

AMUNDSEN, SCOTT A., Ph.D. The Effect that First-Year Experience Courses Have on Student-Athletes' Academic Success When Only Student-Athletes are Enrolled Versus When Student-Athletes are Enrolled with Non-Athletes. (2008)  
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This study examined whether the academic success, specifically the grade-point average, NCAA progress-towards-degree, and freshman to sophomore retention rates, of student athletes was influenced by participating in a first-year experience course populated exclusively by student-athletes and taught by athletic-academic personnel compared to student-athletes participating in an integrated first-year experience course populated by the general student body and taught by a faculty member not associated with the athletic-academic support staff at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU). The results of the study showed that no significant differences existed between the groups regarding academic performance and NCAA progress-towards degree. There was also very little difference in freshman to sophomore retention rates between the two groups with the exception of white males participating in low-profile sports. The quantitative data for this study were collected from ECU's student information system.

THE EFFECT THAT FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSES HAVE ON STUDENT-  
ATHLETES' ACADEMIC SUCCESS WHEN ONLY STUDENT-ATHLETES  
ARE ENROLLED VERSUS WHEN STUDENT-ATHLETES ARE  
ENROLLED WITH NON-ATHLETES

by

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Athletic departments are often viewed as being the front porch of colleges and universities (Kennedy, 2007). Success on the field of play can substantially increase national exposure and generate increased interest among prospective students (Goff, 2000). While universities are under increased pressure to maintain competitive athletic programs (Thelin, 1994), new legislation (NCAA, 2007a) is increasing the focus on student-athlete retention and graduation rates (Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

In 2006-07, more than 360,000 college students participated in 23 sports at 1,000 NCAA member institutions (Jones & Levine, 2006). Student-athletes are a special population due to their atypical role on campus (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 1996). Unlike most traditional students, student-athletes must manage a hectic schedule, exhausting physical workouts, a high-profile existence, and public scrutiny (Parham, 1993). Although they are often academically under-prepared in relation to their peers (Shulman & Bowen, 2001), student-athletes are required to fulfill the academic expectations of their individual institutions while also adhering to increasingly strict NCAA eligibility standards. Failure to fulfill either set of requirements will jeopardize their eligibility to compete, their financial aid/ scholarship, and ultimately their ability to complete a degree (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001).

Socially, student-athletes face many unique struggles. The social life of a student-athlete often exists in a vacuum. The nature of athletic teams, camaraderie, and teamwork along with the large amount of time that they spend together often leads athletes to develop strong bonds with teammates, but conversely leads to social isolation from the general student body (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007). Negative stereotyping of athletes has resulted in widespread bias towards student-athletes on campus (Hamilton & Trolie, 1986; Lorenzen & Lucas, 2004). Studies (Simons et al., 2007; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991, 1993; Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995) have shown that faculty members do not view student-athletes as favorably as individuals from the general student body (Dowling, 2007). Student-athletes are less likely to take advantage of academic resources and campus activities due to their high-profile and additional time constraints (Kennedy, 2007; Simons et al., 2007).

The balance between athletics and academics has been a delicate issue since the beginning of organized collegiate athletics. In the 1890s student-athletes were under tremendous scrutiny. Most teams were employing 'ringers', athletes not enrolled at their institution (Crowley, 2006). Harvard President Charles Eliot publicly denounced athletics for levying excessive demands on student-athletes in areas not related to their studies (Lewis, 1970). In 1929 the Carnegie Commission published a comprehensive report on college athletics that cited the two biggest issues as commercialism and the lack of academic integrity of the student-athlete.

Much time has passed, but the issues remain the same. Recent NCAA reforms have focused on similar issues. In 1983 the NCAA passed Proposition 48. Proposition 48

established minimum grade-point average and standardized test (ACT or SAT) score requirements for all incoming student-athletes. The purpose of Proposition 48 was to increase the standard for student-athletes initial academic eligibility through the establishment of a standardized national eligibility clearinghouse. In 1991, the Knight Foundation Commission was formed by Congress to examine the current state of athletics and to make recommendations for the improvement of student-athlete graduation rates. The commission's report addressed three key areas: academic integrity, financial integrity, and independent certification (Knight & Knight, 1991, 1992, 1993). The commission also focused on the admission of qualified student-athletes who would “. . . undertake the same courses of study offered to other students and graduate in the same proportion” as the general student population (Knight & Knight, 1991, p. 15). The Knight Commission also called for: (a) a strengthening of initial eligibility requirements, (b) a linkage between athletic eligibility and progress towards graduation, and (c) increased accountability for universities with low athletic graduation rates (Knight & Knight, 1991).

The initial recommendations of the Knight Commission have continued to push the NCAA towards new reforms. In 2003, the NCAA strengthened eligibility requirements for student-athletes. The new requirements require student-athletes to complete 40% of their academic requirements after their second year, 60% following their third year, and 80% upon completion of their fourth year (NCAA, 2007a). In 2006 the NCAA instituted new Academic Progress Rate (APR) legislation. APR gives each institution a score, which signifies how well it is doing in moving its student-athletes

towards graduation. The NCAA publicly reports APR scores each year and schools not meeting the mandated graduation cut-off score (currently 50%) can be rebuked and might be subject to scholarship restrictions and/or post-season participation restrictions. In summary, APR ties a team's real time academic performance to the number of available scholarships and post-season competition eligibility.

Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1986, 1993, 1997) model on student attrition is widely accepted as the leading model in retention theory. Tinto (1993) found that attrition rates were at their highest after the first year. One practical application that evolved from Tinto's theory is the first-year experience course. These credit-bearing courses became increasingly popular in the early 1980s (Barefoot, 1993). The first-year experience course curriculum typically addresses the academic and social integration piece of Tinto's model while also addressing the campus resources (Barefoot 1993), wellness issues, and additional academic information (Cone, 1991). Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of first-year experience courses on retention (Barefoot, 1993; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986). A recent study (Toblowky, 2007) reported that 85% of colleges and universities in the US offer some form of first- year experience course.

Research (Etzel, Barrow, & Pinkney, 1994; Gerdy, 1997; Riffie & Alexander, 1991) suggests that student-athletes should participate in a first-year experience course that addresses career exploration and student development theory. Whether the first-year experience course should be taught in student-athlete specific sections is still the subject of much debate. Some researchers state that if student-athletes long-term academic and social interests are being given full consideration, it is more beneficial for first-year

student-athletes to attend a university-administered orientation program that is separate from the athletic department (Gerdy, 1997; Carodine et al., 2001). Gerdy (1997) states,

Many well intentioned athletic departments develop orientation programs for student-athletes. However, such programs are not nearly as comprehensive as university-wide programs. More significantly, however, is the fact that when the athletic department administers the orientation program, it sets the unhealthy precedent that it will 'take care of' everything for the student-athletes, including matters relating to academics and student-life. (p. 65)

Although a separate orientation experience may not benefit student-athletes, some researchers (Curry & Maniar, 2004; Petrie & Denson, 2006; Riffie & Alexander, 1991) still advocate for an orientation course designed exclusively for student-athletes. Several textbooks that specifically address the student-athlete's first-year experience (Ellis, 2005; Nathanson & Kimmel, 2007) are currently in press.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the past 20 years many studies (Astin 1993, Levitz & Noel, 1989) have indicated that first-year experience courses improve student engagement to campus and assist students in their transition from high school to college. During this time-frame there has also been an increased focus on providing additional academic support to students identified as special populations, including student-athletes (Jordan & Denson, 1990; Kennedy, 2007). Several schools not only offer special academic support services, but they have designed first-year experience courses with curriculum specifically designed for student-athletes (Albitz, 2002; Curry & Maniar, 2004; Tebbe & Petrie, 2006). Others have not altered the curriculum for student-athletes, but have created course sections that are entirely populated by student-athletes. Little research has been

conducted to determine the effectiveness of first-year experience courses populated exclusively by student-athletes. The research published in this general area addresses the program evaluations of the curriculum for student-athlete specific first-year experience courses, but has not addressed the success of student-athletes participating in first-year experience courses exclusively populated by student-athletes versus student-athletes participating in first-year experience courses that include the general student body.

### **Research Questions**

The general research question asks what was the impact of a first-year experience course on student-athletes' academic success who participated in a such a course populated exclusively by student-athletes and taught by athletic-academic personnel (Group A) compared to student-athletes in an integrated first-year experience course populated by the general student body and taught by a faculty member not associated with the athletic-academic support staff (Group B).

The research questions below address the key areas that are related to this overall question:

1. What impact did participating in a student-athlete specific first-year experience course have on maintaining NCAA eligibility and meeting the NCAA progress-toward-degree completion guidelines after completing the first-year?
2. Were there significant mean differences in the grade-point average at the conclusion of the first semester and at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?

3. Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?

4. Were there significant mean differences in academic performance as measured by grade-point average between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

5. Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender, and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

### **Significance of the Study**

Despite the comprehensive body of research on the impact of first-year experience courses on academic success (i.e., grade-point average, retention) (Cuseo, 1991; Levitz & Noel, 1989; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989) very little is known about the effectiveness of first-year experience courses populated exclusively by student-athletes. Several program evaluations have been conducted on individual student-athlete first-year experience courses (Albitz, 2002; Curry & Maniar, 2004; Tebbe & Petrie, 2006), but the present study is the first to explore the differences in the academic performance of student-athletes participating in a first-year experience course that included the general student body and those student-athletes participating in a first-year experience course exclusively populated by student-athletes. The NCAA is continuing to increase the satisfactory academic progress standards and institutions need to establish best practice standards relating to student-athletes in first-year experience courses. The findings of the present study will assist NCAA institutions,

professionals working with student-athletes, and instructors of first-year experience programs to develop best practices in the delivery of first-year experience courses to student-athletes.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Academic Progress Rate (APR)**—According to the 2007-08 NCAA Division I Handbook, APR

shall include a calculation that accounts for currently enrolled student-athletes receiving institutional financial aid based in any degree on athletics ability or, for those institutions or teams that do not offer athletics aid, recruited student-athletes who: (a) on or after the varsity team's first date of competition in the championship segment are listed on the varsity team's roster; or (b) have exhausted eligibility and returned to the institution as a fifth-year student to complete a baccalaureate degree. The rate shall account for the institution's success in retaining and graduating all such student-athletes. (NCAA, 2007a, p. 363)

**Academic Success**—Defined by the researcher as the first-year persistence and grade point average of students in the study

**CHAMPS/Life Skills**—CHAMPS is an acronym for Challenging Athletes Minds for Personal Success. According to Bell (2003), "The CHAMPS/Life Skills program focuses on five commitments that are meant to enhance the quality of the student-athlete experience within the university setting" (p. 3).

**First-year experience course**—A course for first-year students designed to assist in the transition to college.

**High Profile sport**—Defined by the researcher in this study as men's basketball, men's football, and women's basketball.

**National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)**—The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a “. . . diverse, voluntary, unincorporated Association of four-year colleges and universities, conferences, affiliated associations and other educational institutions” (NCAA, 2007a, p. 18).

