a semi-structured protocol to conduct in-depth interviews with each student athlete. The interview questions were developed by myself, the researcher, and were revised following a consultation with my committee chair. They were revised a second time after the conclusion of practice interviews, which were conducted on two non-participants attending the same university. A copy of the interview questions appears in Appendix A.

Student athletes were contacted to see if they would be willing to take part in this study, if interested, an interview appointment was made. The data collection began on
January 12, 2005 and concluded on February 6, 2005. Interviews ranged from twenty to fifty-five minutes. The interviews continued until saturation. The interviews were recorded using a cassette recorder as well as notes taken by the interviewer. The interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Prior to the interview, the students were advised as to the nature of the study and were asked to sign a release form to participate in the study. A copy of the release form appears in the appendixes (Appendix B). After the release form was signed, participants were advised as to the nature of the study, and reminded that their participation was voluntary and they could end the interview at any time. Following the completion of the interview, the students were thanked for their time and told they would be informed as to the results of the study.

Research Question

For the qualitative study the following research question was addressed:

How did their experience of being a student athlete impact their selection of a college major?

Data Analysis.

The data was analyzed using a content analysis method to determine how the experience of being a student athlete impacted their selection of a college major. Individual responses were analyzed looking for common themes, meaning athletes using similar terminology in their responses.
Limitations of Qualitative Study

The participants in this study were chosen according to their major, gender, and sport of participation. I was only able to interview students who responded to my request. The information was taken directly from the interviews with the student athletes, and did not verify major changes or transfer information with the students’ transcripts.

The results of this study reflect the participants’ current perceptions regarding how being a student athlete influenced their selection of a major. I would caution against making the generalization that these views would remain constant, for they may be subject to change. I do not assume all student athletes have the same thoughts about how the experience of being a student athlete influence their major selection, the results simply reflect the information provided by the student athletes in this current study.

Another limitation to the study is my position as the researcher. I interpreted the results from the point of view as a graduate student, an employee at the career services office, and a former student athlete. My education, as well as experience at career services, provided me with insight regarding the career exploration process. As a former athlete, I was empathetic toward the participants as they attempted to successfully balance both athletic and academic pursuits.
This chapter reviews the results of the quantitative and qualitative sections comprising this study. The study developed a profile of the academic major of junior and senior student athletes attending a division I-AA university. That profile was compared to the majors selected by the general population of students to determine if student athletes selected the same majors as non-athletes. The student athletes’ majors were classified by gender, sport profile, and recruitment status. Then these groups were compared to see if significant differences in majors existed.

**Quantitative Study**

**Data Analysis**

The overall choice of major among athletes is as follows: College of Nursing 2% (N=2), University College 3% (N=3), College of Agriculture 6% (N=6), College of Arts and Architecture 8% (N=8), College of Engineering 9% (N=9), College of Business 20% (N=20), College of Education, Health, & Human Development 26% (N=26), and the College of Letters and Science 27% (N=27).

A one-sample chi square test was conducted to assess if athletes differed from the general population in terms of the college of their major selection. The result of the test was significant, $X^2 (7, N=101) = 33.93, p = .000$. Athletes were over enrolled in the
Athletes were under enrolled in the College of Agriculture, the College of Arts & Architecture, the College of Engineering, and the College of Nursing. According to the results student athletes are majoring the College of Letters & Science and University College at similar rates when compared to students as a whole (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Observed Frequencies</th>
<th>Expected Frequencies a</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Architecture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>-5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Health, &amp; Human Development</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>-10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters &amp; Science</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>-7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Expected frequencies were calculated using the proportion of students in the general population majoring in each college.
b. \( X^2 (7 \ N=101) =33.93, \ p =.000 \)

A one-sample chi square test was conducted to determine if there was a difference between female athletes and female students in terms of major selection. The result of the test was significant, \( X^2 (6, \ N=36) =20.02, \ p =.003 \) suggesting that female athletes differ from non-athletes in their choice of a major. Female athletes were over enrolled in the College of Education, Health, & Human Development and the College of Business and under enrolled in the College of Arts & Architecture, the College of Letters & Science, and the College of Nursing when compared to the general population of female students. This test looked at seven colleges. University College was not used because it is a new college, with few students enrolled. It may be useful to look at this college in future
studies. These results should be interpreted cautiously. Given the small sample population, the Chi Square analysis may not be accurate due to the number of cells with a small sample population (Table 2).

