

Student First? The Examination of Student-athlete Support Services at a NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Institution

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The purpose of this study was to examine the current student-athlete support services at a NCAA Division I FBS level institution through the lens of high impact educational practices, while identifying and justifying potential areas of improvement in this area. The researchers considered the overall student-athlete experience by identifying and describing what resources student-athlete support services provide, how student-athletes are (or are not) utilizing these services, and applying high impact educational practices to these services. Employing a qualitative approach, 14 semi-structured interviews with student-athletes and administrators presented several themes addressing the implementation of high impact educational practices. The results presented are of importance to athletics administrators interested in understanding how to develop meaningful student-athlete support services, while supporting student-athlete interests and constraints. Athletics administrators can learn to establish on-campus programming for their student-athletes in addition to creating a comfortable climate and connection between student-athlete support services and on-campus resources.

Intercollegiate athletics is a consequential part of American culture, deeply woven and cursed with money. From misplaced values and the lack of attention regarding inequality, to cultural reproduction and scandals, intercollegiate athletics have commonly exhibited a reputation muddled with controversy (Shorette, 2014). Despite the negative publicity associated with the prominent intercollegiate athletics sphere, programs continue to not only grow, but thrive, and have become more popular among stakeholders including fans, spectators, and traditional students. Due to the continued significant growth within this context, academic literature highlights the overall relationship between higher educational institutions and their respective intercollegiate athletics programs.

Within higher education, a common set of high impact educational practices (HIPs) have been studied as a way to produce positive outcomes for students across varied backgrounds. They have been proven effective in contributing to overall student success, especially when students are engaged in at least two throughout their academic career (Kuh, 2008). Typically, participating in these high impact educational practices utilizes extensive time and effort both from faculty and students (Kuh, 2008). While this time and effort is important, high impact educational practices must be implemented effectively in order to have a lasting positive outcome for students. This includes scaling up the practices, such as providing more access for all students and ensuring students have a

real opportunity to participate – at least one available to every student every year (Kuh, 2008).

Several studies have illustrated the overall importance of participation in intercollegiate athletics as a way to increase academic success and on-campus involvement for student-athletes (Comeaux et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Huml et al., 2017). Others have specifically examined high impact educational practices relating to this student-athlete population. For example, Navarro et al. (2020) found student-athlete study abroad trips to be beneficial in academic, social, and career development both in college and during the pivotal transition period after college. Furthermore, the participation in service-based learning, or community service, for student-athletes was deemed a worthwhile opportunity with benefits of personal and professional development (Martin, 2018). Student-athletes participating in collaborative internship opportunities across campus saw professional development improvements in areas like communication, collaboration, and work ethic (Coffin et al., 2021).

While these examples have touted benefits including career readiness, professional development, and personal development, others have recommended additional focus on “leverage[ing] the powerful potential of learning communities to support a group of students who have not traditionally participated in these programs” (Mamerow, 2014, p. 2). and ensuring programming, like first-year experiences, “meet the expectations of

HIP quality dimensions” (Grafnetterova, 2020, p. 1).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested that participation in these types of engagement practices for first-year student-athletes can create similar benefits as seen with non-athlete college students. Similarly, overall engagement in high impact educational practices has been found to create a positive impact on college outcomes for student-athletes (Gatson-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Umbach et al., 2006). Unfortunately, even if high impact educational practices are offered at particular institutions, barriers exist that limit implementation and participation of these practices for student-athletes including student-athlete time commitment and lack of departmental resources among others (Ishaq & Bass, 2019). Some student-athletes have even described their experiences in life skills programming as frustrating with need for improvement (Forestor et al., 2020).

However, opportunities exist to ensure student-athlete programming is meeting the standards of high-impact educational practices. Patton et al. (2016) recommended providing programming for students that considers the specific college environment and types of students in which the institution is serving. Rubin and Lewis (2020) illustrated the importance of collaboration across campus to ensure student-athlete success. Although the outcomes of such interventions have been studied, student-athlete support services staff and administrators alike must strive to identify areas of improvement in their own respective

institutions to help further apply HIP theory into practice (Comeaux et al., 2011; Patton et al., 2016).

Therefore, because of the prominence, recognition, and revenue streams associated with National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletics, the purpose of this study was to examine current student-athlete support services and the use of high impact educational practices at a Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institution, while identifying and justifying potential areas of improvement in this area. The researchers considered the overall student-athlete experience by identifying which student-athlete development programs the student-athletes participate in at the selected institution and how they apply to high impact educational practices. Additionally, missing services were assessed and elaborated on how they could be implemented in the intercollegiate athletics setting moving forward.

Theoretical Framework: High-Impact Educational Practices

Overall, high impact educational practices take unique forms based on the characteristics, priorities, and contexts of the universities utilizing such practices (Kuh, 2008). While these practices have been widely tested and have illustrated beneficial outcomes for diverse college students, they remain unsystematic at the institutional level. For the following practices, educational research has suggested an increase in student retention and student engagement upon implementation and participation (Kuh, 2008).

These high impact educational practices include: (1) First-Year Seminars and Experiences, (2) Common Intellectual Experiences, (3) Learning Communities, (4) Writing-Intensive Courses, (5) Collaborative Assignments and Projects, (6) Undergraduate Research, (7) Diversity/Global Learning, (8) Service Learning, Community-Based Learning, (9) Internships, and (10) Capstone Courses and Projects.

Enhanced and enriched educational opportunities, such as learning communities, service learning, research with a faculty member, study abroad, internship, and culminating senior experiences are known as high impact educational practices because of their positive effect on student learning and development (McCormick et al., 2013). According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2013):

These experiences call on students to invest considerable time and effort, facilitate out-of-class learning, engage students meaningfully with faculty, encourage interaction with people unlike themselves, and provide frequent feedback on performance. Students often describe their participation in these activities as life changing. (p. 13)

Kuh and O'Donnell (2013) identified eight key elements that must occur for practices to be high impact. Specifically, these eight key elements include: 1) performance expectations set at appropriately high levels, 2) significant investment of time and effort by students over an

extended period of time, 3) interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters, 4) experience with diversity, where students are exposed to people or circumstances that differ from those that they are familiar with, 5) frequent, time, and constructive feedback, 6) periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning, 7) relevance of learning through real-world applications, and 8) public demonstration of competence.

Through the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) (2018) data and the NCAA Study of Student-Athlete Social Environments (2016), Bell et al. (2018) determined that being a student-athlete encompasses all key elements except, faculty and peer interaction, reflecting and integrating learning, and relevance of learning through real-world applications. While this is the case, student-athletes are a unique population with unique barriers that make participation in these high-impact educational practices more difficult (Ishaq & Bass, 2019). Not only do student-athletes find it more difficult to participate in these educational programs, but the idea that each college campus is unique, and HIPs are still unsystematic across higher education further complicates implementation and participation for this unique population (Kuh, 2008). The following review of literature will help readers gain a better understanding of who today's college students are, the role of the college choice model and the college environment, and present examples of student-athlete academic resources.