**Progress-toward-degree completion**—The NCAA defines continuing satisfactory progress for student-athletes completing their first-year as:

- having earned 24 semester hours for the academic year
- having earned 18 credits earned during the fall and spring semesters
- earning a minimum grade-point average of 1.8
- earning a minimum of six credits per academic term. (NCAA, 2007a, p. 147)

**Student-athlete**—According to Walter Byers (1995, p. 69) the term student-athlete was ‘coined’ by the NCAA in the 1950s to counter the threat of the newly implemented play-for-pay, grant-in-aid athletic scholarship policy could result in NCAA athletes being considered paid employees by Workers Compensation Boards and the courts. The term was immediately embedded in all NCAA rules and interpretations as a mandated substitute for terms such as players and athletes.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations could impact the generalizability of this research. Although the curriculum, learning objectives, contact hours, and course format were the same for all of the first-year experience courses discussed in this study, the study could not be controlled for the difference in instructor type. The independent variable in this study included the students and instructors in each individual section. The instructor of each individual section could not be controlled because the same instructors did not teach the

first-year experience courses that included the general student body and the first-year experience courses exclusively populated by student-athletes.

The researcher was involved in creating the curriculum for all of the first-year experience courses addressed in this study.

### **Organization of the Study**

The long-term goal of this study is to improve student services for student-athletes through improving the delivery of their first-year experience course. The structure of this dissertation is as follows. Chapter I describes the problem. Chapter II provides a thorough and comprehensive review of the literature relating to first-year experience courses, student retention theory, and academic athletic enhancement programming for student-athletes. Chapter III contains the methods used to gather and analyze the data and provides a detailed description of the research design. Chapter IV contains the findings and results of the study, while Chapter V discusses the conclusions and significance of the study along with recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the academic success, specifically the grade-point average and freshman to sophomore retention rates, of student athletes was influenced by participating in a first-year experience course populated exclusively by student-athletes and taught by athletic-academic personnel (Group A) compared to student-athletes in an integrated first-year experience course populated by the general student body and taught by a faculty member not associated with the athletic-academic support staff (Group B).

Conflict between athletics and academics in post-secondary education is not new. Thelin (1994) describes the relationship as “American higher education’s ‘peculiar institution’” (p. 1). As early as the 1890s educational leaders questioned the academic integrity of ‘tramp athletes’ who were not ‘bona-fide’ students (Ferris, Finster, & McDonald, 2004). In 1929, the Carnegie Report for the Advancement of Teaching reported on the under-prepared students, the materialism of athletics departments, illegal recruiting tactics, overzealous boosters; the myth of amateurism, and academic fraud (Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

#### **History of the NCAA and Student-Athlete Eligibility**

The 2007-08 NCAA Manual (2007a) defines the basic purpose of the NCAA as

The competitive athletics programs of member institutions are designed to be a vital part of the educational system. A basic purpose of this Association is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body and, by doing so, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports. (p. 13)

The organization now known as the NCAA was formed in 1906. The earliest eligibility rules were simple and clear.

No student shall represent a college or university in any intercollegiate game or contest who is not taking a full schedule of work . . . who has at any time received, either directly or indirectly, money, or any other consideration . . . who has competed for any prize money against a professional . . . who has participated in intercollegiate games or contests during four previous years . . . No student who has been registered as a member of any other college or university shall participate in any intercollegiate game or contest until he shall have been a student of the institution which he represents at least one college year. (Falla, 1981, p. 25)

Legislation for determining continued eligibility was not adopted until the 1940s (Crowley, 2006). In 1946 the NCAA adopted the “Principles for the Conduct of Intercollegiate Athletics,” also known as the “Sanity Code” (Kelo, 2005). Although the “Sanity Code” was broad and still leaned towards home-rule, the principles set forth were to adhere to the definition of amateurism, to restrict financial aid for athletic ability, and to hold student-athletes to the same academic standards as the student body (Kelo, 2005). Athletic scholarships were forbidden until 1956 (Falla, 1981). Acceptance of this concept came in an official interpretation from the NCAA:

Financial aid awarded by an institution to a student-athlete should conform to the rules and regulations of the awarding institution and the institution’s conference . . . but in the event such aid exceeds commonly accepted educational expenses

for the undergraduate period of the recipient, it shall be considered 'pay' for participation. (Falla, 1981, p. 149)

The "Sanity Code" was in place for the next twenty years. Under the direction of Walter Byers, during the 1950s and 1960s, the NCAA charted tremendous growth, thanks in large part to increased college enrollments, African-American and female participation, and increased television coverage (Kennedy, 2007).

In 1964 the NCAA first attempted to govern initial eligibility when it approved the '1.6' rule. The '1.6' rule stated that both incoming and continuing student-athletes needed to have a predicted grade-point average of 1.6 on a 4.0 scale. The '1.6 rule' was the NCAA's first real effort to establish minimum academic expectations for first-year student-athletes and to utilize a complex formula that considered grade-point average, class rank, and standardized test scores (Crowley, 2006). This rule transferred a great deal of authority from the home institution to the NCAA since institutions that did not abide by this new multidimensional standard would be ineligible for post-season competition (Crowley, 2006).

In 1973 the '1.6' rule was replaced by the '2.0' rule. The '1.6 rule' was abolished primarily because the formula's use of standardized test scores that were viewed as disadvantaging to minority and economically challenged students (ACT & ETS, 1984; Crowley, 2006; Falla, 1981). By implementing the '2.0 rule,' institutions moved away from using a predictive formula for predicting academic success and returned to the simpler approach of considering the high school grade-point average of student-athletes.

Proponents of the '2.0 rule' felt that institutions would all be operating on a level playing field with regard to recruiting and determining initial eligibility (Crowley, 2006).

Many thought that replacing the '1.6' rule with the toothless '2.0 rule' was a major setback (Byers, 1995; Falla, 1981; Crowley, 2006). Walter Byers, former NCAA Executive Director (1995) stated,

Losing the '1.6 rule' was one of the most painful experiences in the 22 years that I served as executive director. It was a terrible day for college athletics . . . For a decade later the weak requirement would provide recruiters an open door to solicit whomever they wanted. (p. 5)

By 1983 the effects of the lax '2.0 rule,' public outcry over academic scandals in major college programs, and an increase in the commercialization of college sports, created a real concern regarding the general academic integrity of student-athletes (Crowley, 2006; Pickle, 2008; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Sperber, 2000). Specifically academic scandals at the University of Georgia, University of Kentucky, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Creighton University, Southern Methodist University, New Mexico State, and Oklahoma State (Bailey & Littlejohn, 1991; Dowling, 2007; Eitzen, 2006, French, 2004; Pickle, 2008; Svare, 2004) motivated the NCAA to explore academic reform and to develop new academic entrance standards for student-athletes (ACT & ETS, 1984).

In 1983 Proposition 48 was passed by the NCAA to supplement the much maligned '2.0 rule' (ACT & ETS, 1984). This proposal was developed by the American Council of Education, an academic group strongly influenced by university presidents (Crowley, 2006; Sperber, 2000). Freshman would not be able to participate in athletics

unless they earned a 2.0 or better grade-point average in 11 high school core courses (English - 3 years, Math - 2 years, Science - 2 years, Social Science - 2 years, additional academic electives - 2 years) and score a 700 on the SAT or a 15 composite on the ACT (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). The primary criticism of Proposition 48 was that student-athletes were being held to a higher standard than the general student body in determining the minimum SAT and ACT test scores for initial freshman eligibility (Ervin, Saunders, & Gillis, 1984). The use of fixed minimum test scores was viewed as discriminatory, due to the fact that proportionally more African-American student-athletes would be disqualified from participating in their freshman year than would other student-athletes (Crowley, 2006; Kelo, 2005; Sellers, 1992; Thelin, 1994).

In 1991 the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, a national task force appointed by the United States Senate, was formed to look into allegations of academic abuses in collegiate athletics. The Commission stressed the importance of admitting student-athletes who could undertake meaningful courses of study and graduate in the same proportion as their non-athlete peers. The result of the Knight Commission's work was Proposition 16, a reform of Proposition 48. Proposition 16 developed a minimum college grade-point average while also instituting a sliding scale for initial freshman eligibility which considered both high school core grade-point average and standardized test scores (Crowley, 2006; Knight & Knight, 1991). At this time the NCAA also adopted year-by-year progress towards degree completion requirements. Twenty-five percent of the degree must be completed by the beginning of the third year, 50% by the beginning of the fourth year, and 75% completed by the beginning of the fifth year (NCAA, 2007a).

The Knight Commission (1991) stated that athletics continue to “. . . threaten to overwhelm the universities in whose name they were established” (p. 11).

William Atchley, former president of Clemson University, described the leadership of the NCAA in the 1980s as being dominated by athletic directors and coaches. He stated (as cited in Sperber, 2000),

At one time coaches and athletic directors openly ran the NCAA, now they have to pretend that their presidents are involved in the association’s decision making. But if you look at who is making the real decisions, from the Executive Director on down, you will find men and women who come out of college coaching and athletic director positions. They shape the thinking of the NCAA and probably always will shape it for them, it’s the present and future of the coaching and athletic director professions, the jobs of their close friends at stake. (p. 33)

The leadership of the NCAA underwent a major change in 2003 when Myles Brand, the first former university president to lead the NCAA, was inaugurated (Crowley, 2006). Under Brand’s direction the sliding scale was altered to allow lower standardized test scores when coupled with higher high school core grade-point averages (NCAA, 2007a). Continuing eligibility standards were also increased with student-athletes now required to complete 40% of their degree by the third year, 60% by the beginning of the fourth year, and 80% completed by the beginning of the fifth year (NCAA, 2007a). Brand’s NCAA also raised the stakes by establishing the Academic Progress Rate (APR), a real-time measure of academic progress. The APR, calculated each fall, is a real-time measurement of eligibility, retention, and graduation (NCAA 2007a, Meyer, 2005). According to Meyer (2005),

Those included in the cohort are enrolled student-athletes receiving institutional aid based on athletics ability in the required semester/term. Student-athletes may earn two points per semester for a total of four. Points are assigned if a student-athlete has earned eligibility (one point) and returns after the fall (one point); points are assigned in the spring using the same criteria. Students who are eligible to return to their institutions thus can earn four points per year. At the start of the academic year, each Division I APR will be calculated by adding up all points earned by student-athletes and divided by the total possible points that could have been earned. The APR will be totaled for four years before historical penalties are implemented although contemporaneous penalties will take effect during the 2005-2006 academic year. (p. 2)

These changes along with the potential sanctions and negative publicity have increased the attention paid to student-athlete support services (Kennedy, 2007).

Faculty groups are also concerned about student-athletes (Dowling, 2007; COIA, 2007; Eitzen, 2006; Gerdy, 2006; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Sperber, 2000; Svare, 2004). The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) is an alliance of 55 NCAA Division I faculty senates whose mission is to provide a national faculty voice on intercollegiate sports issues (COIA, 2007). In their position paper *Framing the Future: Reforming College Athletics*, COIA (2007) states,

Concerted efforts to enhance student-athletes integration into campus life would likely arrest the increasing isolation of student-athletes from the rest of the campus. Such integration must be a responsibility shared across all stakeholder groups, including faculty, instead of leaving it solely to the athletic department. Strengthening academic oversight of athletics learning centers would enhance the quality and integrity of these facilities. Improvements in these areas would enable student-athletes to participate more fully in academic and social aspects of campus life. (p. 8)

In their recommendations to the NCAA Presidential Taskforce, COIA (2007) made two specific recommendations regarding the integration of student-athletes into campus life:

Recommendation 2.3                      Integration into Campus life

- 2.3.1 Life skills and personal development programs for student-athletes should have as a goal the integration of the student-athlete into the rest of the student population. These programs should help student-athletes develop an appropriate balance between their academic time requirements and their paramount need for academic and social integration. Administrators, faculty, and athletic departments should mitigate the time demand on student-athletes to allow them to pursue the full range of educational experiences open to other students.