Table 2. Whether Female Athletes Differ From the Females in the General Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Observed Frequencies</th>
<th>Expected Frequencies</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Architecture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Health, &amp; Human Development</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>-.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters &amp; Science</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Expected frequencies were calculated using the proportion of students in the general population majoring in each college.
b. University College was deleted due to a small N.
c. $\chi^2 (6, N=36) =20.02, p = .003$

A one-sample chi square test was conducted to determine whether male athletes differed from the general population of male students in terms of their major selection.

The results of the test were significant, $\chi^2 (5, N =62) =20.20, p = .001$ suggesting that male athletes differ from non-athletes in their choice of a major. Male athletes were over enrolled in the College of Business, the College of Education, Health, & Human Development, and the College of Letters & Science and under enrolled in the College of Engineering and the College of Arts & Architecture when compared to the population of male students. This test looked at six colleges. University College was not used because it is a new college, with few students enrolled. It may be useful to look at this college in future studies. The College of Nursing was not used because it had few female students and no male student athletes enrolled (Table 3).
Table 3. Whether Male Athletes Differ From the Males in the General Population \(^c\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College b</th>
<th>Observed Frequencies (^a)</th>
<th>Expected Frequencies</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Architecture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>-2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Health, &amp; Human Development</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>-12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters &amp; Science</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Expected frequencies were calculated using the proportion of students in the general population majoring in each college.

\(^b\) The College of Nursing and University College were deleted due to a small N.

\(^c\) \(\chi^2 (5, N = 62) = 20.20, p = .001\)

A one-sample chi square test was conducted to determine whether athletes participating in high profile sports, may also be called a “revenue producing sport”, differed from the general population in terms of their major selection. The results were significant, \(\chi^2 (5, N = 43) = 11.93, p = .036\). Athletes participating in high profile sports were more likely to be over enrolled in the College of Business, the College of Education, Health, & Human Development, and the College of Letters and Science than non-athletes. Athletes participating in high profile sports were more likely to be under enrolled in the College of Engineering and the College of Arts & Architecture than non-athletes. This test looked at five colleges. University College was not used because it is a new college, with few students enrolled. The College of Nursing was not used because it had no athletes participating in high profile sports enrolled in the college (Table 4).
Table 4. Whether Athletes Participating in High Profile Sports Differ From the General Population c

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College b</th>
<th>Observed Frequencies</th>
<th>Expected Frequencies a</th>
<th>Residual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>-.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Architecture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Health, &amp; Human Development</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>-7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters &amp; Science</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Expected frequencies were calculated using the proportion of students in the general population majoring in each college.
b. The College of Nursing and University College were deleted due to a small N.
c. $X^2 (5, N=43) = 11.93, p = .036$

A one-sample chi square test was conducted to determine whether athletes participating in low profile sports, may also be called non-revenue producing sports, differed from the general population in terms of their major selection. The results were significant, $X^2 (6, N=55) = 24.489, p = .000$. Athletes participating in low profile sports were more likely to be over enrolled in the College of Business and the College of Education, Health, & Human Development. Athletes participating in low profile sports were more likely to be under enrolled in the College of Agriculture, the College of Arts & Architecture, the College of Engineering, the College of Letters & Science, and the College of Nursing. This test looked at seven colleges (Table 5). University College was not used because it is a new college, with few students enrolled. It may be useful to look at this college in future studies.
A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there is a significant difference between the selections of a major by female student athletes as compared to male student athletes. The two variables were college of major and gender (male and female). For this analysis college of major was grouped into four categories: College of Business, College of Education, Health & Human Development, the College of Letters & Science, and a fourth category consisting of the College of Agriculture, Arts & Architecture, the College of Engineering, the College of Nursing, and University College. The fourth category was created to eliminate cells with a small sample size. Gender was found to be a significant determinant of major, Pearson $X^2 (3 \ N =101)$ =12.604 $p = .006$, Cramer’s $\phi = .35$. Male athletes were more likely than female athletes to major in the College of Business, the College of Letters and Science, and the combined college consisting of the College of Agriculture, Arts & Architecture, the College of Engineering, the College of Nursing, and University College. Female student athletes
were more likely to major in the College of Education, Health, & Human Development than male student athletes (Table 6).