Literature Review

Throughout this study, higher education theories were utilized to help explore the student-athlete academic environment, specifically as it relates to student-athlete support services. In order to help garner a more in-depth understanding of college students and their environment, a magnitude of topics, including characteristics of today's college student, college choice, and the college environment, were explored to illustrate the current higher education landscape. Holistically understanding the concepts and theories helped demonstrate the current state of higher education and how individual programs within student-athlete support services programs connect to high-impact educational practices.

Characteristics of Today's College Student

With an estimated 19.5 million students enrolled in higher education in 2020 (NCES, 2020), the overall undergraduate enrollment has continued to increase over the past 40 years and will continue to do so (Renn, 2012). The early 2000's saw tremendous growth in the undergraduate enrollment with an increase upwards of 24 percent in just an eight-year period (Renn, 2012). Furthermore, Renn (2012) explained this growth has included an increased proportion of students of color, consistent with demographic changes in the U.S. and overall college attendance rates for these racial and ethnic groups of students. Renn (2012) also explained, "The percentage of White students in higher

education has decreased over the last several decades. Although the overall percentage decreased, the total number of White students actually increased by 54% over the same period" (p. 7). While this may seem like a significant increase, it pales in comparison to the growth seen in Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Hispanic students. This population of students experienced an average of 528% growth while American Indian, Alaska Native, and African American college students increased by an average of 146% (Renn, 2012).

Diversity is not only limited to race and ethnicity, but also among identities, attitudes, and beliefs of current college students. Trend data suggests that college students are becoming more accepting and progressive in regard to their attitudes of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans issues (PEW Research, 2013). Similarly, Dey and Associates (2009) found that "93 percent of students responding to a survey supported the notion that contributing to a larger [campus] community should be a major focus of a college education" (p. 5).

These findings can certainly be applied to Generation Y (Gen Y), or Millennials, who are born between 1981 and 2001. Gen Y's changing nature shows a student body that lacks basic skills, is collaborative in nature and learns best as a group, is assertive and confident, is supported emotionally and financially by "helicopter parents" (i.e., parents who pay extremely close attention to their child's experiences) and is dependent upon technology and its expectations as

a learning tool (Black, 2010). Educators must be aware of these characteristics in “helping students gain the skills to live, earn, and work successfully within society” (Black, 2010, p. 100).

In fact, most incoming college students today are Gen Z and are also referred to as “Zoomers” (McCrary, 2021). Gen Z students are becoming more technology dependent and are considered digital natives, digesting much of their information from technology (Levine & Dean, 2012). Furthermore, Gen Z exhibits greater concern for social justice and sustainability and are more diverse as a group with furthered global thinking (Boleska, 2018; Levine & Dean, 2012).

While these characteristics apply to today’s college student, student-athletes exhibit their own unique set of characteristics in addition to the ones previously mentioned. Just as the overall percentage of the White student population has decreased over the past several years, similar trends can be seen within the student-athlete population. According to the NCAA demographics database (2018), White males and females made up 64.5% of the total student-athlete population in Division I, II, and III institutions combined. The percentage of White male student-athletes participating at the Divisions I, II, and III levels combined decreased from 64.9% in 2015-2016 to 63.7% in 2016-2017 (NCAA, 2018). In 2016-2017, White male student-athletes comprised 56.7%, 58.3%, and 72.5% of all male student-athletes in Division I, Division II, and Division III, respectively. During the 2016-2017 season, African American male student-athletes com-

prised 22.2%, 20.4%, and 12.2% of all male student-athletes in Divisions I, II, and III, respectively (NCAA, 2018).

Similar data can be applied to the White female student-athletes, who in 2016-2017 saw a 1.1% decrease from 66% of all Division I women student-athletes to 64.9%. Their female African American peers also saw a decrease, but at a much smaller scale from 12.6% to 12.5% of the all-female student-athlete population (NCAA, 2018). The percentages decreased to 9.5% at the Division II level and 5.9% at the Division III level. Conversely, the number increased to 70.8% at the Division II level and 80.3% at the Division III level for White female students (NCAA, 2018).

College Choice

The enrollment decisions facing high school graduates have increasingly become an important indicator of societal and educational issues. For example, Kinzie et al. (2004) suggested that federal, state, and institutional policymakers often base decisions about education equity and access on specific information obtained from the postsecondary students, including sociological and economic background. College choice is defined by Hossler and colleagues (2003) as “a complex, multistate process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training” (p. 7). This systematic, theory-driven research on college choice can enhance the knowledge on student college choice

and can lead to “an improved understanding of college choice, which can lead to aid policies, high school guidance activities, and marketing activities that make college more accessible to students and that increase the likelihood of student fit” (Hossler et al., 2003, p. 38).

While shown to occur among traditional college students, college choice factors play a different role within the student-athlete experience. Past studies have largely determined that academic programs or major were the top priority when it comes to student-athlete college choice; however, other factors exist, including who the head coach is, what academic support services are present, academic reputation, career development opportunities, and sport atmosphere (Kankey & Quaterman, 2007; Letawsky et al., 2005; Pauline, 2012). However, college choice factors can largely vary per sport. For example, Klenosky and colleagues (2001) examined NCAA Division I football players and determined the coach/coaching staff was most important in their decision, but also the location and friends on the team made them feel comfortable with their college decision.

The literature illustrates college choice factors that are unique to student-athletes, including head coach, student-athlete support services, and sport atmosphere; however, Letawsky and colleagues (2003) noted, “Although student-athletes have different factors that influence college choice, non-athletic related factors (i.e., academic reputation, major options, financial considerations) are just as important as athletic related

factors” (p. 604). Athletics administrators and recruiters must learn to find the appropriate balance between these two factors, particularly with the addition of new name, image, and likeness opportunities for student-athletes and its role in college choice and recruitment.

College Environment and Safe Spaces

When assessing the role of student-athlete support services and high impact educational practices, the researchers focused on the college environment. Due to its importance regarding student retention, the college environment plays a vital role in the overall student experience and must be studied. While students enter college with a unique set of individual characteristics, with these characteristics they must also interact with the unique environment present within their institutions.

Unfortunately, there is opportunity for these interactions to not go well, particularly for marginalized students experiencing a negative campus environment. Within the college environment exists the idea of safe spaces within the classroom. Specifically, a “safe space” is described as “classroom environment in which students are willing and able to participate and honestly struggle with challenging issues” (Holley & Steiner, 2005, p. 49). A safe space may also represent “inclusive groups of learners,” who are underrepresented or marginalized based on a variety of factors but feel as if they are in a safe environment to be able to express their views (Gayle et al., 2013, p. 2).

Students felt more challenged and

aware in a safe classroom while also indicating the opportunity to be more open-minded to their own viewpoints and the viewpoints of others (Holley & Steiner, 2005). Safe classrooms have often been viewed as an opportunity to create a college environment open to all; however, often students are unaware of the role they play in creating these types of environments. Specifically, most students felt that the instructor was the primary influencer on the perceived safety of the classroom without realizing their own power in helping drive the classroom to a safe space (Holley & Steiner, 2005). This is incredibly important, especially for underrepresented or marginalized student populations because “a large majority of students stated that safe classroom environments were important in both what and how much they learned” (Holley & Steiner, 2005, p. 58).