Recommendation 2.4                      Campus Integration of Academic Advising for Student-Athletes

- 2.4.1 Academic advising and academic support for student-athletes should be structured to give student athletes as valuable and meaningful an academic experience as possible and not just to maintain their academic eligibility.
- 2.4.2 The academic advising facility for student-athletes should be integrated into and report through the academic advising structure and not the athletic department.
- 2.4.3 The campus academic advising structure or the office of the chief academic officer should have oversight of and regularly review the academic advising of student-athletes.
- 2.4.4 Athletic academic advisors should be appointed by and work for the campus academic advising structure and not solely for the athletic department. (p. 9)

### **The Student-Athlete**

Student-athletes are commonly recognized as a special population (Carodine et al., 2001; Hyatt, 2003; Kennedy, 2007; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). They follow

regimented schedules, lead stressful lives, and often face negative stereotyping and discrimination by the faculty and other students (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Carodine et al. (2001) found that student-athlete's overall academic performance was negatively affected by a combination of factors including time commitment to athletics, physical stress from athletic participation, and a high profile on campus.

### ***Academically Under-prepared***

Many student-athletes are under-prepared for the academic challenges of college and struggle to compete with their non-athlete peers (Adler & Adler, 1991; Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992; Sellers, 1992; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). In a study conducted at Clemson University, Maloney and McCormick (1993) found that student-athletes had SAT scores that averaged 150 points below that of the general student body. At Notre Dame in 1996, the median SAT score for all freshman was 1310, while freshman football players' median SAT score was 894 (Zimbalist, 1999). The tendency to admit student-athletes who are below normal admission standards has been documented at service academies. According to Eitzen (2006) the 2001 freshman class at the Air Force Academy included 277 cadets who were below normal academy admission standards. Of these 277 cadets, 165 were student-athletes. Eitzen (2006) also states that "the athletes who get into the academy with academic waivers are less likely to graduate, less likely to become pilots, less likely to move into critical high-tech jobs, and less likely to rise to the service's top echelons" (p. 42).

Shulman and Bowen (2001) and Bowen and Levin (2003) argue that student-athletes routinely are given preferential treatment in the admissions process and therefore are more likely to struggle academically. They also find that participating in high profile sports may impede a student-athletes' ability to learn for self-understanding, gain higher order thinking skills, and might decrease their motivation to succeed academically. Other studies (Pascarella et al., 1995; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996) reveal no difference between student-athletes and non-athletes regarding their cognitive development and grade-point averages. Due to small sample sizes and studies focusing on institutions with varying academic profiles, it is very difficult to draw any clear conclusions on the effect of participating in college athletics and the cognitive development of student-athletes (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hanna, 2006).

Shulman and Bowen (2001) state,

Compared with other students, athletes report having grown less as people at college and having spent limited time at cultural events, pursuing new interests, or meeting new people from different backgrounds . . . Time pressure is not wholly responsible for these deficits, as other students who are equally active in extracurricular pursuits make time for more of the . . . broadening activities. (p. 72)

### ***Time Commitment***

Some researchers have found that the time demands faced by student-athletes negatively affect academic performance (Meyer, 1990; Parham, 1993) resulting in lower grade-point averages (Cantor & Prentice, 1996; Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1997). According to the most recent NCAA "GOALS: Growth, Opportunity, Aspirations, and Learning of Students in College" survey (NCAA, 2007a), football players are

spending 44.8 hours a week practicing, playing, and/or training. One might assume that these student-athletes are neglecting their studies, but football players also report studying 39.5 hours per week. Although NCAA (2007a) rules limit mandatory practice and playing time to 4 hours a day and 20 hours per week, not including travel and rehabilitation time, student-athletes are permitted to spend their free time however they like, and many student-athletes choose supplemental practice and/or training activities (Wolverton, 2008). Lax enforcement also limits this rules effectiveness, most colleges monitor this rule by simply requiring coaches to turn in a weekly log (Porto, 2003).

### *Coaches*

According to Gerdy, Ridpath, Staurowsky, and Svare (2004),

Coaches are extremely influential in the lives of athletes and are often the most visible representatives of a college or university. Coupled with the fact that they the primary justification for coaches being a part of the academic community is that they are, first and foremost, teachers and educators . . . for a number of reasons, we have lost faith in the ‘coach as educator’ model. This is of great concern because coaches can and should be respected and successful educators. But at a time when we should be emphasizing the role of coaches as educators, it appears they are under prepared to fill the role as evidenced in the alarmingly low percentage that possess advanced educational degrees. (p. 4)

Legendary coach Paul “Bear” Bryant said,

I used to go along with the ideas that football players on scholarship were ‘student-athletes,’ which is what the NCAA calls them. Meaning a student first, an athlete second. We were kidding ourselves, trying to make it more palatable to the academicians. We don’t have to say that and we shouldn’t. At the level we play, the boy is really an athlete first and a student second. (Bryant & Underwood, 1974, p. 325)

At some institutions coaches may foster an anti-academic atmosphere where continuing eligibility is more important than real academic progress (Porto, 2003). In a survey of NCAA Division I student-athletes reported to their academic advisors that coaches said,

1. If you wanted an education, you should have gone to Harvard.
2. You came to school to play football. You should have stayed home if you wanted an education.
3. I know it's finals week and you should be doing that academic stuff, but try and stay focused on basketball.
4. You're not smart enough to make it in college, so you're going to have to learn how to cheat. (Gerdy, 1997, p. 72)

### ***Stigma & Faculty Perception***

Intercollegiate athletes are not usually thought of as stigmatized because they are seen as a privileged population (Simons et al., 2007). According to Hyatt (2003), the student-athletes' perceived elite status can add to the inequity and discrimination. Several studies have found that faculty have negative perceptions regarding student-athletes' lack of preparation (Engstrom et al., 1995) and embrace the 'dumb jock' stereotype (Knapp, Rasumussen, & Barnhart, 2001). Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston (1992) defined this prejudice against student-athletes as 'athletism.' For example, faculty perceived more favorably students who were not involved in athletics getting a scholarship, driving a luxury vehicle, being mentioned in the press, or even receiving a good grade in their class (Engstrom et al., 1995).

### ***Isolation and Role Engulfment***

According to Parham (1993), student-athletes are involved in their own encapsulated world and are often encouraged by coaches and administrators to remain isolated (Gerdy, 1997). The time demands and athletic commitment of the student-athlete can cause a disconnection from the campus community (Adler & Adler, 1991; Carodine et al., 2001; Parham, 1993; Prentice, 1997; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Student-athletes' social experiences at the university are predominantly with other athletes (Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989). Hurley and Cunningham (1984) state, "Loneliness affects academic and athletic performance, poor athletic performance affects academic performance, and so on" (p. 55). Gerdy (1997) states that

. . . a major factor in students leaving an institution is the feeling of personal isolation. Given that a number of student-athletes, particularly in the sports of football and basketball, report 'frequent' or 'occasional' feelings of isolation . . . athletic departments should intensify efforts to encourage student-athletes to build relationships outside of the department.

Adler and Adler (1991) argue that competing in college sports severely narrows the student athlete's perspective because

. . . these young men are spending formative years sacrificing themselves to entertain and enrich others, lured by the hope of a future that is elusive at best. For other students, this kind of narrowing and intense focus may lead to a prosperous career in such fields as medicine, law, education, or business. For college athletes, however, their specialization, dedication, and abandonment of alternatives lead to their becoming finally proficient at a role that, for most, will end immediately following the conclusion of their college eligibility. (p. 230)

### ***Wellness***

Although student-athletes are dealing with the same developmental issues as their non-athletic peers, (i.e. sense of purpose, independence, clarifying values, dealing with authority) (Astin, 1975; Chickering, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005), it is clear that their daily experiences, increased time commitments, and competitive pressures create a unique set of physical and psycho-social challenges (Etzel, Watson, Visek, & Maniar, 2006). These demands may put student-athletes at a greater risk for physical and psychological health problems (Etzel et al., 2006). Student-athletes represent a population that is at-risk to experience a range of distressful reactions and dysfunctional behaviors (Pinkerton et al., 1989). Research has consistently shown that student-athletes are more likely to engage in binge drinking (Brenner & Swanik, 2007) and are more likely than non-athletes to experience negative consequences from their drinking habits (Nelson & Wechsler, 2001). Student-athletes are also significantly more likely to drive while drunk, ride with intoxicated drivers, have more sexual partners, and perpetrate more sexual violence than non-athletes (Nattiv & Puffer, 1991).

### **CHAMPS/Life Skills**

Building on the holistic movement the NCAA created the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills program in 1994 with just 46 schools participating in the first year's orientation conference. The program became mandatory in 2000 when the NCAA rule 16.3.1.2 mandated that all Division I “. . . member institutions conduct NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills (or an equivalent program) on campus” (NCAA, 2007a, p. 203). According to the CHAMPS/Life Skills website (2006),

The mission of the NCAA is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the campus educational program and the student-athlete as an integral part of the student body.” With this in mind, the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program was created to support the student-athlete development initiatives of NCAA member institutions and to enhance the quality of the student-athlete experience within the context of higher education.

In the process of achieving this mission, the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program will:

Promote student-athletes' ownership of their academic, athletic, career, personal and community responsibilities.

- Meet the changing needs of student-athletes.
- Promote respect for diversity and inclusion among student-athletes.
- Assist student-athletes in identifying and applying transferable skills.
- Enhance partnerships between the NCAA, member institutions and their communities for the purpose of education.
- Foster an environment that encourages student-athletes to effectively access campus resources.
- Encourage the development of character, integrity and leadership skills.

Participating institutions in the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program are provided with instructional materials and supplemental resources which support a student-athlete's development in five areas: academics, athletics, personal development, career development and community service.

Schools have several options when implementing a program. Here are some successful examples for each of the tenants:

- Academic Excellence—study skills sessions, programs on selecting a major, time management sessions, and workshops on talking to your professors.
- Athletics Excellence—exit interviews of students with no remaining eligibility, which are required in Division I, to address what their experiences were at the institution.
- Career Development—job fairs, resume building, and sessions on interview skills, networking and mentoring.

- Personal Development—programs about alcohol and drug use and abuse, eating disorders, stress management and conflict resolution.
- Service—volunteering time in activities such as reading to children at local schools and building houses for Habitat for Humanity. (NCAA, 2006)

### **The Field of Student-Athlete Academic Support (SAAS)**

It is widely held that the founding of the National Association of Academic Advisors of Athletes (N4A) represents the birth of Student-Athlete Academic Support (SAAS) programs (Kennedy, 2007). The N4A was founded in 1975, but did not host meetings outside of the annual NCAA Conference until 1993 (N4A, 2008). Prior to the N4A the majority of athletic-academic support was provided by coaches and athletic personnel (Gurney, Robinson, & Gygetakis, 1983) with the primary focus on keeping student-athletes academically eligible (Whittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981). In the 1980s applied sports psychologists began working with SAAS support units, but their focus was still on performance enhancement as opposed to a holistic or total-person approach (Gould, Tammen, Murphy, & May, 1989).