Table 6. Differences Between Female Student Athletes and Male Student Athletes Choice of a Major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College a</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Male-Female</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Male-Female</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters &amp; Science</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Male-Female</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined College</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Male-Female</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Male-Female</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. The Combined College consists of the College of Agriculture, Arts & Architecture, Engineering, Nursing, and University Studies, which were grouped together due to small N

b. $X^2 (3N=101)=12.604, p=.006, \text{Cramer’s } \hat{V} = .35$

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there is a significant difference between the selections of a major by high profile athletes as compared to low profile athletes. The two variables were college of major and profile (high profile and low profile). For this analysis college of major was grouped into four categories: College of Business, College of Education, Health & Human Development, College of Letters & Science, and a fourth category consisting of the College of Agriculture, Arts & Architecture, the College of Engineering, the College of Nursing, and University College. The fourth category was created to eliminate cells with a small sample size. Profile was not found to be a significant determinant of major, Pearson $X^2 (3N=101)=6.02, p = .111, \text{Cramer’s } \hat{V} = .24$ (Table 7).
Table 7. Differences Between High Profile Athletes and Low Profile Athletes Choice of a Major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College a</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>High Profile</th>
<th>Low Profile</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Profile</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Profile</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters &amp; Science</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Profile</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined College</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Profile</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Profile</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. The Combined College consists of the College of Agriculture, Arts & Architecture, Engineering, Nursing, and University Studies, which were grouped together due to small N
b. $X^2 (3N=101) = 6.02, p = .111$, Cramer’s $V = .24$

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there is a significant difference between the selections of a major by recruited athletes as compared to walk-on athletes. The two variables were college of major and recruiting status (recruit and walk-on). For this analysis college of major was grouped into four categories: College of Business, College of Education, Health & Human Development, College of Letters & Science, and a fourth category consisting of the College of Agriculture, Arts & Architecture, the College of Engineering, the College of Nursing, and University College. The fourth category was created to eliminate cells with a small sample size. Recruiting Status was not found to be a significant determinant of major, Pearson $X^2 (3N = 101) = .452, p = .929$. Cramer’s $V = .07$ (Table 8).
Table 8. Differences Between Recruited Athletes and Walk-on Athletes Choice of a Major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College a</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Recruit</th>
<th>Walk-on</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Recruit Status</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Within Recruit Status</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters &amp; Science</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>% Within Recruit Status</td>
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a. The Combined College consists of the College of Agriculture, Arts & Architecture, Engineering, Nursing, and University Studies, which were grouped together due to small N

b. $X^2 (3N=101)=.452$ $p=.929$, Cramer’s $V=.07$

The results of the quantitative study indicate that student athletes were not selecting the same majors as their non-athlete peers. They were over enrolled in the College of Business and the College of Education, Health & Human Development and under enrolled in the College of Agriculture, the College of Arts & Architecture, the College of Engineering, and the College of Nursing. These results provided the rationale to follow up to determine possible explanations for this discrepancy.

Qualitative Study

Summary of Findings

After the quantitative data were collected and analyzed thirteen student athletes were selected to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. These results highlight how the experience of being a student athlete impacted their selection of a college major. The interviews took place during the 2005 spring semester at the same institution.
Athletes’ Reason for Selecting the University

The reasons for typical students to select a university may not apply to student athletes who choose a college for the opportunity to pursue their athletic goals (Mathes & Gurney, 1985). Eight of the participants chose to attend this specific university because of the athletic program. Steve, a traditional major said: “(Name of University) kind of selected me. They were the only school to offer me a scholarship.”

Student athletes take more than just athletic programs into account when selecting a college (Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003). Four students said they were attracted to the school for the academic programs but the opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics was a factor in their choosing to attend the university. For three of these student athletes it was the deciding factor. JoAnn commented: “Actually it was the deciding factor between (name of other university) and here. I could play (name of sport) here and the (name of other university) coach wasn’t that interested.” Chris added: “One other school had an (name of major) department, another reason I came here was because here I got offered a pretty good scholarship. The facilities were good and I like the coach a lot.”

Impact of College Selection on Major Selection

For many student athletes their selection of a major is impacted before they even start classes by which college they select and the majors available at that university. Six of the participants chose a major from those available at the institution.
Troy, a student majoring in a traditional major who participates in a high profile sport noted:

“I knew I would probably go into business, I have always been kind of a sports person and I was thinking that I wanted to my ideal job would be to work for Nike. I was thinking sports marketing, but they don’t have that here, so I just did regular marketing.”

Phil who is majoring in a non-traditional degree and participates in a high profile sport stated: “When I was looking at colleges I kind of looked at what they were strong at and I saw that they had a good (name of degree) program here so I thought I would try it and see how it worked.”