Of particular note are African American students at predominately White institutions, who felt much more vulnerable in the classroom than their non-African American peers (Sedlacek, 1999). While this is the case, past research has also indicated that, although vulnerable in the classroom, a more engaged classroom provides African American students with a greater sense of belonging (Booker, 2007).

Student-Athlete Academic Resources

Across higher education institutions, the general student population is often offered resources in the form of tutors and academic advisors. While student-athletes often have access to

these same resources, past research has illustrated the discrepancy in additional personnel support available for student-athletes (Huml et al., 2017). Particularly, student-athlete resources are often housed in exclusive academic centers on campus that specifically serve this population (Rubin & Moses, 2017). These academic centers have shown positive outcomes for student-athletes, especially regarding career self-efficacy; however, growing dependence on these centers and student-athlete specific resources create a sense of isolation between athletic departments and academic units on campus (Burns et al., 2013; Huml et al., 2017; Rubin & Moses, 2017). According to Rubin and Moses (2017), these academic centers play “an integral role in building a positive team academic sub-culture” (p. 326). Furthermore, overall perceptions of the service quality of student-athlete support services, including academic advising and life skills, helped influence overall satisfaction, involvement, and emotional adjustment in freshmen student-athletes (Otto et al., 2019). Not only are freshmen student-athletes affected by overall service quality of support programs, but Division I student-athletes, in general, are “shaped to a significant degree by the vision, knowledge, and competencies of those providing leadership in this athletic enterprise” (Comeaux & Crandall, 2019, p. 82).

However, due to the isolation between athletic and academic units on campus, issues of academic integrity and ethics may arise. Intercollegiate athletics scandals are becoming more and more

prevalent throughout the media, especially within the realm of academic scandals. While the NCAA continues to grow in participation with more than 460,000 student-athletes competing across 24 sports, more eyes have caught sight of the negative attention surrounding several NCAA institutions. Although research has placed immense value on successful athletic programs, this may illustrate a shift away from an academic focus (Brunet et al., 2013). Unfortunately, this shift away from academics has shed light on several NCAA scandals on and off the court or field.

In 2017, the University of North Carolina (UNC) was not punished by the NCAA despite “running one of the worst academic fraud schemes in college sports history, involving fake classes that enabled dozens of athletes to gain and maintain their eligibility” (Tracy, 2017, para. 1). While this was the case, no punishment was enforced by the NCAA because these so called “paper” classes were not being exclusively offered to athletes at the institution and, thus, could not conclude that NCAA academic rules were broken (Tracy, 2017). This incident was not a unique occurrence across the NCAA. Academic fraud has been noted in several Division I institutions, such as the University of Missouri and the University of Notre Dame. Both of these cases involved athletic staff members, including an academic coordinator and athletic trainer, completing a significant amount of coursework for basketball and football student-athletes, respectively. A one-year postseason ban was imposed

for Missouri basketball, while Notre Dame football was put on a one-year probation (Associated Press, 2016; Palmer, 2016). While constant media attention was placed on these programs during the time of scandal, little media attention is placed on strong academic performances and practices that are or can be implemented in the student-athlete environment.

Student-Athlete Support Programs as HIPs

As intercollegiate athletics continues to shift, we know that “supporting athletes in their navigation of the academic rigor in college while balancing their role as athletes require[s] intentional resources for this student population” (Navarro et al., 2019, p. 1). Oftentimes this can prove difficult due to the disconnect between athletics administrators and on-campus student-affairs personnel as well as other barriers to implementation and participation (Ishaq & Bass, 2019; Navarro et al., 2020), several studies have illustrated the benefits of student-athlete participation in high-impact educational practices while also noting recommendations for programming. Although student-athletes face time demands and pressure to perform, development in college is one of the most critical stages for young adults, particularly as they prepare for careers and life outside of sport (Navarro et al., 2020). Participation in HIPs is one way for student-athletes to navigate their transition out of college and, ultimately for many, out of sport as well (Stokowski et al., 2019).

Coffin et al. (2021) found on-campus internship participation by student-athletes aided in overall professional development, career preparation, and workplace skills. Navarro et al. (2019) described academic, social, and career development benefits for student-athletes engaging in study abroad experiences. Career development benefits were echoed across participation in community service for student-athletes as well, including “working with diverse groups, scholarship and admittance into graduate programs, and career choice/personal values” (Martin, 2018, p. 10). Of greater importance to many higher education institutions are the cross-collaborative first-year seminars and quality experiences that incorporate HIP dimensions for student-athletes create a positive impact and lead to increased persistence, satisfaction, and sense of belonging (Grafnetterova et al., 2020). Furthermore, Rubin et al. (2020) shared narratives on student-athletes’ experiences in undergraduate research and determined that the “experiences were impactful on their confidence, skill-building, and future directions” (p. 13).

While many institutions employ such high-impact practices for their student-athletes, each must understand the needs of their specific student-athlete population, while acknowledging the importance of athletics and campus collaboration to ensure student-athlete academic, personal, and professional success (Rubin & Lewis, 2020). By understanding and recognizing student-athlete needs while pursuing new high-impact practice

opportunities, like learning communities, where student-athletes are often left out of participation (Mamerow & Navarro, 2014), administrators can begin to understand how to best continue to support their unique student-athlete population.

While these high-impact practices have illustrated beneficial outcomes for student-athletes, the practices remain unsystematic at the institutional level across higher education (Kuh, 2008) and likely within athletic departments as well, “due to the fact that the organized concept of HIPs are not integrated into the Athletics or University’s mission[s]” (Braunstein-Mikove et al., 2022, p. 95). Additionally, some HIPs are far too often ignored despite positive outcomes, including undergraduate research, which often illustrates significant discrepancies in participation for student-athletes relative to their non-athlete student peers (Hall et al., 2020).

Although a sincere interest in student-athlete success exists, Braunstein-Mikove et al. (2022) indicated that transformational leadership, “or an insightful coach or administrator, who will encourage the introduction of these initiatives into the intercollegiate athletics lexicon” (p. 95) is necessary to make participation in HIPs a priority. Therefore, additional research is necessary to assess the role of student-athlete support services as it relates to high impact educational practices at specific institutions. In order to further explore student-athlete support services programming, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: What current student-athlete support services are being utilized at the studied Division I FBS level institution?

RQ2: What student-athlete support services are perceived to be missing by student-athletes and athletic administrators at the studied Division I FBS level institution?

Methodology

Positionality

According to Sultana (2007), “It is critical to pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge, and the power relations that are inherent in research processes in order to undertake ethical research” (p. 380). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the positionality and epistemological assumptions of the researchers which can have influence on the research process. The primary researcher previously worked in college athletics at three separate Division I FBS level institutions. The positions he held were in event management, marketing, and student-athlete support services. The research team also consisted of an individual who worked in college athletics at two Division I FBS level institutions and one Division III level institution. The positions she held were in ticket operations and as a support staff member for women’s basketball teams. The final individual on the research team is a former Division I student-athlete who utilized student-athlete support services at her institution while playing her respective sport. As all three researchers previously worked in college

athletics, it is important to recognize how their experiences might have directly or indirectly impacted how the study was designed and executed as well as how the data was analyzed and interpreted (May & Perry, 2017).