Negative publicity from academic scandal, the Knight Commission report, and groundbreaking research on academic services for student-athletes moved the field forward towards a holistic total-person approach during the early 1990s (Kennedy, 2007). In January 1991 the NCAA mandated academic counseling and tutoring for all Division I student-athletes (Meyer, 2005). Etzel, Ferrante, and Pinkney (1991, 1996) advocated a comprehensive model of student services that is a joint venture between the athletic academic staff, student affairs, and academic affairs, involving units such as academic

advising, counselors, residence life, learning centers, and multicultural affairs. Lottes (1991) proposes a service model for student-athletes composed of four main categories:

- Academic—academic advisement, academic skills, and, tutorial assistance
- Athletic—counseling about injuries, health issues, and athletic transition issues
- Personal and Social—personal/career counseling, and values clarification
- General—administrative issues and staff changes

The goal of the SAAS program today should be the integration of athletics and academics. In the past many NCAA Division I athletic programs created and maintained a SAAS program for the purpose of separating student-athletes from the academic and social life of the university (Gerdy, 1998). Directors of athletics have fostered the growth of autonomous academic-assistance programs for student-athletes as a way of managing rather than solving academic problems. These programs are inherently driven toward maintaining eligibility rather than moving student-athletes towards graduation. Strong SAAS programs have gained popularity with coaches and athletic staff due to their help in the recruitment process of prospective student-athletes (Sloan, 2005). Modern SAAS programs have become significantly more comprehensive and have evolved to include counseling; sports psychology services; career planning, including resume, portfolio, and placement assistance, all designed to help the student-athlete to succeed in the classroom, on the playing field, and beyond (Gerdy, 1997; Hamilton, 2004; Kennedy, 2007).

### **The Vanderbilt Model**

According to Steinbach (2004),

Vanderbilt, in an effort to better integrate athletics into the educational mission, has merged athletics with campus recreation and wellness. The Athletic Department has been changed to the Athletic Program. There is no longer a position of athletics director; functions traditionally handled by athletics (media relations, marketing, public affairs, broadcasting, and fundraising) are now being handled by university-wide departments. Included in this broad-based reorganization are also programs for greater faculty and student-athlete involvement. Future plans include turning coaches into part-time faculty members. (p. 40)

### **Student Retention, Persistence, and Departure**

Astin (1975, 1984, 1993) conducted longitudinal studies of college dropouts that aim to identify factors that influence persistence. Astin found that campus involvement was by far the most important factor when predicting persistence. Astin (1984) defines involvement as

. . . the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. (p. 297)

He also found that students involved in fraternities, sororities, and athletics were very likely to persist.

Tinto's (1975, 1986, 1993, 1997) Student Integration Model and Bean's Student Attrition Model (1980, 1982, 1985) are the primary theoretical retention models used in higher education. Tinto's (1975, 1986, 1993, 1997) Student Integration Model suggests

that student's inability to integrate into the social and academic life of the institution can influence their ability to persist. Tinto (1975, 1986, 1993, 1997) found that student integration is primarily accomplished through interaction with peers and faculty/staff. More specifically academic integration into the campus community may include academic achievement measures like grade-point average, and frequency of contact with their faculty and academic advisors.

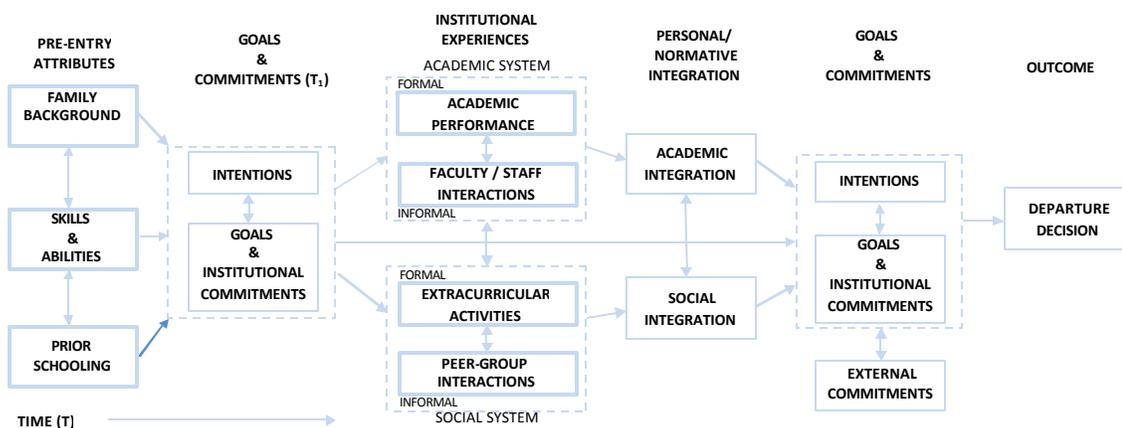


Figure 1. *Tinto's Student Integration Model*

Bean's (1980, 1982, 1985) Student Attrition Model was based on a model of employee turnover and stresses the importance of behavioral intentions. Bean states that students' beliefs about their academic experiences affect their intention to stay and subsequent persistence (1980, 1982, 1985). The flow of the model indicates that a student enters an institution with mental attributes that are shaped by past experiences, abilities, and self-assessments. The three most important attributes are:

- Self-efficacy statements—"Do I have confidence that I can perform academically here?"

- Normative beliefs—“Do the important people in my life think college is important?”
- Past Behavior—“Am I prepared academically and socially for college?”

Bean’s model also acknowledges the influence of factors external to the institution, a factor that is not found in Tinto’s model.

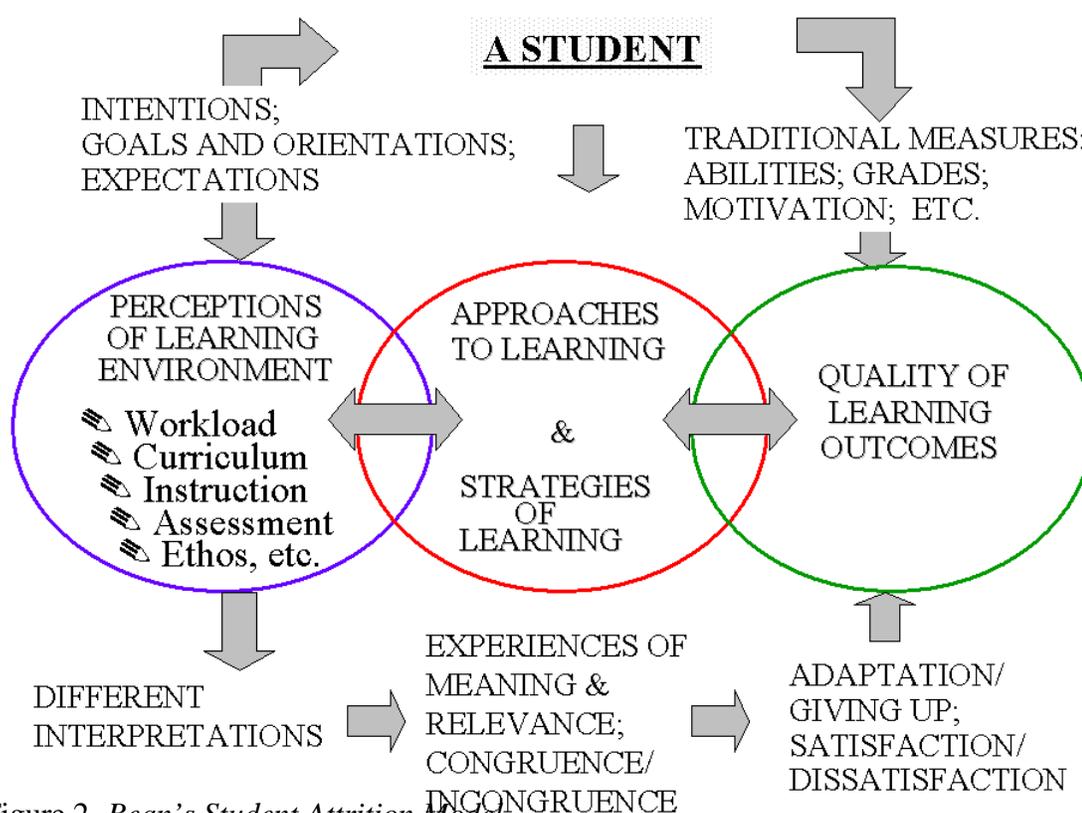


Figure 2. *Bean's Student Attrition Model*

Tinto’s (1975, 1986, 1993, 1997) views on the importance of academic and social integration have been validated by a 17-year study of the freshman seminar (University 101) at the University of South Carolina (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). Fidler and Fidler (1991) stated that

the positive significant relationships between participating in University 101 and freshman-to-sophomore retention was related to ‘course process’; that is, University 101 participants are more likely than non-participants to achieve strong relationships with faculty . . . and this reflects greater social integration. (p. 15)

Unfortunately, the leading models on persistence and departure do not address the plight of the student-athlete. For such a popular topic, it is remarkable that so little research has been conducted at the national level about what student-athletes do during college and how they compare to their peers not participating in athletics (Umbach et al., 2006).

### **The First-Year Experience and the Student-Athlete**

In the early 1990s higher education’s shift to a holistic total-person approach to student services was not unique to athletes (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Although the curriculum of first-year experience courses differs from campus to campus (Barefoot, Warnock, Dickinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Gordon & Grites, 1984), most first-year experience courses focus on the following research-based objectives:

- Increase student-to-student interaction,
  - Increase faculty-to-student interaction, especially outside of class,
  - Increasing student involvement and time on campus,
  - Linking the curriculum and the co-curriculum,
  - Increasing academic expectations and levels of academic engagement
  - Assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for college.
- (Barefoot, 2000, p. 15)

### ***Increase Student-to-Student Interaction***

Alexander Astin (1993) states that “. . . the students’ peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (p. 398).

Ernest Boyer (1987) states,

. . . a successful freshman-year program will convince students that they are part of an intellectually vital, caring community, and the spirit of the community will be sustained by a climate on the campus where personal relationships are prized, where integrity is the hallmark of discourse, and where people speak and listen carefully to each other. (p. 57)

### ***Increase Faculty-to-Student Interaction, Especially Outside Of Class***

In order to attain the level of academic and social integration described by Tinto (1975, 1986, 1993, 1997), students must have prolonged informal relationships with faculty members. He stated,

Institutions with low rates of student retention are those in which students generally report low rates of student-faculty contact. Conversely, institutions with high rates of retention are most frequently those which are marked by relatively high rates of such interactions. (p. 66)

George Kuh (1981) stated, “The empirical evidence seems unequivocal: Faculty-student interaction is an important part of a quality undergraduate experience” (p. 21).

Astin’s (1993) 25-year longitudinal study, which included a national sample of approximately 500,000 students and 1,300 institutions of all types, found that faculty-to-student interaction was significantly correlated with many academic achievement outcomes including: first year persistence rates, college GPA, and degree attainment.

### ***Increasing Student Involvement and Time on Campus***

Terenzini et al. (1996) state,

Out-of-class experiences appear to be far more influential in students' academic and intellectual development than many faculty members and academic and student affairs members think. . . . Even when pre-college academic learning and cognitive ability levels are taken into account, academic and cognitive learning are positively shaped by a wide variety of out-of-class experiences. (pp. 157, 160)

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state,

The environmental factors that maximize persistence and educational attainment include a peer culture in which students develop close on-campus friendships, participate frequently in college-sponsored activities, and perceive their college to be highly concerned about the individual student, as well as a college emphasis on supportive services. It is worth noting that some of these environmental influences on educational attainment persist even after college size and student body selectivity are taken into account. (p. 212)

Retrospective reports from alumni on what memories of their college experience were most meaningful in promoting learning and personal development have consistently revealed that their most powerful learning experiences occurred outside the walls of the classroom (Light, 2001; Marchese, 1992).