**Athletic Scholarship Provided the Funding for College**

Many student athletes see athletics as an opportunity to subsidize the cost of their college education. Twelve of the participants mentioned receiving some form of scholarship to attend the university. John looked at one of the positives to his athletic scholarship: “I guess I consider myself a lot luckier than a lot of other people being on scholarship and having my education paid for. My sisters they took out loans, I know that when I am finished and I have my degree and not owe any money.”

Socio-economic status is also a factor for student athletes. Five of the participants mentioned that without a scholarship they would not have had the opportunity to attend college, and thus pursue their current educational goals. Mikki, a non-traditional degree major said:

“Actually I didn’t think I was going to have the chance to go to college because I didn’t have the money to go to college…. (name of coach) watched me (sport of participation) and gave me a scholarship to (sport of participation) at (name of university).”
Athletes Major in Sports Related Fields

Four of the participants in the study selected a sports related major such as teaching and/or coaching. Kim, a traditional major commented: “I majored in health enhancement because I can pursue my abilities in teaching and I am getting a coaching minor as well.” In addition, four participants plan to incorporate sports with their current field in their future occupation. Jo Ann, a non-traditional major said:

“My dream job would be involved with skiing or golf equipment and the research or production. I think that being a collegiate student will allow me to go to future employers and say I use this stuff a lot, I know how it should work, and I know what I want out of it.”

While Lisa is unsure of her plans for the future she is considering going into an area that was initially sparked by her athletic participation. “Part of me wants to go to grad school for exercise physiology or one of those areas, because I want to know more about the science, of why my body does what it does when I work out.” She also acknowledges the impact sport has made on her selection of her current major.

“I think that (name of sports participants) always travel and that is the nature of it and how it is and because of that (selected major) is a natural fit. Everyone is French, Spanish, and German; because (name of sport) is such a world wide sport we realize the importance of communicating with people from other cultures.”

Kara told the story of how her involvement in athletics gave them the opportunity to double major, something they may not have otherwise done.

“I hurt myself my freshman year so I guess in a way athletics did influence my major because I probably wouldn’t have picked up the second major without the fifth year of eligibility. It is something I wanted to do, but it wasn’t offered my first year so it worked out well for me.”
Time Devoted to Majors

Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton (2000) suggested that student athletes are challenged to manage the dual roles of student and athlete. All thirteen of the participants mentioned the amount of time required to be a student athlete. Steve, a traditional major said: “I was limited to how many courses I wanted to take because I don’t want to put too much pressure on myself having to focus on (name of sport) as well as academics.”

Chris, a non-traditional major mentioned:

“That’s really hard especially with (name of non-traditional major) because it takes a lot of work. I am very busy throughout the day. I have to manage my time well with school work everyday, practice every day, and make up school work when I am gone.”

Martin and Cox (2000) found that college athletes have a great deal of constraints placed on their time. Three of the participants mentioned the amount of time and energy available for schoolwork as an issue. Lisa, a non-traditional major said:

“I think that in the first two weeks of classes you see what the professors are looking for and the level of work they are looking for and judging where you need to focus your energies on. Prioritizing parts of classes, and being efficient with your time is important because we don’t have a lot of extra time.”

As it was discussed by Hollis (2001) to meet the obligations of their scholarship student athletes are forced to miss classes, exams, and run the risk of choosing majors that work best with their athletic schedules. For three of the participants the issue of time and the lack thereof, influenced their selection of a major.
Troy, a traditional major was contemplating switching his major due to time constraints.  

“I am thinking of switching to finance because from talking to other people, just the things you have to do and a lot of it has to do with the amount of time it takes which I don’t have a lot of time. People have said the marketing takes a lot of time and I am just kind of feeling that out to see if I would be able to handle it.”

JoAnn, a non-traditional major commented: “I thought about architecture for a little while but the idea of doing architecture and (name of sport) at the same time because of the projects would be tough.”

The lack of time to devote to studies caused three of the participants to postpone a certain aspect of their academic plans until they have more time available. Vick, a traditional major, changed his major due to the amount of time required to be in athletics.

“The main reason I came up here was for the (name of specific major). This program is very prestigious and looked at very highly. It was going to take a lot of work for me to do that with (sport) at the same time. I changed my major to (different major in same college).”

Scheduling Problems

Eight of the participants said that they tried to schedule their classes around their athletic practice. Michaela, a traditional major commented: “There were times when practice and class conflicted. For the most part we scheduled our classes around our practices and if we couldn’t do that then we went to class.” JoAnn, a non-traditional major said: “For the most part I try to set up my schedule so I am done by 1 or 2 in the afternoon.”