Epistemological assumptions are known as an individual’s beliefs about the nature of knowledge (Sikes, 2004). The researchers employed a constructivist epistemology, which suggests that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 12), and individuals construct their own understandings through previous experiences and interactions (Ültanir, 2012). This approach allowed the researchers to focus on the participants’ views of the student-athlete support services at the studied Division I FBS institution. It also provided the researchers the opportunity to acknowledge the impact their college athletics background has on the research process (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, the constructivist epistemology paradigm coincides with the chosen case study methodology, as they both seek to deeply understand an experience, meaning, or knowledge constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015). Merriam’s (1998) constructivist application to the case study method also accounts for the researchers’ role in the construction and interpretation of the studied phenomenon.

The researchers utilized a case study approach which provided “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process,

or a social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii). This methodology was deemed appropriate due to the three distinctive characteristics of the case study method: 1) particularistic- focus is on a particular situation, program, organization, event, or phenomenon, 2) descriptive- researchers are provided with rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon, 3) heuristic- elucidates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Specifically, the case-study approach provided an in-depth understanding of student-athlete support services at the studied Division I FBS Institution. The perspective from individuals who have had experiences with the services (i.e., student-athletes and athletic administrators) was explored.

Interviews represented the data collection method and were consistent with the epistemological assumptions of constructivism (Creswell, 2003) and the case study methodology approach (Merriam, 1998). Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with student-athletes and administrators at a large Midwestern NCAA Division I FBS institution during the 2019 Spring semester. The semi-structured interview method, which is commonly used in case studies, was deemed appropriate as it offers flexibility during the data collection process and provides researchers with comprehensive responses (Merriam, 1998). It provided an advantage in assessing the original questions within the study, but also allowed the researchers to ask follow-up questions and dig deeper through unexpected findings and data

that were likely to transpire throughout the individual’s interview process (Gillham, 2000). Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached, which is described as, “any further data collection will not provide any different information from that you already have, that is you are not learning anything new” (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 153). Based on the interviews that had been conducted, the researchers believed they had a solid understanding of the student-athlete support services at the studied Division I FBS institution. The current study’s sample size and use of data saturation to suspend interviews, is considered common and consistent with other case study approaches (Merriam, 1998; Schwandt & Gates, 2017).

Two interview guides (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) were created to help direct the conversation, and each contained specific questions for both the student-athletes and the athletics administrators. (See Appendix for interview guides). The interview guides and open-ended questions were constructed from relevant higher education literature and the theoretical framework on high-impact educational practices (Merriam, 1998). For consistency purposes, the primary researcher conducted all the interviews with participants. The interviews ranged between 19-37 minutes and included approximately 15 questions related to educational programming for student-athletes and athletics administrators at the institution. All interviews were conducted over the phone after an initial email recruitment to the athletics

director. Ultimately, convenience sampling was utilized based on the overall response from the institution as well as the convenient access to participants.

Document collection and analysis was also used to provide further information regarding university specific programs, including learning communities and core curriculum, to help assess whether institutions provided such opportunities for students. Specifically, university websites were evaluated through “repeated review, examination, and interpretation of the data in order to gain meaning of the construct studied” (Gross, 2018, para. 1). By using several data sources – document collection and semi-structured interviews – the current study generated a detailed understanding of the student-athlete support services at the studied Division I FBS institution. This in-depth, multi-faceted investigation is indicative of a case study approach (Merriam, 1998).

Participants

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researchers recruited participants for this study. An NCAA Division I institution was used due to the significant number of resources presented within student-athlete support services and the access for the researchers. The convenience sampling consisted of 14 total participants from an NCAA Division I FBS institution. Nine student-athletes were interviewed, six females and three males. The sports of each student-athlete varied, but included baseball, golf, wrestling, track and field, basketball, softball, and

rowing. A total of four athletics administrators were also recruited. Two females and two males were interviewed with positions ranging from graduate assistant to director. One faculty athletic representative was included in this sample. Table 1 details the participant profiles along with the appropriate pseudonyms utilized within the results section of this study.

Data Analysis

The results were analyzed by the researchers using the interview transcriptions of the audio interviews. As results were originally presented in audio format, transcription was necessary. The open-ended interview responses were analyzed using open coding to identify emergent themes. Both deductive and inductive reasoning were used during open coding analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Specifically, the researchers adhered to the suggested coding framework outlined by Gratton and Jones (2010). The responses were individually read and assigned codes by each researcher based on a priori themes drawn from the existing literature on high impact educational practices and student-athlete support services. After individually coding the participant responses, the researchers met collectively to discuss the analysis. Next, the researchers collectively reread the responses and searched for additional statements that fit into one of the assigned codes developed in the first stage. Further, the researchers went back through the responses with a more analytical perspective to search for explanations or patterns in the assigned codes.

Table 1
Participant Profiles

Participant	Gender	Position	Sport
Audrey	Female	Student-athlete	Golf
Sybil	Female	Student-athlete	Track & Field
Bobbi	Female	Student-athlete	Basketball
Dominique	Male	Student-athlete	Football
Fletcher	Male	Student-athlete	Golf
Patrick	Male	Student-athlete	Baseball
Raven	Female	Student-athlete	Track & Field
Chloe	Female	Student-athlete	Rowing
Brynn	Female	Student-athlete	Rowing
Samantha	Female	FAR	N/A
Teri	Female	Assistant AD	N/A
Leslie	Female	GA	N/A
Maxwell	Male	Assistant AD	N/A
Richard	Male	Director	N/A

Specifically in this stage of coding, the researchers discussed how these inductive themes highlighted the student-athlete support services (or lack thereof) at the studied Division I FBS level institution. In the fourth and final stage (Gratton & Jones, 2010), the researchers individually reread the original participant responses, and then collectively selected representative quotes to display appropriate justification for the analysis and results.

Trustworthiness of Data

Trustworthiness plays a vital role in the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) address central questions that help determine trust and capture concerns of validity, reliability, objectivity, and generalizability. Addressing these central concerns helps researchers stray away from calling themselves reliable, but rather, move to, “distinguish[ing] the traits that...ensure our interpretations of the data are ‘trustworthy’” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 44). The trustworthiness procedures used in this study include being in the setting for a long period of time (prolonged engagement), sharing data and interpretations with participants (member checking), triangulating data through multiple methods, and discussing emergent findings with colleagues (peer debriefing) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These procedures are consistent with Merriam’s (1998) conception of case study data validation and “provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion ‘makes sense’” (p. 199).

Results & Discussion

The analysis of the qualitative data revealed key themes relating to the implementation of high impact educational practices as well as the absence of certain high impact educational practices within student-athlete support services.

HIPs in the Student-Athlete Support Services Setting

Throughout the results, it was apparent that the institution utilized a variety of student-athlete support services in an effort to provide positive outcomes for their student-athletes. However, the results only indicated consistent utilization of only three HIPs, including first-year seminars and experiences, service/community-based learning, and internships.