### ***Linking the Curriculum and the Co-curriculum***

Ernest Boyer (1987) states that

The undergraduate college should be held together by something more than plumbing, a common grievance over parking, or football rallies in the fall. What students do in dining halls, on the playing fields, and in the rathskeller late at night all combine to influence the outcome of higher education, and the challenge, in the building of community, is to extend the resources for learning on the campus and to see the academic and nonacademic life as interlocked. (p. 11)

### ***Increasing Academic Expectations and Levels of Academic Engagement***

According to Cuseo (1991), the first-year experience course has the ability to enhance academic engagement by transcending specialized content and traversing disciplinary boundaries by focusing on the development of learning strategies and life skills that have cross-disciplinary applicability. The content and objectives of the first-year experience course are strikingly similar to the lifelong learning goals cited in many college mission statements and catalogues.

### ***Assisting Students Who Have Insufficient Academic Preparation for College***

Tinto's (1993) concept of academic integration implies that students must have mastered the basic academic skills to engage in the academic dialogue and be validated as a member of the community.

Study after study (Fidler & Fidler, 1991; Hyers & Joslin, 1998; Raymond & Napoli, 1998; Reason et al., 2006) documented the success of first-year experience courses. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that studies of the first-year experience “. . . produce uniformly consistent evidence of positive and statistically significant advantages to students who take the courses” (p. 400).

According to the 2006 National Survey on First-year experiences (2006):

- 85% of all colleges and universities currently offer a first-year experience course.
- 92% of institutions with first-year experiences are offered for academic credit
- 51% of institutions administer the seminars directly through academic affairs
- 82% indicate that seminars are graded using a letter grade system

- 46% of institutions require their first-year experiences for ALL first-year students.

One of the unexpected outcomes of the emergence of first-year experience courses and the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program was the development of student-athlete specific first-year experience courses taught by members of the SAAS staff (Albitz, 2002; Bell, 2003; Curry & Maniar, 2003; Denson, 2004; Tebbe & Petrie, 2006). The curriculum of the CHAMPS/ Life Skills program are typically delivered in a workshop format (Gerdy, 1997), but due to concerns relating to poor attendance alternative delivery methods of this information are often considered. Athletic-specific sections of these courses are not questioned by faculty since about 35% of the freshman experience courses are housed in a unit outside of academic affairs (Toblowsky, 2007) and they often perceive this type of course as developmental or remedial (Barefoot, 2000; Cuseo, 1991). No data are available on the number of colleges and universities currently offering student-athlete specific first-year experiences courses. According to Denson (1994), freshman seminars specifically for student-athletes attempt present the material in a format that reflects their experiences as college athletes as well as students. Tebbe and Petrie (2006) describe the content of a similar course as being “. . . more personally meaningful for the student-athletes which ideally would improve their comprehension and adoption of new strategies to learn” (p. 9).

The fact that leading publishers are currently marketing three student-athlete first-year experience texts (A Student-Athlete's Guide to College Success (Petrie & Denson, 2003), Becoming a Master Student-Athlete (Ellis, 2005), and The College Athlete's

Guide to Academic Success (Nathanson & Kimmel, 2007)) indicates that many schools are teaching first-year experience courses geared towards student-athletes.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the academic success, specifically the grade-point average and freshman to sophomore retention rates, of student athletes was influenced by participating in a first-year experience course populated exclusively by student-athletes and taught by athletic-academic personnel (Group A) compared to student-athletes in an integrated first-year experience course populated by the general student body and taught by a faculty member not associated with the athletic-academic support staff (Group B).

#### **Research Design**

A quantitative research design was used in this study. Quantitative data were collected regarding the grade-point average, and first-year retention rates of student-athletes enrolled in two differently populated General Studies Orientation (GSO) 100 first-year experience courses each of which were taught by a different type of instructor. It is the researcher's proposition that in order to best comprehend the effect that the composition of the type of GSO 100 courses (Group A or Group B) have on EKU's student-athletes, the analyses of grade-point average and retention data were necessary. The retention data generated from this study may spawn future research and influence curricular decisions relating to the composition of first-year experience courses for student-athletes.

### **Research Questions**

1. What impact did participating in a student-athlete specific first-year experience course have on maintaining NCAA eligibility and meeting the NCAA progress-toward-degree completion guidelines after completing the first-year?
2. Were there significant mean differences in the grade-point average at the conclusion of the first semester and at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?
3. Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?
4. Were there significant mean differences in academic performance as measured by grade-point average between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?
5. Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender, and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

### **Student Learning Objectives (SLO) of the GSO 100 Course**

As a result of the GSO 100 course, students will be able to:

- SLO 1: Articulate how EKU's General Education Program contributes to being a well-rounded person.
- SLO 2: Identify academic resources and support services important for academic success.
- SLO 3: Identify and articulate individual learning style and abilities.
- SLO 4: Engage in activities that promote connection to the university.

SLO 5: Develop and articulate short and long term academic and life goals.

SLO 6: Articulate the value of diverse perspectives.

Included within these objectives are the following three goals: The first goal is to provide an extended orientation to campus and to understand the importance of diversity on campus. This includes discussing institutional/academic policies and identifying and visiting key resources on campus. It also involves discussing the meaning and value of a diverse and multicultural environment. The second goal is to assist students in understanding and improving their academic skills. These skills include time management, note-taking, and test-taking strategies. The third goal involves general wellness. Stress management, exercise, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and nutrition are all discussed. This course serves as an overview of college life and is designed to promote a successful transition to college. The institution-specific textbook includes chapters on academic resources, adjusting to college, finance management, note- and test-taking skills, time management, alcohol and drugs, library literacy, stress management, diversity, and career development.

### **Participants**

Prior to the fall of 2006 student-athletes at ECU were separated into sections of GSO 100 populated exclusively by student-athletes. Since fall 2006 student-athletes have been integrated into GSO 100 sections composed of students from the general student body.

The participants in this study included 110 new first-year student-athletes entering in the fall of 2005 and the fall of 2006 at ECU, an NCAA Division I institution with an

undergraduate enrollment of approximately 12,000 students. Percentages are listed in parenthesis. As a whole, the participants included 59 (53.6%) females and 51 (46.3%) males. The ethnic composition of the group was 89 (80.9%) White, 18 (16.3%) Black, 2 (1.8%) Hispanic, 1 (1%) other. The following sports were represented: 8 (7.2%) men's baseball, 8 (7.2%) men's basketball, 18 (16.3%) men's football, 2 (1.8%) men's golf, 2 (1.8%) men's tennis, 13 (11.8%) men's track, 10 (9%) women's basketball, 2 (1.8%) women's golf, 21 (19%) women's soccer, 11 (10%) women's softball, 2 (1.8%) women's tennis, 7 (6.3%) women's track, and 6 (5.4%) women's volleyball.

In fall 2005, 55 first semester student-athletes registered for GSO 100. This is Group A. Group A's participants included 36 (65.4%) females and 19 (34.5%) males. The ethnic composition of this group was 48 (87.2%) White, 6 (10.9%) Black, 1 (1.8%) Hispanic. The following sports were represented in Group A: 4 (7.2%) men's baseball, 4 (7.2%) men's basketball, 3 (5.4%) men's track, 6 (10.9%) men's football, 2 (3.6%) men's golf, 6 (10.9%) women's basketball, 1 (1.8%) women's golf, 14 (25.4%) women's soccer, 8 (14.5%) women's softball, 2 (3.6%) women's tennis, 3 (5.4%) women's track, and 2 (3.6%) women's volleyball.

Group A's student-athletes were required to enroll in one of two athlete-specific sections of this course. These sections were populated exclusively by student-athletes and taught by members of the athletic-academic staff, specifically by either the Coordinator of Student- Athlete Academic Advising or by the Athletic Academic Advisor. These instructors were both Master's degree student services professionals with specific work experience in the area of student-athlete academic support. Although these sections had

the same learning outcomes, objectives, textbook, and a common syllabus, the assignments and other activities were presented in an athletic context and the student-athletes' interactions with each other may have influenced the learning environment. For example, a lecture on motivation may have included athletic metaphors, e.g., clearing academic hurdles, while a homework assignment on time management may have involved creating a calendar for appropriate study time when traveling to sport competitions, and the section on maintaining a healthy lifestyle may have included information on the optimum amount of sleep and what foods to put into your body for maximum athletic performance.

In fall 2006, 55 first-semester student-athletes registered for GSO 100. This is Group B. Group B's participants included 23 (41.8%) females and 32 (58.1%) males. The ethnic composition of this group was 41 (74.5%) White, 12 (21.8%) Black, 1 (1.8%) Hispanic, and 1 (1.8%) other. The following sports were represented in Group B: 4 (7.2%) men's baseball, 4 (7.2%) men's basketball, 10 (18.2%) men's track, 12 (21.8%) men's football, 2 (3.6%) men's tennis, 4 (7.2%) women's basketball, 1 (1.8%) women's golf, 7 (12.7%) women's soccer, 3 (5.4%) women's softball, 4 (7.2%) track, and 4 (7.2%) women's volleyball. There were no athlete-specific sections and student-athletes were disbursed over 20 sections. All assignments were geared toward the general student body and were not presented in an athletic context. Sections were taught by a variety of academic and student affairs Master's degree professionals, but no athletic-academic staff members taught these sections.

Only new first-year student-athletes unconditionally admitted to Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) are eligible to enroll in GSO 100. Students admitted with conditions were required to participate in a different and more intensive program specifically designed for at-risk students and are not included in this study. Transfer students with more than 29 semester hours of credit were not required to enroll in GSO 100 and were not included in this study.

### **Data Management**

All of the student-athlete demographic information (gender, ethnic group, and sport) and academic information (grade-point average and retention rates) were obtained from the Registrar's Office at EKU through the SCT BANNER student information system. Student-athlete eligibility information was obtained through EKU's Athletic Compliance Department. Student-athlete squad lists are submitted to the Registrar's Office at the beginning of each semester by the Athletic Compliance Department. The information used in this study was the identical information used to compile the institution's annual compliance report for the NCAA.

### **Data Analysis**

Research question 1 asks what impact participating in a student-athlete specific first-year experience course has on maintaining NCAA eligibility and meeting the NCAA progress-towards-degree guidelines after completing the first-year.

NCAA defines continuing progress-toward-degree completion for student-athletes completing their first-year as:

- having earned 24 semester hours for the academic year

- having earned 18 credits earned during the fall and spring semesters
- earning a minimum grade-point average of 1.8
- earning a minimum of six credits per academic term. (NCAA, 2007a)

Research question 2 asks if there were significant differences between the grade-point averages of student-athletes in Group A compared to the student-athletes in Group B. The independent variable is defined by Group, either Group A or Group B. Group A includes the student-athletes and instructors and Group B includes the student-athletes, non-student-athletes, and the instructors. The dependent variables are the grade-point average of the student-athletes in Group A and Group B.

A distribution which included the high school grade-point averages, standardized test scores, and personal demographics were examined to ensure that Group A and Group B were similar. A one-way ANOVA was run to determine if there were significant mean differences between the first and second semester grade-point averages of student-athletes in Group A and Group B.