A common problem was with classes that were only offered during certain times. While six of the participants mentioned having problems with classes that were only offered at certain times, four participants from non-traditional majors also mentioned that
most of their upper level classes created conflicts with their academic practice. This supports the findings of Bowen & Levin (2003) who found that practice schedules conflicting with laboratory classes could be a possible explanation between the discrepancies in majors between student athletes and the general student population.

Chris, a non-traditional major noted:

“Like this year I am taking a senior design class that I have to take and it is during practice time so I just have to miss practice that day. Balancing (name of major) and athletics is tough because a lot of the classes are scheduled later, and that is usually when we are practicing.”

Mikki, a nontraditional major said:

“Once you get accepted into the (name of degree) program you are at school from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday we have lecture from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. On Thursday and Friday I have to go from 6:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. I hardly ever practice with the team I just have to call coach and say I can work out right now can you watch me or I can go do it by myself.”

Kara, a non-traditional major stated: “If my practice schedule wasn’t somewhat flexible I don’t know how that would work. Right now all the classes I am taking are only offered at one time—they are classes I have to have and I can’t move on to the next classes without them.” This problem of practice interfering with classes is further complicated for students who participate in team sports, where others are depending on them to participate in the practice session.

**Effects of Transfer from a Previous Institution**

Seven of the student athletes interviewed had transferred from another institution, thus creating additional problems for them in terms of staying eligible and ability to change majors. Three of the participants said they had problems with their transfer
credits from a previous institution. Phil, a student athlete majoring with a non-traditional major noted:

“For a while I was a senior and in my major I was pretty much a sophomore, which made things pretty much impossible. I know lot of junior college transfer kids that this has happened to; I think it is kind of the standard thing for those guys so it is nice that (name of traditional degree) is there to fall back on. I don’t see it as necessarily as big of a problem for the guys who have been here since their freshman year.”

Mikki, a non-traditional major had a similar experience:

“I transferred here as a junior and I had already gone to a community college for two years actually this last year they told me I wasn’t going to be able participate in sports because I had been in school too long and I didn’t have the requirements for the percentage of degree completed so I had to go appeal, write a letter, and they told me I was fine because I pretty much had to restart in the (name of major) program.”

**Ability to Change Majors**

One of the significant areas where the experience of being a student athlete influenced their major selection was in their ability to change majors. As discussed in Clow (2000) student athletes, unlike traditional college students, lack the ability to explore majors without time constraints. This affects student athletes’ abilities to change majors and influences what they change their majors to in order to comply with the NCAA regulations regarding percentage of degree completion necessary for eligibility. Five of the participants noted that they changed their major within their college. Three of the participants said they were affected by eligibility requirements and two of the participants said they changed majors for eligibility purposes.
Phil, a transfer student in a non-traditional degree said:

“I changed it to (new major) for an eligibility thing my senior year. I officially changed it to (new major) but I kept taking my (current major) classes. You need around 120 credits to graduate in any major and in (new major) about half of them are electives. Being that I still had 70-80 credits or 90 then I could throw whatever I wanted to go be at 50% on my (new major) degree.”

Tyler commented:

“I changed it for eligibility purposes. Then I changed it back. They changed it for two weeks, when I transferred I had my associates degree and they didn’t accept all of my credits so I was kind of behind in (name of major). I have to be at a certain percentage by a certain year so they changed me to (new major) and they were like you are going to be in the same bind in the next semester so they just changed it back and I just took on more classes.”

To maintain athletic eligibility student athletes are given two choices either to stay with their current major and participate in sports or to change majors and become ineligible (NCAA Division I Manual, bylaw 14.4.1). Three of the participants said they were affected by the requirements for a degree and two of the participants were unable to change their major without losing eligibility. Phil, a non-traditional major participating in a high profile sport reiterated this point by saying: “By the time I started thinking about this I was pretty far along and didn’t really want to switch and take a year hit and all that fun stuff.” Mikki, a non-traditional major said: “You almost have to be pretty much sure that when you pick a major, that is the major you want or if you change it has to be some other major that will actually transfer so you won’t be behind.”
She also told the story of a teammate:

“She wanted to change her major right now but she can’t because if she did then she couldn’t compete. She is going to finish this degree and then go back to school. She couldn’t go back and change her mind anymore because it was pretty much too late.”

Student athletes also have the additional pressures of meeting academic requirements in order to maintain eligibility. Steve, a traditional major said: “I had to maintain a grade point average that would allow me to participate in athletics.” Kim commented:

“We have to go to our classes. That is the biggest thing that our coaches push [is] to go to your classes. If we don’t do well with our grades we can become ineligible. I think that is another thing that is behind us pushing us to succeed. There are a lot of other things behind us like NCAA rules and our coaches. If your GPA drops below a 2.0 and if you drop below that then you become ineligible.”