Beyond the existence of the support services, it is important to strategically evaluate the individual support programs in order to advance such services and promote the significance of high impact educational practices in the student-athlete setting. Therefore, the following subsections detail how the student-athlete programs and services intersect high impact educational practices and how additional services can be provided to implement these practices within the student-athlete setting.

First-year Seminars and Experiences

The utilization of first-year seminars and experiences attempt to improve students’ overall intellectual and practical skills (Kuh, 2008). These types of experiences play a critical role as they are often

the first programs students participate in within the college environment, which plays a large role in student retention and overall psychological processes (Bean & Eaton, 2000). Fortunately, first-year seminars and experiences have found their place within the NCAA Division I student-athlete setting, whether through the institution, the athletic department, or both.

Specifically, the studied institution utilized a first-year summer bridge program for their student-athletes. Additionally, they established a freshmen student-athlete mentoring program through University Leadership and Development Program (ULDP). The required institutional summer bridge programs were designed to work on practical skills by providing financial literacy training, diversity and inclusion instruction, classroom, and professional etiquette courses, as well as career and volunteer services. Maxwell, an Assistant Athletics Director stated, “The other thing is we’re thinking about this summer is continuing to implement the Summer Bridge Program, which cooperates with [ULDP] and that’s mandatory because it’s basically a class or a workshop.” Specifically, the summer bridge programs, an example of specific first-year programming built for student-athletes in combination with university programming. According to Maxwell, they allow student-athletes:

The opportunity to have someone look at a resume or start building a resume or start talking about social networking etiquette, which a lot of guys don’t understand on

Twitter there are lot of people are reading. So, what you put out there, you’re getting watched or Snapchat or whatever that may be. So, I’m trying to implement some of what [ULDP] does starting with our freshman.

Additionally, the institution attempted to provide a strong first-year experience in an effort to make student-athletes aware of the resources available to them as they grow within their academic and athletic careers.

In attempting to illustrate whether or not high impact educational practices are used within the student-athlete context, it becomes evident that first-year seminars and experiences are currently part of the student-athlete academic environment and play a role both within athletics and the campus communities at this institution. Athletics administrators must continue to provide similar opportunities for student-athletes in an effort to get them acquainted with the campus community and college structure.

These findings coincide with those of Grafnetterova et al. (2020), who encouraged first-year seminar instructors to “adhere to quality dimensions of HIPs” and to be “more intentional in the design and implementation of their programs, which can result in the achievement of desired learning outcomes” (p. 141). The results noted the use of both student-athlete specific programming and campus programming, which helps enhance overall first-year student-athlete experiences by utilizing the academic and professional expertise of the institution’s

faculty and staff (Grafnetterova et al., 2020). This collaboration can help limit barriers to implementation and participation in high impact practices for student-athletes (Ishaq & Bass, 2019).

Service/Community-Based Learning

Throughout the analysis of the collected data, service/community-based learning was one area student-athletes excelled in and were certainly being implemented within the athletics setting. Service/community learning programs are described as “field-based ‘experiential learning’ with community partners as an instructional strategy” in an effort to “analyze and solve community problems” (Kuh, 2008, p. 21). The importance of community service within the athletic departments was consistently discussed within each interview. Patrick, a baseball student-athlete stated:

A huge deal of what SAAC does is reach out into the community and the greater area because the University has so much power when working with the community and especially with children and a lot of different other non-profit organizations. Student-athletes have a whole lot of power and so we would work with the police department, we’d work with the Boys and Girls Clubs, things like that. Not really to ever promote athletics, but to always give back to the community and, in return, support for us was just insurmountable.

Similar sentiments were expressed by several student-athletes and administra-

tors. For example, Maxwell, an Assistant AD, noted community involvement as one of the key pillars of programming within the athletic department:

Which is phenomenal for our guys to be involved in and our student-athletes to be involved in... [staff] are really involved in putting on workshops and events at least once a month [including] community service. I mean it’s absolutely crazy. And what I tell our recruits is all this stuff is free, all you got to do is show up and so our guys and gals have a phenomenal opportunity to do a lot of things here with our services.

While this opportunity is not something all student-athletes are able to participate in, many campuses require a service-learning component in their coursework, especially freshmen courses, as noted by the athletic director. These results within the studied institution are promising as Martin (2018) found it as a “best practice to encourage community service as it catalyzes professional exploration,” “provides developmental experiences for the student-athlete population,” and “promote[s] a holistic student-athlete career development process” (p. 17). While this is the case, the studied institution must consider constraints as it can be difficult to coordinate community service around the already hectic schedules of student-athletes (Martin, 2018). Additionally, athletic departments like the one studied, must also take into consideration how they are encouraging participation in community service as

Huml et al. (2017) found “no statistically significant relationship between frequencies of student-athlete volunteering and NCAA Division level, service-focused mission statement, geographical location, mandatory service requirements, use of community service as punishment, nor personnel choosing volunteer activity” (p. 114).

Internships

Internships were one of the most widely utilized high impact educational practices within the context of the student-athlete experience. Internships are intended to provide students with professional experience and “to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field” (Kuh, 2008, p. 11). Brynn, a rower at the studied university, credited ULDP for her internship with the conference office at the institution studied. The academic department at the studied institution, “makes each of our juniors and seniors meet with our student affairs staff during the fall and start to look at potentially getting an internship [or] shadowing work that they can do between their junior and senior [year].” Similarly, student affairs staff exist at some NCAA Division I universities to assist with internships and career development. Teri, an Assistant Athletics Director, noted, a career specialist is “somebody that’s going to do work specifically with our student-athletes” to help provide “job shadowing and internships for student-athletes. That’s really a high priority for us.”

Interestingly, while some internship programming is managed within the athletic program, many athletic academic staff rely on specific academic programs and/or departments on campus for student-athlete internship opportunities. For example, at the studied institution, some majors, “like sport management [and] exercise science, [the internship] is a required piece of your major, so that becomes a part of it. For other majors that don’t require the internship, it is maybe not talked about as much” (Teri, Assistant AD). Athletics administrators must work directly with academic departments specifically in “building toward more of a centralized location and working with career services to indicate specific internship opportunities for our student-athletes” (Richard, Director).

While the studied institution noted resources that are available for student-athletes during their college careers, there was little mention of post-eligibility opportunities and services. For example, University of Nebraska’s Post-Eligibility Opportunities (PEO) program helps provide former student-athletes with educational opportunities and post-eligibility workshops in an effort to increase marketability and career development, often resulting in internships, study abroad opportunities, or admission into graduate school (Navarro et al., 2020). These are all important considerations for an athletic department to help student-athletes explore career opportunities to “ensure a smooth transition to life beyond sport” while “gain[ing] crucial career-related experiences while also balancing their

academic and athletic responsibilities” (Coffin et al., 2021, p. 70).