Research question 3 asks if there were significant differences between the first-year retention rates of student-athletes in Group A compared to the student-athletes in Group B. Descriptive statistics, specifically percentages were used to determine the first-year average retention rate for student-athletes in Group A and Group B.

Research question 4 asks if there were significant mean differences in academic performance, specifically grade-point average between student-athletes by gender, sport-profile type, and ethnicity in Group A and Group B. A univariate factorial ANOVA was

used with the dependent variable being grade-point average and the three independent variables being the groups (A, B), gender, sport-profile type, and ethnicity.

Research question 5 asks whether there were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender, and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course.

### **Ethical Issues**

Human subjects were the focus of this research. There were no risks to the subjects involved in the study, and the methods used were conducted with the permission of Eastern Kentucky University in accordance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of North Carolina Greensboro. All student information including student identification numbers, demographic information, and academic information was kept confidential and secured in a locked environment at the home of the researcher.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS AND RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the academic success, specifically the grade-point average and freshman to sophomore retention rates, of student athletes was influenced by participating in a first-year experience course populated exclusively by student-athletes and taught by athletic-academic personnel (Group A) compared to student-athletes in an integrated first-year experience course populated by the general student body and taught by a faculty member not associated with the athletic-academic support staff (Group B).

#### **Research Questions**

The general research question asks: What was the impact of a first-year experience course on student-athletes' academic success who participated in a course populated exclusively by student-athletes and taught by athletic-academic personnel (Group A) compared to student-athletes in an integrated first-year experience course populated by the general student body and taught by a faculty member not associated with the athletic-academic support staff (Group B)?

The research questions below address some of the key areas that are related to this overall question:

1. What impact did participating in a student-athlete specific first-year experience course have on maintaining NCAA eligibility and meeting the NCAA progress-toward-degree completion guidelines after completing the first-year?

2. Were there significant mean differences in the grade-point average at the conclusion of the first semester and at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?

3. Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?

4. Were there significant mean differences in academic performance as measured by grade-point average between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

5. Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender, and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

A distribution which included the high school grade-point averages (Table 1) and ACT scores (Table 2) were examined to ensure that Group A and Group B were similar.

***Research Question 1: NCAA Progress-Toward-Degree***

What impact did participating in a student-athlete specific first-year experience course have on maintaining NCAA eligibility and meeting the NCAA progress-toward-degree completion guidelines after completing the first-year?

The number and percentage of student-athlete enrolled in Groups A and B who successfully met the NCAA progress-toward-degree completion guidelines were identical

(Table 3). In Group A, 91% (50/55) of student-athletes met NCAA progress-toward-degree completion guidelines after completing their first year. In Group B, 91% (50/55) of student-athletes met NCAA progress-toward-degree completion guidelines after completing their first year. There was no significant difference between the groups.

Table 1

*High School GPA: A Two-sample t-test*

Group	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
A	55	3.33	0.495	0.067
B	55	3.17	0.494	0.067

Difference =  $\mu$  (Group A) -  $\mu$  (Group B)

Estimate for difference: 0.1604

95% CI for difference: (-0.0266, 0.3473)

t-test of difference = 0 (vs not =): t-value = 1.70 p-value = 0.092 df = 108

Table 2

*ACT Scores: A Two-sample t-test*

Group	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
A	55	21.91	3.20	0.43
B	55	21.42	2.70	0.36

Difference =  $\mu$  (Group A) -  $\mu$  (Group B)

Estimate for difference: 0.491

95% CI for difference: (-0.628, 1.610)

t-test of difference = 0 (vs not =): t-Value = 0.87 p-Value = 0.386 DF = 108

Table 3

*NCAA Progress-Toward-Degree*

	<b>Eligible</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Group A	50/55	91%
Group B	50/55	91%

Before Questions 2 and 3 are addressed the following demographic data characteristics were compiled regarding gender (Table 4), ethnicity (Table 5), and sport (Table 6).

Group A and Group B were very different in terms of gender (Table 4). There were more females (65%) than males in Group A (35%) and more males (58%) than females (42%) in Group B. One of the factors that caused this difference was the addition of women's soccer as a varsity sport during the year Group A students were studied.

Table 4

*Demographic Characteristics by Gender***Group A (N=55)**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Group A	19 (35%)	36 (65%)
Group B	32 (58%)	23 (42%)

A Chi-Square Test was run to determine whether the difference observed between Group A and Group B relating to gender was significant. The student-athletes in Group A and Group B were not homogeneous with respect to gender,  $\chi^2(1, N = 110) = 0.01, p < .05$ .

Group A and Group B were both populated by predominantly White student-athletes (Table 5). Group A had one Hispanic student-athlete and six Black student-athletes, while Group B had one Hispanic student-athlete, one student-athlete identified as Other, and 12 Black student-athletes. In total, there were more minority student-athletes in Group B (25.4%) than in Group A (12.7%).

Table 5

*Demographic Characteristics by Ethnicity*

**Group A (N=55)**

Ethnicity	Group A	Group B
Black	6 (10.9%)	12 (21.8%)
Hispanic	1 (1.8%)	1 (1.8%)
Other	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)
White	48 (87.3%)	41 (74.5%)

A Chi-Square Test was run to determine whether the difference observed between Group A and Group B relating to ethnicity was significant. The student-athletes in Group A and Group B were homogeneous with respect to ethnicity,  $\chi^2(3, N = 110) = 0.31, p > .05$ .

Due to the small numbers in certain sports, student-athletes were divided by sports into two groups to measure retention. High profile sports were identified as men's football, men's basketball, and women's basketball. Low profile sports included men's baseball, men's golf, men's tennis, men's track, women's track, women's golf, women's soccer, women's softball, women's tennis, and women's volleyball.

Group A and Group B had student-athletes from a variety of sports (Table 6).

Table 6

Demographic Characteristics by Sport

Sport	Group A (N=55)		Group B (N=55)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<b><u>Male:</u></b>				
High Profile	10	53	16	50
Low Profile	9	47	16	50
Individual sports:				
Baseball	4	7.2	4	7.2
Basketball	4	7.2	4	7.2
Football	6	10.9	12	21.8
Golf	2	3.6	0	0
Tennis	0	0	2	3.6
Track	3	5.5	10	18.1
<b><u>Female:</u></b>				
High Profile	6	16.6	4	17.3
Low Profile	30	83.3	19	82.6
Individual sports:				
Basketball	6	10.9	4	7.2
Golf	1	1.9	1	1.9
Soccer	14	25.5	7	12.7
Softball	8	14.5	3	5.5
Tennis	2	3.6	0	0
Track	3	5.5	4	7.2
Volleyball	2	3.6	4	7.2
Total High Profile	16	29.1	20	36.4
Total Low Profile	39	70.9	35	63.6

Group A had 10 High Profile male student-athletes and 9 Low Profile Male student-athletes, while Group B had 16 High profile male student-athletes and 16 Low Profile male student-athletes. Group A included 6 High Profile female athletes and 30 Low Profile student-athletes, while Group B included 4 High Profile and 19 Low-Profile student-athletes.

A Chi- Square Test was run to determine whether the difference observed between Group A and Group B relating to sport-profile type was significant. Group A and Group B are homogenous with regard to sport-profile type.  $\chi^2(1, N = 2) = 0.16, p > .05$ .

### ***Research Question 2: Mean Difference in GPAs***

Were there significant mean differences in the grade-point average at the conclusion of the first semester and at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?

A one-way ANOVA was run to determine whether there were significant mean differences between the first and second semester college grade-point averages of student-athletes in Group A and Group B.

To compare the GPA between the two groups after the first semester and the first academic year mean GPAs were examined (Table 7).

The significance value for the first semester (Table 8) and cumulative first academic year GPAs (Table 9) was  $> 0.05$ . Although the cumulative first academic year GPA was much closer to the 95% criterion, the two groups' mean GPA for the 1<sup>st</sup> semester and cumulative first academic year were not significantly different.

Table 7

*Comparison of Mean First Semester and Cumulative First Academic Year Mean GPAs*

<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>GPA After First Semester</b>	<b>Cumulative GPA After First Academic Year</b>
Group A	55	3.04 (.77)	2.82 (.77)
Group B	55	3.09 (.64)	2.84 (.72)

Table 8

*First Semester GPA: One-way ANOVA: Group A, Group B*

<b>Source</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
Factor	1	1.290	1.290	2.17	0.144
Error	108	64.141	0.594		
Total	109	65.431			

Table 9

*Cumulative First Academic Year GPA: One-way ANOVA: Group A, Group B*

<b>Source</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
Factor	1	1.64	1.64	3.5	.06
Error	108	48.23	0.47		
Total	109	49.87			

***Research Question 3: Mean Retention Rates***

Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?

***First year retention rates.*** Retention rates for student-athletes are recorded in the table below (Table 10).

Table 10

***Retention Percentage by Group***

			GROUP		Total
			Group A	Group B	
Retained	No	Count % within GROUP	15 27.2%	18 32.7%	33
	Yes	Count % within GROUP	40 72.7%	37 67.3%	77
Total		Count % within GROUP	55 100%	55 100%	110

Following the second academic semester Group A had a retention rate of 72.7% (40/55) while Group B had a 67.3% (37/55) rate for the same period. Student-athletes in Group A were retained at a slightly higher rate than student-athletes in Group B, but the difference was not significant (Table 11).

***Research Question 4: GPAs by Sport, Gender, and Ethnicity***

Were there significant mean differences in academic performance at the end of the first semester and at the end of the first academic year as measured by grade-point

average between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

Table 11

*Chi-Square Test: Retention Group A, Group B*

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Expected counts are printed below observed counts  
Chi-Square contributions are printed below expected counts

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	C1	C2	Total
1	40 38.50 0.058	15 16.50	55
2	37 38.50 0.058	18 16.50 0.136	55
Total	77	33	110

---

Chi-Square = 0.390, df = 1, p-Value = 0.533

---

A univariate factorial ANOVA was used to compare the academic performance, specifically grade point average after the first and second semester, between student-athletes by group, sport-profile type, and ethnicity in Group A and Group B. The grade point average was taken as a dependent variable and group, gender and ethnicity as fixed factors.

The factor counts for ethnicity, group, sport-profile type, and gender are listed below (Table 12).

Table 12

*Between-Subjects Factors*

		<b>Value Label</b>	<b>N</b>
Ethnicity	1.00	White	89
	2.00	Black	18
	3.00	Hispanic	2
	4.00	Other	1
Group	A		55
	B		55
Sport	L	Low Profile	74
	H	High Profile	36
Gender	F		59
	M		51

For the 1<sup>st</sup> semester GPA (Table 13), a four factor analysis of variance was used to compare the academic performance, specifically grade point average after the first semester, between student-athletes by gender, group, sport-profile type, and ethnicity in Group A and Group B. The 1<sup>st</sup> semester grade point average was taken as a dependent variable and group, gender and ethnicity as fixed factors. The effect of ethnicity,  $F(3,107)$

= 2.79,  $p = .045$  and the interaction between ethnicity and group  $F(2,108) = 3.86$ ,  $p = .025$  were both significant.