Treatment of Advisors and Professors toward Student Athletes.

As it was discussed in Sellers (1992) found there may be an assumption that athletes do not do well in the classroom. When looking at the treatment of advisors and professors toward student athletes this study found a discrepancy in the results from students majoring in traditional vs. non-traditional majors. While six of the participants majoring in traditional majors noted that their professors were helpful and worked with their athletic schedule. Two of them mentioned that some professors work with them and others do not like student athletes at all. According to Steve, a traditional major: “In reality some of them love us and some of them don’t care for student athletes at all. Some instructors actually think [of] how responsible we have be [in order to do well] academically as well as athletically.”
Troy a student in a traditional major added:

“Actually both my roommates are both in finance and their teacher had them fill out a card telling what their job was, a job producing income and they wouldn’t let any of the athletes put down their sport and it is basically like a job it pays for housing and food. It is a job in itself.”

Of the students majoring in non-traditional majors five of them said they have received differential treatment from their professors due to their student athlete status.

Mikki said:

“In (name of major) the professors told us it was pretty much a full time job and we couldn’t have anything else.” In regards to their athletic participation: “They feel like I shouldn’t be doing it. That it is too hard to do two things so I should choose one or the other. If I want to be a (name of occupation) I should quit my sport.”

Kara mentioned:

“I have heard some bad things that there is a teacher who teaches in (name of department) that actually flunks student athletes the only reason they will give them is that they need to find a new major. I know of three people who have had this problem.”

She also related an experience when she was directly affected.

“I did have one lady in the (name of department) and when I handed her the list of dates when I would be gone, and said I would hand in my work early, she said you know I don’t have to accept this and my coach talked to her. She did accept my work, she got mad if I handed it in early so I made arrangements with a friend who was in class to hand it in for me.”

In addition to problems with professors regarding their athlete status three of them noted their advisors were not always supportive of their athletic pursuits. Lisa commented:

“My advisor is encouraging, but he looked at my transcript and he was like you know all these B’s could be A’s if you weren’t in athletics.” Chris said: “My advisor is not very responsive actually. Sometimes I tell him I only want to take like 14 instead of 17 credits
this semester and he asks why and he says obviously school comes before athletics and he [is] not very great with that.”

Student athletes may have to prove themselves as students. Jo Ann, a non-traditional major spoke of a time when they had an issue with a professor regarding her student athlete status:

“One professor I had him initially in a fall semester and I would go and ask him for help and stuff like that because I wasn’t doing particularly well in his class initially. I must have gone to him eight times and he told me you have to decide which is more important athletics or academics and I told him they are both important to me and you need to understand that. The season ended and I worked my tail off and got an A in his class and I had him the next semester and he didn’t give me any problems.”

Preparation for Life Following Collegiate Athletics

According to Parham (1993) one of the tasks that make student athletes unique is their need to prepare and cope with the termination of their athletic career. While all thirteen of the participants noted the importance their major in their future plans; two specifically cited the need to prepare for life after athletics. Jon, a traditional major commented:

“You know in the back of my mind like every athlete that you ask they want to have the chance to play professional sports, but you know that doesn’t happen very often. You have to have plan b and I always thought well something I am going to enjoy doing and I feel (name of profession) would work for me.”

Summary of Results

This chapter provided a current profile of the majors of student athletes participating at a division I-AA university. Results of the quantitative study showed that student athletes differ from their non-athlete counterparts in their selection of a college
major. These differences were also prevalent when classified by gender and sport profile. While there were significant differences between the major selection of male and female student athletes there was not a significant difference between high profile and low profile athletes or recruits and walk-on athletes. Results from the qualitative study found that athletic participation impacts the major selection of college athletes in a variety of ways. These include, but are not limited to; time available to devote to academics, the scheduling of classes during athletic practices, and the treatment of professors and advisors toward their athletic status.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

This study developed a profile of what student athletes at a Division 1-AA university were majoring in. The results indicated that student athletes are majoring in the following colleges: College of Nursing 2%, University College 3%, College of Agriculture 6%, College of Arts and Architecture 8%, College of Engineering 9%, College of Business 20%, College of Education, Health, & Human Development 26%, and College of Letters and Science 27%.