Missing High Impact Education Practices

As discussed in the previous theme, certain high impact educational practices were utilized in the student-athlete support services setting at the institution of focus in this study. However, while certain practices existed, the researchers discovered some programming practices were not offered or effectively implemented. Specifically, outside of the three previously discussed high impact educational practices, there was little evidence of specialized student-athlete support services and access to diversity/global learning, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, and capstone courses and projects.

Diversity/Global Learning

Diversity and global learning encompass diversity and inclusion classes and experiences like study abroad as a way to teach world views and explore cultures (Kuh, 2008). Ultimately, diversity/global learning opportunities were limited due to barriers that existed, such as time. Fletcher, a golf athlete, noted, “So, through the business school, there was three or four opportunities that I wanted to do, over in Italy and over in Spain, a lot of these opportunities that students got to take advantage of that we just don’t get to do.” This thought was consistent with other student-athlete exper-

iences. Unfortunately, with barriers to participation, these meaningful and often described as life changing experiences become limited to the student-athlete (NSSE, 2013).

These results pinpoint a critical issue regarding participation in study abroad programs for student-athletes at the studied institution. While study abroad programs are available and offered, student-athletes are limited in what they can fit into their packed schedules, where, at the Division I level, approximately 34 hours per week are spent on athletic-related activities (Navarro et al., 2020). The studied institution must ensure ways to promote and encourage participation in study abroad programming or provide reasonable alternatives in diversity/global learning (Ishaq & Bass, 2019). This can be an issue for even the most driven student-athletes. Although administrators believe that there may be, “very few [student-athletes] that are actually deeply engaged in campus activities outside of athletics because of the time commitment that would be required,” they continue to ask themselves, “what can you do to try and help that?” (Teri, Assistant AD).

Common Intellectual Experiences

Common intellectual experiences refer to “core” curriculum featured at institutions as a way to explore big picture items in an attempt to foster a sense of broad knowledge in areas like science, history, and cultures (Kuh, 2008). Common intellectual experiences are university-controlled and, if implemented, are

required by all students as part of general education.

According to the studied institution's core website, the programming "is designed to yield fundamental skills, build a broad background of knowledge, generate capacities and opportunities for blending and creating ideas, strengthen an appreciation of cultural and global diversity, and cultivate ethical integrity" (FBS Core, 2019, para. 1). The FBS Institution's core program utilizes six educational goals with specific learning outcomes. These goals include: 1) critical thinking and quantitative literacy, 2) communication, 3) breadth of knowledge, 4) culture and diversity, 5) social responsibility and ethics, and 6) integration and creativity (FBS Core, 2019). While intended to provide a foundation for students, "very few [colleges and universities] have curricular requirements that come close to ensuring that their students receive a solid general education" (Leef, 2013, p. 4). Thus, while the institution studied provided a common intellectual experience through their core curriculum, there is little opportunity to provide specialized requirements for the unique student-athlete population.

Learning Communities

Learning communities "consist of small cohorts of students who are enrolled together in two or more linked courses in a single semester and are widely-used strategy aimed at improving student outcomes" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d, p. 1). According to Kuh (2008), learning communities contribute to overall academic challenge,

collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, and supportive campus environments, especially for first-year students. However, based on the results, these learning communities were not part of the student-athlete support services. Unfortunately, this also goes against the idea of learning that takes place in and out of the classroom. Experiences, like learning communities, that may not be as readily available for student-athletes, have the potential to limit opportunities of cognitive growth through things like student-faculty contact, active learning (Pascarella et al., 2006), and integrative learning (Kuh, 2008). In an effort to increase overall student-athlete involvement in learning communities, athletics administrators must rely on promoting these on-campus opportunities.

While not available directly within the athletic department, learning communities are part of the learning environment for students across NCAA Division I campuses. Iowa State University has served over 80,000 students in learning communities since 1995 and currently offers 90 learning communities with over 77 percent of first-year students participating (Iowa State University Learning Communities, 2019). Particularly, Iowa State University has cited greater student satisfaction and engagement for learning community students, including NSSE benchmarks (A Success Story, 2019). In an effort to "support Wayne State University's commitment to student learning and retention," WSU offers over 35 learning community opportunities for their students and faculty to "learn and grow together" (Learning Communities,

2019, para. 1). As learning communities are an essential part of high impact educational practices, athletics administrators must work together with on-campus administrators to set student-athlete specific goals to participation in an effort to increase overall participation and engagement with this high impact educational practice on-campus. Clearly, NCAA Division I universities across the country offer these opportunities that align with Kuh's (2008) overall goals and outcomes; however, additional collaboration is necessary to garner greater access for student-athletes.

Student-athletes are often isolated from the general student population, due to practice, competition, or other time constraints (Mamerow & Navarro, 2014). Due to these factors, student-athletes are often kept out of or do not traditionally participate in campus opportunities like learning communities (Mamerow & Navarro, 2014). In the results, it is shown that learning communities are frequently offered at institutions; however, athletic departments have the opportunity to leverage the benefits of these opportunities for their student-athletes as they "have a longstanding and successful approach to supporting new college students, and many of the traditional benefits of learning community participation line up closely with the needs of student-athletes" (Mamerow & Navarro, 2014, p. 1).

Writing-Intensive Courses

Writing at all levels has continuously shown positive outcomes in improving

overall literacy, reasoning, and communication (Kuh, 2008). While this may be the case, Richard, a Director in Student-Athlete Support Services, noted, "we basically don't step into that much," referring to their control over the writing courses. However, relating to writing intensive courses as a high impact educational practice, athletic departments have implemented supplementary writing programs, including writing workshops, to assist their student-athletes. While institutions were implementing writing-intensive courses, additional resources, particularly specialized student-athlete programming within the athletic department, would allow for more benefits for the student-athletes.

Interestingly, some NCAA Division I athletic programs do offer student-athlete specific writing programs; however, it was very uncommon. For example, New Mexico State's Writing and Reading Comprehension Program provides the opportunity for pre-selected student-athletes to "work collaboratively with a reading and writing specialist" in an effort to "establish learning methods that will guide them from the early stages of a writing assignment to its final version" (Academic Support Programs & Services Center Overview, 2019, para. 7). Particularly, this is supplemental to sound education practices, like attendance, note-taking, and time management, "which are imperative for academic success for all students" (Academic Support Programs & Services Center Overview, 2019, para. 7). It is difficult to apply specific recommendations regarding

student-athlete specific writing intensive courses due to the academic controversies that have involved NCAA Division I athletic programs. Specifically, Ishaq and Bass (2019) noted:

It is likely that universities have concerns regarding athletics control over such programming due to controversies and scandals that have previously surrounded athletic departments... These scandals combined with strong media attention on intercollegiate athletic department scandals make for difficult decisions across institutions in how they handle academic programming among athletic departments. (p. 188)

While this is the case, both on-campus and athletics administrators must learn to balance the difficult divide and work to establish student-athlete specific programming related to writing or be able to provide appropriate access points for student-athletes to participate in writing intensive courses throughout their academic careers.

Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative assignments include approaches like team-building exercises, study groups, group projects, and group writing in an effort to promote problem solving and learning to work together (Kuh, 2008). Fortunately, for student-athletes, collaborative work and team exercises are part of the nature of competing in sports. The prevalence of classes that offer these assignments and research projects, “set the stage for

developing a meaningful relationship with another person on campus- a faculty or staff member, student, coworker, or supervisor...who share intellectual interests and are committed to seeing the student succeed” (Kuh, 2008, pp. 14-15). The relationships established through these experiences help promote positive student development within the college environment (McCormick et al., 2013).

While student-athlete support services and campus resources are often physically separated, Rubin & Lewis (2020) saw the importance of athletics and campus collaboration to ensure the success of student-athletes. Athletics advisors should make an “effort...to interact with [campus administrators], such as inviting [campus administrators] to participate in recruiting activities with more than a day’s notice” while also taking the time to honor or recognize them in an effort to “establish intentional follow-ups” (Rubin & Lewis, 2020, p. 115). The results of the studied institution suggested the importance of meaningful relationships across campus, which is consistent with Rubin & Lewis’s (2020) findings, which stressed prioritizing academic success of student-athletes through communication and relationship-building across athletics and campus administrations.

Undergraduate Research

Undergraduate research is often encouraged, but rarely utilized as it is often up to the student-athlete to reach out and organize such opportunities that they may not even know exist. Additionally,

with undergraduate research specifically, it is intended to “involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions” (Kuh, 2008, p. 10). As a high impact educational practice, undergraduate research opportunities are available for student-athletes; however, based on the interview analysis, many student-athletes are not participating in such opportunities, and they are not directly related to student-athlete support services. These findings support claims of undergraduate research receiving little attention in research and participation in the intercollegiate athletics landscape, while also illustrating participation discrepancies in undergraduate research for student-athletes relative to their non-athlete student peers despite positive outcomes associated with its participation (Hall et al., 2020).

While student-athletes may not be directly participating in undergraduate research, the opportunity to do so exists across several NCAA Division I universities, particularly those that have an Office of Undergraduate Research. For example, Northwestern University’s Office of Undergraduate Research “strives to integrate student learning with experiences in the world beyond the classroom” (Our Role, 2019, para. 1). Through opportunities for independent projects or guiding and advising students how to work with faculty, undergraduate research opportunities are prevalent (Our Role, 2019). Several other NCAA

Division I institutions, including University of Illinois at Chicago, University of North Carolina, University of Pittsburgh, and University of Tennessee all have Offices of Undergraduate Research with similar goals of undergraduate involvement in inquired-based projects (Office of Undergraduate Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity, 2019). While it may be difficult for student-athletes to navigate their busy schedules with undergraduate research, student-athletes and athletics administrators must work to integrate on-campus opportunities to garner greater access to high impact educational practices for their student-athletes. These programs support Rubin et al.’s (2020) claims regarding the positive impact undergraduate research has on confidence and skill-building; however, necessary recommendations exist to further promote undergraduate research at the studied institution.

Capstone Courses and Projects

Capstone courses and projects are intended to help students illustrate and integrate what they have learned into a culminating paper or project (Kuh, 2008). There were no mentions of capstone courses and projects specifically within student-athlete support services. Based on the results of this study, the use of capstone courses and projects certainly depends on the university being studied and the majors that the student-athletes are enrolled in. However, institutions like University of North Dakota, University of Northern Iowa, University of Cincinnati, and Purdue University, have a list

of Capstone Courses available on their website (Capstone Courses, 2019; UND Capstone Courses, 2019; UNI Capstone Courses, 2019; University of Cincinnati, 2018). Unfortunately, with capstone courses and projects, it becomes difficult to specifically implement within the student-athlete setting as several outside factors can impact in the overall experience of this high impact educational practice.

While high impact educational practices play a significant role in overall student outcomes, several opportunities are missing specifically within NCAA Division I athletic programs. Whether athletics administrators work to bridge the gap and capitalize on existing on-campus resources for student-athletes or develop student-athlete specific programming, very few high impact educational practices were discussed in the experiences of student-athletes. This aligns with Co-

meaux and Crandall's (2019) claim that athletic stakeholders must redefine and refine the baselines in intercollegiate athletics while aiming to actively align them more closely with the core values of colleges and universities, including the educational mission. In this way, we can ensure the student-athlete is given a fighting chance to demonstrate a high degree of commitment to both their academic *and* athletic roles. (p. 82)

These findings help further develop implications for athletics and campus administrators alike as they work to promote cross-collaboration among athletic and on-campus resources and offices to

allow for greater access to high impact educational practices for student-athletes, in hopes of leading to academic success (Rubin & Lewis, 2020). However, this is not possible without the directive of intercollegiate athletics transformational leaders (Braunstein-Mikove et al., 2022).

Implications and Directions for Future Research

The continued success of the NCAA in terms of revenue will continue to put a spotlight on the intercollegiate athletics relationship with higher education. The purpose of this study was to examine current student-athlete support services educational programs at a FBS NCAA Division I institution, while identifying and justifying potential improvements to help promote high-impact educational practices. The researchers considered the overall student-athlete experience by identifying which programs are available to student-athletes, whether or not they are participating in these programs, and how these programs apply to high impact educational practices. This can often times prove difficult for student-athletes, who struggle with unique barriers to implementation and participation in these educationally purposeful activities (Ishaq & Bass, 2019; Navarro et al., 2020).

The results presented are of importance to athletics administrators interested in understanding how to develop meaningful student-athlete support services, while supporting student-athlete interests and constraints. For example, athletics administrators can learn to establish programming for their students

on campus and create a comfortable climate and connection between athletics student-athlete support services and on-campus resources while striving for positive outcomes in academic progress rates (APR), graduation success rates (GSR), and grade point averages (GPA). Athletic administrators can reflect on specific practices within their unique athletic departments to ensure cross-collaboration among athletics and campus programs are utilized to ensure positive outcomes in academic, personal, and professional lives of their student-athletes (Rubin & Lewis, 2020).

Unfortunately, through the student-athlete time commitment combined with NCAA rules and regulations, it becomes difficult to navigate participation in many high-impact educational practices, including study abroad programming, which often requires weeks or months of commitment. The studied institution must find ways to promote diversity/global learning in ways that are manageable for student-athletes at their institution.

Additionally, high quality faculty mentorship, promoting undergraduate research through sport culture, and creating cross-collaboration between advisors and coaches to explain benefits of undergraduate research were recommendations made to enhance student-athlete participation and overall experience in undergraduate research (Hall et al., 2020). Through the studied institution, we know that undergraduate opportunities exist; however, the institution must focus on these recommendations, among oth-

ers, to promote undergraduate research to their student-athletes, a group often secluded from the general population on campus.

Furthermore, when it comes to learning communities, it is recommended that athletic departments either work to create student-athlete exclusive learning communities that more closely align with student-athlete needs and schedules or integrate student-athletes into already existing learning communities, which may present logistical issues (Mamerow & Navarro, 2014).