Table 13

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for First Semester GPA*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Ethnicity	4.569	3	1.523	2.793	.045
Group	1.356	1	1.356	2.488	.118
High Profile	.311	1	.311	.570	.452
Gender	.079	1	.079	.145	.704
Ethnicity * Group	4.212	2	2.106	3.863	.025
Ethnicity * High Profile	.038	1	.038	.069	.793
Group * High Profile	.578	1	.578	1.060	.306
Ethnicity * Group * High Profile	.311	1	.311	.571	.452
Ethnicity * Gender	.001	1	.001	.002	.966
Group * Gender	.064	1	.064	.118	.732
Ethnicity * Group * Gender	1.004	1	1.004	1.842	.178
High Profile * Gender	.344	1	.344	.631	.429
Ethnicity * High Profile * Gender	.003	1	.003	.006	.939
Group * High Profile * Gender	.114	1	.114	.209	.649
Ethnicity * Group * High Profile * Gender	.000	0	.	.	.
Error	50.158	92	.545		
Corrected Total	65.431	109			

R Squared = .233 (Adjusted R Squared = .092)

For the cumulative GPA after the first academic year (Table 14), the four factor analysis of variance was used to compare the academic performance, specifically the cumulative grade point average after the first academic year, between student-athletes by gender, group, sport-profile type, and ethnicity in Group A and Group B.

Table 14

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Cumulative GPA after the First Academic Year*

<b>Source</b>	<b>Type III Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Ethnicity	5.181	3	1.727	3.856	.012
Group	1.459	1	1.459	3.256	.074
Gender	.538	1	.538	1.202	.276
High Profile	.008	1	.008	.018	.893
Ethnicity * Group	3.966	2	1.983	4.427	.015
Ethnicity * Gender	.112	1	.112	.250	.618
Group * Gender	.120	1	.120	.268	.606
Ethnicity * Group * Gender	1.508	1	1.508	3.367	.070
Ethnicity * High Profile	.157	1	.157	.350	.556
Group * High Profile	.948	1	.948	2.117	.149
Ethnicity * Group * High Profile	.599	1	.599	1.336	.251
Gender * High Profile	1.129	1	1.129	2.520	.116
Ethnicity * Gender * High Profile	.252	1	.252	.562	.456
Group * Gender * High Profile	.279	1	.279	.622	.432
Ethnicity * Group * Gender * High Profile	.000	0	.	.	.
Error	41.212	92	.448		
Corrected Total	57.315	109			

R Squared = .281 (Adjusted R Squared = .148)

The cumulative grade point average after the first academic year was taken as a dependent variable and group, gender and ethnicity as fixed factors. The effect of ethnicity,  $F(3,107) = 3.85, p = .012$  and the interaction between ethnicity and group  $F(2,108) = 4.43, p = .015$  were both significant.

Group performance was not consistent across the different ethnic groups for either first semester GPA or cumulative GPA after the first academic year.

***Research Question 5: Retention Rates by Sport, Gender, and Ethnicity***

Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the second semester between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender, and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

Several differences were observed based on the retention data by gender and ethnicity (Table 15). Males in Group A (89.4%) returned after their second semester at a much higher rate than males in Group B (59.3%). A Chi-Square Test was run and the probability was less than 0.05 indicating that there was a significant difference between the two groups. Although not significantly different (Table 15), females in Group B (78.2%) returned after their second semester at a higher rate than females in Group A (63.8%).

Several differences were observed based upon the retention data by sport-profile, gender, and ethnicity (Table 16). High profile student-athletes in Group A (75%) returned after their first academic year at the same rate as high profile student-athletes in Group B (75%). Low profile white male student-athletes in Group A (88.8%) returned for their sophomore year at a significantly higher rate than low profile white male student-

athletes in Group B (42.8%). Although not significantly different, low profile white females in Group B (76.4%) returned for their sophomore year at a much higher rate than low profile white females in Group A (65.3%).

Table 15

*Retention Table by Gender and Ethnicity*

	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>p value</b>
Males	17/19 (89.4%)	19/32 (59.3%)	<b>5.20</b>	<b>.02</b>
Females	23/36 (63.8%)	18/23 (78.2%)	1.37	.24
White	34/48 (70.8%)	27/41 (65.8%)	.25	.61
Black	5/6 (83.3%)	9/12 (.75)	.16	.69
White Males	16/17 (94.1%)	14/24 (58.3%)	<b>6.50</b>	<b>.01</b>
White Females	18/31 (58%)	14/17 (82.3%)	3.34	.07
Black Males	2/2 (1)	5/7 (71.4%)	*	*
Black Females	3/4 (75%)	3/5 (60%)	*	*
Hispanic Female	1/1 (1)	0/1 (0)	*	*
Other Male		0/1 (0)		*

\* Groups with one category that included one group < 5 were not calculated

Chapter V will include a summary and a discussion of the results, conclusions, limitations, recommended future research, and some final observations.

Table 16

*Retention Rates by Sport Profile, Gender, and Ethnicity*

	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>	<b>Chi Square</b>	<b>p value</b>
High Profile White	11/13 (84.6%)	8/12 (66.6%)	1.1	.29
High Profile Black	2/3 (66.6%)	7/8 (87.5%)	*	*
All High Profile Sports	12/16 (75%)	15/20 (75%)	**	**
Low Profile White	25/35 (71.4%)	19/29 (65.5%)	.26	.61
Low Profile Black	3/3 (1)	2/4 (55%)	*	*
All Low Profile Sports	28/39 (71.7%)	22/35 (62.8%)	**	**
High Profile White Male	8/8 (1)	8/10 (80%)		
High Profile Black Male	1/2 (50%)	5/6 (83.3%)	*	*
High Profile Male	9/10 (90%)	13/16 (81.2%)	.36	.55
Low Profile White Male	8/9 (88.8%)	6/14 (42.8%)	<b>4.87</b>	<b>.03</b>
Low Profile Black Male	none	2/3 (66.6%)	*	*
Low Profile Male	8/9(88.8%)	8/17 (47%)	**	**
High Profile White Female	3/5 (60%)	1/2 (50%)	*	*
High Profile Black Female	0/1 (0)	1/2 (50%)	*	*
High Profile Female	3/6 (50%)	2/4 (50%)	**	**
Low Profile White Female	17/26 (65.3%)	13/17 (76.4%)	.60	.44
Low Profile Black Female	3/4 (75%)	2/2 (1)	*	*
Low Profile Female	20/30 (66.6%)	15/19 (78.9%)	**	**

\* Groups with one category that included one group < 5 were not calculated

\*\*Sum of the groups included at least one group <5 were not calculated

**CHAPTER V**  
**CONCLUSIONS, SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY, LIMITATIONS,  
AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the academic success, specifically the grade-point average and freshman to sophomore retention rates, of student athletes was influenced by participating in a first-year experience course populated exclusively by student-athletes and taught by athletic-academic personnel (Group A) compared to student-athletes in an integrated first-year experience course populated by the general student body and taught by a faculty member not associated with the athletic-academic support staff (Group B).

The research questions below address the key areas related to this overall question:

1. What impact did participating in a student-athlete specific first-year experience course have on maintaining NCAA eligibility and meeting the NCAA progress-toward-degree completion guidelines after completing the first-year?
2. Were there significant mean differences in the grade-point average at the conclusion of the first semester and at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?
3. Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Group A and Group B?

4. Were there significant mean differences in academic performance as measured by grade-point average between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

5. Were there significant differences in the percentage of student-athletes retained at the conclusion of the first academic year between Groups A and B among student-athletes by sport, gender, and ethnicity who participated in a first-year experience course?

Quantitative data were collected regarding the grade-point average, and first-year retention rates of student-athletes enrolled in two differently populated General Studies Orientation (GSO) 100 first-year experience courses each of which were taught by a different type of instructor. It is the researcher's proposition that in order to best comprehend the effect that the composition of the type of GSO 100 courses (Group A or Group B) have on EKU's student-athletes, the analyses of grade-point average and retention data were necessary. The retention data generated from this study may spawn future research and influence curricular decisions relating to the composition of first-year experience courses for student-athletes.

This chapter discusses the key findings based on the results of the five research questions. The findings and their relationship to student-athlete academic success, first-year experience courses designed specifically for student-athletes and student-athlete retention are discussed. Recommendations are made for improving the delivery of student services to student-athletes in an effort to improve their academic performance and retention rates. The limitations of this study are discussed as well as suggestions for future research.

### **Summary and Discussion of the Results**

The data collected regarding student-athletes from Group A and Group B led to several observations about the characteristics of the student-athletes enrolled in first-year experience courses. Although the two groups differed in their composition by gender, it was noted that these groups did not differ with regard to ethnicity, sport-profile type, and college readiness (high school GPA and ACT scores).

One of the primary benefits of offering a student-athlete specific first-year experience course taught by athletic academic personnel is that academic progress-towards-degree can be monitored. In this study the vast majority of students in Group A (50/55) and Group B (50/55) met the NCAA progress-toward-degree requirements. Although student-athletes in Group A were directly exposed to these requirements in their first-year experience course, they met the progress-towards-degree requirements at the exact same level as the student-athletes in Group B who were not directly exposed to these course requirements.

The academic performance of student-athletes, specifically first semester and cumulative first academic year grade point average, in Group A and Group B were not significantly different. Student-athletes participating in first-year experience courses designed for the general student body and taught by faculty not affiliated with the athletic department performed at the same academic level as student-athletes in student-athlete specific first-year experience courses taught by athletic-academic staff. This seems to demonstrate that although student-athletes are clearly a special population; an athlete-only special orientation course is not required to ensure academic success.

As an entire population, student-athletes in Group A and Group B did not differ significantly with regard to their first year retention rates. More specifically, as a whole, student-athletes in Group A and Group B returned to school after their second semester at equivalent rates.

There were few significant differences between Group A and Group B regarding mean first semester and cumulative first academic year GPA by sport-profile, gender, and ethnicity. Student-athletes' GPAs from Group A and Group B did not differ in terms of sport-profile type and by gender. Significance differences were seen in ethnicity and group, but these were difficult to quantify due to the small percentage of minority student-athletes in Group A (13%) and Group B (26%).

Retention rates by sport-profile, gender, and ethnicity were similar between Group A and Group B. No significant differences in student-athlete retention were observed with regard to males in high profile sports and females in both high and low profile sports. Relationships relating to ethnicity were not calculated due to multiple cells of less than five student-athletes among both males and females in Group A and Group B.

A significant difference was observed among white males participating in low-profile sports. White males participating in low-profile sports in Group A returned after their second semester at an 89% rate, while white males in low-profile sports in Group B returned after their second semester at a 43% rate. This is of particular interest because Group A and Group B did not demonstrate significant differences with regard to academic performance during the first or second semester. These student-athletes were successful in the classroom and eligible by NCAA standards, but were leaving the

institution at a much higher rate than similar students participating in an athlete-specific first-year experience course. The researcher believes that the low retention rates of white males participating in low-profile sports may be related to their identity and desire to be involved in the 'athletic culture' of the university. Student-athletes participating in low-profile sports typically receive less scholarship money than student-athletes participating in high-profile sports. Low-profile students' primary reason for choosing to enroll at EKU might have been to participate in intercollegiate athletics. It also may be more difficult for the low-profile student-athletes to build relationships with the staff of the Student-Athlete Academic Support (SAAS) staff. Resources are limited and athletes in high-profile sports, more specifically, athletes receiving full scholarships do tend to get more attention from the SAAS staff. Participating in a first-year experience course taught by SAAS staff does allow the student-athletes participating in low-profile sport an increased opportunity to embrace the 'athletic-culture' and to bond with the SAAS staff. Research has also shown that males tend to seek out and embrace the 'athletic-culture' at higher levels than females (Adler & Adler, 1991; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

### **Conclusions**

The results of this study show that there was no significant difference in academic performance and NCAA progress-towards degree between student-athletes in Group A and those in Group B. There was also very little difference in retention rates between the groups with the exception of white males participating in low-profile sports. Based on these findings it is the researcher's proposition that student-athletes should be integrated

into first-year experience courses that are designed for the general student body. Student-athletes should be considered students first and athletes second. The integrated class provides a general orientation to campus that increases the student-athletes ability to engage in the complete university experience.