A quantitative study was conducted to determine whether student athletes were enrolled in the same majors as non-athletes. The results indicate that athletes are not enrolled in the same majors as students from the general population. Both female and male student were enrolled in significantly different majors than their male and female counterparts. Finally, athletes in high and low profile sports were also enrolled in significantly different majors as non-student athletes.

In addition to determining whether student athletes differ from the general population, the quantitative study also addressed whether student athletes differed from each other as classified by gender, profile of sport, and recruiting status. Only gender was found to be a significant determinant of major, while sport profile and recruiting status did not produce significant difference in terms of major selection.
A qualitative study found that being a student athlete impacted the selection of a major in a variety of ways. All thirteen of the participants noted the amount of time required to balance the roles of student and athlete. While the degree of impact varied, some mentioned it even caused them to change their major or delay certain aspects of their academic plans until their athletic careers were completed. Due to scheduling conflicts between classes and practices, eight of the participants said they have attempted to schedule their classes around their athletic practice. Class scheduling was a problem frequently mentioned by non-traditional majors in regard to their upper level classes.

Unlike regular students, who have the opportunity to change majors easily, student athletes must progress toward a degree to maintain their athletic eligibility. Several students mentioned that these policies impacted their ability to change majors.

Some student athletes perceive the treatment of professors and advisors toward student athletes to be an issue. A majority of the students participating in traditional majors found their professors to be helpful and willing to work with their athletic schedules. Five student athletes in non-traditional majors mentioned receiving differential treatment due to their athlete status.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study demonstrated the need to further explore whether or not student athletes are enrolled in the same majors as students in the general population. While this study was conducted at a division 1-AA University it would be informative to find whether similar results were found at institutions of a different size, possibly NCAA division-I, NCAA division-II, NCAA division-III institutions as well as institutions of
similar size. Another possible study would be to address whether there is a difference among majors for students who transfer to the university when compared to students who spend their entire athletic careers at the same university.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies addressing the major of student athletes since the NCAA modified the requirements for degree completion in 2003 requiring student athletes to complete 40% of their courses toward their degree before their third year of college, 60% before their fourth year, and 80% before their fifth year (Bylaw 14.4.3.2 of the NCAA Division I Manual). It may be beneficial to see if and how this impacts student athletes and their selection of a major.

While there have been studies done to address what factors influence student athletes selection of a university, it could provide potential insight to look at what efforts athletic department representatives take to introduce the potential student athlete to the academic programs available at the institution, and how this influences their selection of a major.

Student athletes in this study suggested that the attitudes of faculty and advisors in traditional majors differed from those in non-traditional majors in regard to their treatment of student athletes. It would be worthwhile to further investigate these findings to see if these incidences occur at other institutions.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study determined that student athletes, at this particular institution, are not selecting the same majors as students from the general population. Given the information, the institution would benefit from looking at possible explanations
for the discrepancy between the majors of student athletes and the majors of students from the general population.

One of the themes mentioned in the study was the fact that the scheduling of classes, specifically upper level classes, can create conflicts for student athletes and their ability to attend both their classes and athletic practice. It appears, many of the classes needed are only offered at certain times and during specific semesters. It may be advantageous for college administrators to further investigate these concerns. Academic departments and the athletic department could work together to find acceptable solutions to this problem, such as rearranging the times when upper level classes are offered, or coaches finding alternative times to practice.

In terms of accommodations, the results of the study demonstrate an apparent difference between the traditional majors of student athletes and the non-traditional majors. A majority of the students in traditional majors defined those included in the College of Business, the College of Education, Health, & Human Development, and males majoring in the College of Letters & Science, mentioned their advisors and professors working with their athletic schedules and generally supported them as student athletes. In contrast, students in non-traditional majors shared information of experiences in which their professors were less supportive of them as athletes and suggested they must choose between their major and their athletic pursuits. Student athletes in these colleges had to prove they were committed to both academics and athletics.

Based on the thirteen interviews conducted for this study, a possible area of concern for the institution may be the negative attitude of professors and advisors in non-traditional majors toward student athletes, indicated in the study. This could be a
possible explanation as to why student athletes are not majoring in these areas at the same rate as their non-athlete counterparts. If negative stereotypes do occur then addressing them may create opportunities for future student athletes to major in these fields.

One of the major implications addressed by this study was the possible need for athletic departments to assist student athletes with the major exploration process. According to the information provided by this study one of, if not the biggest, barrier for student athletes is their lack of time available for academic pursuits, including exploring potential careers and majors. Due to regulations put forth by the NCAA, student athletes must progress toward degree completion at specified rates, thus greatly affecting their opportunity to change majors to maintain their eligibility status. Unlike non-student athletes they do not have the opportunity to take their time to find out what they want to do and change their major at will.