In addition to these implications, athletics administrators must continue to push programs that take that extra effort to establish campus relationships for their student-athletes as they work towards integration on campus. For example, administrators, both in athletics and within the general university, can learn to establish relationships for their students on campus and create a comfortable climate and connection between athletics academics and general university resources. The results presented show very little integration across athletics and on-campus. As mentioned throughout the interviews, student-athletes' only connection or relationship with anyone on campus is their major-specific academic advisor. Addressing this issue will help "pop" the student-athlete/athletics bubble existing on the campus that was studied. Furthermore, academic staff can identify opportunities to work with the coaches in order to shape an understanding for their students on the opportunities available and how to make them plausible

around their schedules. Additionally, this research can help build upon Hall et al.'s (2020) recommendations to involve collaboration between advisors and coaches to explain benefits of these educationally purposeful activities, further illustrating the importance of coaches, administrators, and transformational leadership in creating a more systematic approach to HIPs in the intercollegiate athletics setting (Braunstein-Mikove et al., 2022).

Student-athletes are often left out of participation in campus programs, like learning communities and study abroad (Mamerow & Navarro, 2014; Navarro et al., 2019). This research allows athletic administrators to reflect on certain recommendations to enhance overall access for their unique population, ultimately helping student-athletes navigate their experiences in college, but also their transition out of college and away from sport (Stokowski et al., 2019). The practices discussed in this study have beneficial outcomes for student-athletes; however, the practices remain unsystematic at the institutional level across higher education (Kuh, 2008) and likely within the institution studied in this research. It is the researchers' hope that the institution studied will be able to use the results to help identify current HIPs in their department, while identifying and justifying areas of improvement within their student-athlete support services programming as it relates to HIPs.

Whereas this research provided an illustration in student-athlete support services at one NCAA Division I setting, it is vital to continue this research in a direction that continues to benefit

student-athletes, administrators, coaches, and parents in the academic setting. Moving forward, it will be important to compare NSSSE data of student-athletes vs. non-athlete students in order to identify if these high impact educational practices are as effective for student-athletes. By understanding the data between student-athlete and non-athlete students, future research can help identify whether student-athlete specific high impact educational practices can be created. Similarly, research has noted the benefits of being a student-athlete and participating in sports. However, the question remains, can being a student-athlete be classified as a high impact educational practice in itself using standards set by Kuh's (2008) research?

Limitations

While this study presents further insight on student-athlete support services, it is not without limitations. While there were various student-athletes from different sports, administrators with differing positions, and with the number of participants being adequate for the type of qualitative analysis, it does not allow for generalization. Although important information was provided through the use of athletics administrators and student-athletes, the data did not include insight from coaches, a key part of overall student-athlete support services. They would be able to provide an important perspective on their role in student-athlete support services.

Ultimately, to further the understanding of the topic and to build on the current implications of the study, it will

be essential to bring in additional insight through multiple institutions across NCAA Division I and beyond. Additionally, not all student-athletes interviewed were aware of what student-athlete support services were available or did not participate in any. Some participants were much more knowledgeable in the subject area than others, which can result in more limited data from some participants over others.

Conclusion

This case study highlighted the use of specific high impact educational practices in student-athlete support programming and services at a NCAA Division I institution. Through the researchers' examination of this institution through the lens of student-athletes and athletic administrators, it was evident that while not all high impact educational practices were utilized in the development of student-athlete support services and programming, HIP support is available to help student-athletes participate in at least two HIPs during their academic career as recommended by Kuh (2008) to increase student success and engagement. While Kuh (2008) recommended participation in at least two HIPs throughout students' academic careers, participation in at least one per year of college is ideal. Therefore, the case study helped justify potential areas of improvement for student-athlete support services at this institution, while urging athletics administrators to establish on-campus programming for their student-athletes in addition to creating

a comfortable climate and connection between student-athlete support services and on-campus resources to fill in appropriate HIP deficits in athletics.

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Appendix

Interview Guide – Administrators

Educational Programming

- ▶ What are your job responsibilities as an administrator? What role do you play with the athletes?
- ▶ What current educational programming is being utilized within student-athlete support services? Explain these programs.
- ▶ What programming do most student-athletes participate in and how are they drawn towards these programs?
- ▶ How are these programs promoted in the student-athlete academic settings? How does athletics help with this?
- ▶ What do you believe the benefits of these educational programs are for the student-athletes?

Resources/Funding

- ▶ How do you think athletics resources and funding play a role in the implementation of educational programming for student-athletes?
- ▶ If resources were not an issue, what type of educational programming do you think would be most important for the athletic department to implement for their student-athletes?

Interview Guide – Faculty Athletic Representatives

Read quote and ask questions:

According to Kuh (2008), what faculty think and value what faculty think, and value does not necessarily impel students to take part in high-impact activities or engage in other educationally purposeful practices. Rather, when large numbers of faculty and staff at an institution endorse the worth of an activity, members of the campus community are more likely to agree to devote their own time and energy to it, as well as provide other resources to support it—all of which increases the likelihood that the activities will be available to large numbers of students and that the campus culture will encourage student participation in the activities.

Role as FAR

- ▶ What are your job responsibilities as faculty athletic representative? What role do you play with the athletes?
- ▶ As a faculty member involved in both athletic and non-athletic affairs on campus, how can you utilize such an approach in your role?

- ▶ How do you play a role in the overall relationship between athletics and campus administration?

Student-athlete Experience

- ▶ As a FAR how can/do you use your position to help enhance the overall student-athlete experience educationally?
- ▶ Does higher education theory, including the use of high impact educational practices, drive your decision making in the student-athlete academic setting?

Resources/Educational Programming

- ▶ What differences, if any, do you see regarding programming available to student-athletes compared to programming run on-campus?
- ▶ What role do financial resources play in your position dealing with both athletic and on-campus administrators?

Interview Guide – Student-Athletes

Program Participation

- ▶ As a student-athlete, when you are not practicing or participating in your sport specifically, what are you involved in?
- ▶ Are you involved in any clubs, activities, or meetings on campus? Within the athletic department?
- ▶ Within the athletic department, what were you required to attend any meetings or programs as a student-athlete?
- ▶ How did you hear about these programs? What made you attend or participate in these programs? If you did not, what would make you want to attend?
- ▶ Who are you in most contact with within athletic administration? Coach? Academic advisor? Etc? How easily accessible are you academic advisors?

Opportunities and Experiences

- ▶ What was your experience like with these programs? What did you learn or talk about?
- ▶ As a student-athlete, why do you think some of these activities should or shouldn't be required for student-athletes?
- ▶ As a student-athlete, what type of programs/opportunities do you think can be changed or added in order to increase student-athlete participation and benefit?
- ▶ How do you think these programs affect your overall experience as a student-athlete? What impact, positive or negative, have these programs had on you? What is the personal benefit to being involved?

- ▶ As a student-athlete, why do you think some of these activities should or shouldn't be required for student-athletes?
- ▶ As a student-athlete, what are some of the barriers to participating in additional programming outside your sport? Things like study abroad?
- ▶ What programs do you recommend being implemented for student-athletes? What would you add or remove?
- ▶ Are all your resources available to you through athletics or do you have to use outside resources?
- ▶ Is there a student-athlete/athletics "bubble" represented at your institution and, if so, how does your administration attempt to minimize this?