It is also the researcher's proposition that the CHAMPS/ Life Skills program at EKU should be strengthened and participation should be required of all student-athletes. EKU does not have a full-time athletic staff person assigned to handle the CHAMPS/Life Skills program. This is not uncommon at small and mid-size NCAA Division I institutions. This non-academic program would better meet the needs of students who are seeking to belong to the 'athletic-culture' and give the SAAS staff a better opportunity to bond with new student-athletes.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations in the design of the present study that impact its generalizability and internal validity. Students in Group A and Group B were taught by different instructors. Although common course goals and learning objectives were used, there was no way to control for differences between course instructors. Due to time limitations no classroom observations were conducted.

Small sample sizes made it difficult to draw any conclusions relating to ethnicity. EKU is a predominantly white institution and the groups did not have enough minority students to draw reliable conclusions.

Additionally, the researcher was involved in both the curriculum development of the GSO 100 course and the direct supervision of the SAAS staff. Although efforts were

made to control bias or subjectivity, the researcher's close relationship to the GSO course and the SAAS staff could have led to oversimplification or faulty conclusions.

### **Future Research**

This study specifically explored the academic performance and retention rates of two groups of students over a one-year period. No longitudinal data were collected regarding these groups. It would be interesting to track these student groups over a four- to six-year period and compare their GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates.

The small number of minority students at ECU made it very difficult to measure differences between ethnic groups. Similar studies should be conducted at NCAA Division I institutions that are more diverse with regard to ethnicity.

This study looked exclusively at quantitative data in determining academic performance and retention rates of student-athletes in Group A and Group B. Although quantitative data are very effective when looking at academic performance, qualitative data are needed to better determine the reasons for student departure. Surveys and interviews of student-athletes would provide a richer context regarding retention and student departure issues. Qualitative data are needed to determine the reason for the differences in retention rates between groups regarding white males participating in low-profile sports at ECU.

### **Final Concluding Comments**

This study compared the demographic characteristics, the NCAA progress-towards-degree, the first and second semester grade point averages, and the first-year retention rates of two groups of student-athletes enrolled in different types of first-year

experience courses at Eastern Kentucky University, Group A participated in an athlete-specific first-year experience course taught by athletic-academic personnel, and Group B participated in a first-year experience course designed for the general student body taught by a student services professional not affiliated with the athletic department.

The quantitative data demonstrated that there was no significant difference between Group A and Group B regarding NCAA progress-towards-degree and first-year academic performance. It was also noted that there was very little difference between Group A and Group B regarding first-year retention rates, with the exception of white males participating in low-profile sports.

Based on the findings from this study, the researcher suggested that further examinations of first-year experience courses specifically for student-athletes should be conducted. Specifically future research should include NCAA Division I institutions that have ethnically diverse student bodies.

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## Appendix

### Course Syllabus

## **GSO 100: ACADEMIC ORIENTATION**

### ***Instructor***

**Phone:**

**E-mail address:**

### ***Office Location and Hours***

### **Text/Materials**

- **Focus : The Centennial Edition, 100 Years of Success at EKV**, Amundsen, S., Davis, R., (2006), Kendall Hunt
- **University Date Book** (handed out during New Student Days Convocation 1pm Sunday August 20 or purchased at the EKV Bookstore)
- **Student Handbook** (online)
- **University Catalog** (online)
- **Fast Food Nation**, by Eric Schlosser (provided to students free of charge during Summer Orientation. Students who did not attend summer orientation or lost their copy can purchase another copy in the EKV bookstore).
- **New Student Days Guide** for proof of attendance stamps
- **Colonel's Compass** (online)

### **Description**

This 1-hour course is designed to assist entering first year and transfer students. The course will cover the following components:

### **Student Learning Objectives:**

- Articulate how EKV's General Education Program contributes to being a well-rounded person.
- Identify academic resources and support services important for academic success.
- Identify and articulate individual learning style and abilities.
- Engage in activities that promote connection to the university.
- Develop and articulate short and long term academic and life goals.
- Articulate the value of diverse perspectives.

### **Attendance Policy**

Class participation is essential for discussion. Students are expected to attend all classes. Roll will be taken at the beginning of every class. Students will be allowed to miss up to three classes without penalty. After students have three unexcused absences the letter grade for the course will be lowered. Each subsequent absence will result in a lower letter grade. If students miss a class, they are responsible for turning in the assignment for that day.

Absences will be considered excused for:

- University sponsored trips
- Student illness or serious illness of an immediate family member
- Death of an immediate family member

Students must notify the instructor **in advance** and provide verification if he/she will miss a class for an excused reason. If a student must miss a test or assignment, written notification must be given prior to the due date.

## **Evaluation**

### **Tests**

Two examinations will be given during the semester. They will cover the assigned reading in the textbook, lectures, discussions, handouts and any additional material assigned.

### **Papers and Assignments**

All written assignments should be typed, double spaced on 8 ½ X 11 paper and stapled. Papers will be evaluated based on accuracy of information, appropriate grammar and correct spelling.

All papers are due on the assigned dates. Late papers and assignments will NOT be accepted.

### **Journal Entries**

Journal entries will be submitted via e-mail to the instructor.

### **Quizzes**

Quizzes will be given during the semester. They will cover the assigned reading in the textbook, lectures, handouts and any additional material assigned. Unannounced quizzes may be given.

### **Out of Class Experiences**

Each student will be expected to participate in a variety of out of class activities and submit a small written report about the experience. More information will be available about specific activities throughout the semester. See orientation **class assignment booklet**.

- Sporting event, written description, proof of attendance
- Major Fair – REQUIRED OCTOBER 17, 11:30 – 2:30pm, Powell Lobby
- ECU Student Organization or Club Meeting, written description
- Cultural Activity (seminar, gallery event, music, or theater), written description

### **Presentations**

Students will be expected to use the skills learned in the class to present on a topic assigned by the instructor.

### **Participation**

Students will earn point for their participation during in class discussions.

<b>Course grades (EXAMPLE)</b>		<b>Grading System</b>	
Participation 4.0	25%	90 – 100	A
Exam #1 3.0	15%	80 – 89	B
Presentation 2.0	10%	70 – 79	C
Out of class experiences 1.0	15%	60 – 69	D
Quizzes/Written Assignments/ 0.0		59 and below	F
Journals	20%		
Exam #2 – Final	15%		
	100%		

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

Each student is expected to do his/her own work. Cheating will not be tolerated. Any student who is found to be cheating will automatically fail the course and the proper University officials will be notified. See the 2006-2007 Student Handbook for the University policy concerning plagiarism and cheating.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Any student in need of academic accommodations and who is registered with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities should make an individual appointment with the instructor to discuss accommodations. Upon individual request, this syllabus can be made available in alternative forms. Any student not registered with the Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities who has need of academic accommodations should contact the Office in the Student Services Building at 622-1500 or 622-2933.

<u>WEEK</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Activity/Assignment/HW</u>
<u>1</u>	<u>8/22</u>	<u>Introduction</u>	<u>Possibilities Book</u>
	<u>8/24</u>	<u>Introduction/Syllabus Review/Chap. 1: Transitioning to College</u>	<u>Read: Chap. 5 &amp; Chap. 2</u>
<u>2</u>	<u>8/29</u>	<u>Academic Services</u>	<u>Read: Chapter 3 &amp; 4</u>
	<u>8/31</u>	<u>Motivation/Goal Setting/Time Management</u>	<u>HW: Master Schedule</u>
<u>3</u>	<u>9/5</u>	<u>Fast Food Nation Discussion</u> <u>Author Eric Schlosser, 7:30 p.m. @ Brock Auditorium</u>	<u>Discuss Fast Food Nation</u>
	<u>9/7</u>	<u>Campus Tour With VIP</u>	<u>Read Chap: 10</u>
<u>4</u>	<u>9/12</u>	<u>Library &amp; Academic Integrity Presentation: SSB Auditorium</u>	<u>Read Chap:6</u>
	<u>9/14</u>	<u>Learning Styles/Study Skills</u>	<u>Learning Style Assessment</u>
<u>5</u>	<u>9/19</u>	<u>Note Taking &amp; Test Taking/Study Skills</u>	<u>Discuss Note Taking Format Assignment:</u>
	<u>9/21</u>	<u>Building Memory &amp; Test Taking/Concentration</u>	<u>Concentration Exercise</u>
<u>6</u>	<u>9/26</u>	<u>Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle</u>	<u>In Class: Quiz</u> <u>HW: Dietary Analysis</u>
	<u>9/28</u>	<u>Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle/Risky Behavior</u>	<u>Video Presentation</u>
<u>7</u>	<u>10/3</u>	<u>Review For Midterm Exam</u>	
	<u>10/5</u>	<u>Midterm</u>	
<u>8</u>	<u>10/10</u>	<u>Fall Break</u>	<u>Read Chap: 11 &amp; 12</u>
	<u>10/12</u>	<u>Choosing a Major/Planning for a Career</u>	<u>Visit Career Services</u>
<u>9</u>	<u>10/17</u>	<u>Attend Major Fair Powell Plaza 11:30-2:30: -NO CLASS</u> <u>Please provide proof of attendance at next class meeting</u>	<u>Written Assignment: Major Fair Report</u>
	<u>10/19</u>	<u>Academic Advising</u>	<u>HW: Interview a Profession</u>
<u>10</u>	<u>10/24</u>	<u>Scheduling Appointments for Spring Terms</u>	
	<u>10/26</u>	<u>Alcohol 101 Presentation: SSB Auditorium</u>	
<u>11</u>	<u>10/31</u>	<u>Out of Class Activity</u>	<u>Professional Interviews</u>
	<u>11/2</u>	<u>Finding Your Place on Campus</u>	<u>Guest Speaker</u>
<u>12</u>	<u>11/7</u>	<u>Out of Class Experience</u>	
	<u>11/9</u>	<u>Out of Class Experience Talks</u>	<u>Read Chapter 17</u>
<u>13</u>	<u>11/14</u>	<u>Online Learning</u>	<u>Guest Speaker</u>
	<u>11/16</u>	<u>Managing Your Money</u>	<u>Budgeting Assignment</u>
<u>14</u>	<u>11/21</u>	<u>Intro Into diversity</u>	<u>Read Chapter 15</u>
	<u>11/23</u>	<u>Thanksgiving Holiday</u>	
<u>15</u>	<u>11/28</u>	<u>Work on Diversity Presentation Outside of Class: No Class</u>	<u>Discuss Diversity Presentation Assignment</u>
	<u>11/30</u>	<u>Diversity Presentations</u>	
<u>16</u>	<u>12/5</u>	<u>Diversity Presentations/Review For Exam</u>	
	<u>12/7</u>	<u>Final Exam-Final Class</u>	