By developing new, or working with existing, resources athletic departments can assist student athletes with all areas of career planning. By starting this process before the athletes commit to, and completing it after they have graduated from, the university athletic departments can assist student athletes with the awareness, resources, and tools necessary to prepare for college and to make the successful transition into the workforce. Possible suggestions include: giving potential recruits the opportunity to meet with departments and professors during their recruiting visit, providing them with career counseling so they can better understand who they are and what areas are of interest to them, helping with researching the world of work, developing a quality resume, finding out how to prepare for an internship, and researching and applying for internships and full time positions.
Results of the current study indicated students transferring from a previous college have additional needs that need to be addressed. These needs include: having programs and or staff available to assist transfer students in determining how their credits transferred from their previous institution, how they apply to the specific degree programs at the current institution, and where they stand in regards to the NCAA requirements. It would be beneficial for the athletic department to have an individual who is familiar with the degree programs available to assist student athletes with making decisions regarding their academic major.

Conclusion

This study has determined that student athletes at this specific institution are not enrolled in majors at the same rate as the general population of students. It has explored how being a student athlete has impacted their selection of a college major. This study serves to continue the study of the unique population of collegiate student athletes. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will serve as foundation for further studies addressing the needs of student athletes, and how institutions can best assist them as they strive to meet their full potential on the playing field, in the classroom, and in life.
REFERENCES CITED


APPENDIX A

STUDENT ATHLETE QUESTIONNAIRE
STUDENT ATHELTE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Can you tell me why you decided to attend college?
2. What made you select MSU? Were there other colleges you were considering?  
   2b. How did being a student athlete influence your decision to attend MSU?
3. When you were thinking about what school to attend did you think about possible 
   majors and the academic programs available?
4. A lot of students come to college thinking about majoring in a certain area-then 
   change their mind once they get here. Did this happen to you?
5. Can you please share with me how you decided upon your current major? People 
   do this in a variety of ways-tell me about your process.
   5b. Did you ever change your major? If so how many times?
   5c. (possible follow up to 5). Would you say that __________ influenced your 
      choice of a major 
      (or)
      You mentioned that ________________ influenced your choice of a 
      major….can you tell me more about how ____________ had an impact on your 
      major selection.

   External factors such as money or the possibility of a good job 
   Value Systems. 
   Influence of Parents? Siblings? Spouses? 
   Who you are. 
   Prior experiences in the field. 
   Having taken courses in the field. 
   Previous academic success in the area. 
   Expectations for future success in the field. 
   Abilities 

6. When you chose a major were there any majors you felt were unavailable for you 
   to select? If so can you tell me what they were and why you chose something 
   else.
7. I am particularly interested in how being a student athlete affected your major 
   selection process. Is there anything about being a student athlete that influenced 
   your selection of a major?

8. How do you balance your athletic pursuits along with your major (academic) 
   requirements?
   8b. Are there times when they conflict?
9. Do you feel pressure to change majors because you are an athlete? 
   9b. Do you feel that there are some majors that are better regarded for student 
      athletes? If so, did you feel pressure to select one of these majors?
10. How responsive has your advisor been to your student athlete status?
11. How responsive have your instructors been toward your student athlete status?
12. Tell me about your plans for the future? What would you like to do after college?
13. How do you feel your experience, as a collegiate athlete will benefit you in your future plans?
14. What do you see as the role of your major in your future plans?
APPENDIX B

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM
SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

The study in which you are participating is designed to determine how your experience of being a student athlete has impacted your selection of a college major. Approximately 10-15 student athletes will be interviewed for this study. If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked questions pertaining to your college major and how you selected that major. The interviews will be audiotaped. The tape will then be transcribed verbatim and any information that might identify you personally (including your name) will be removed from the transcription. Only the interviewer will have access to the tape from your interview. The tape will be erased by April 1, 2005. There are no anticipated risks involved and that participating or not will have no effect on the student's grades course standing, etc.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to stop participating in the research at any time, or to decline to answer specific questions. Your participation in this research is confidential. The transcription of your interview will be identified by code number but this number will not be connected with your name in any fashion.

Further information about this study may be obtained by calling Sarah Schmitt at (406) 556-1354 or Betsy Palmer at (406) 994-7573. Additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board, Mark Quinn, (406) 994-5721.

I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have about research procedures. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described. I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

_______________________________________   __________________
Participant Signature      Date

_______________________________________   __________________
Interviewer Signature      Date