Toward an Understanding of Student-Athlete Career Maturity: Implications for Intercollegiate Athletics Programming

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Division IA athletic departments have provided academic support services to student-athletes since the late 1890s. However, prior to 1991, services focused primarily on academic assistance rather than on holistic personal and career development (Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1993). As both researchers and practitioners highlighted an increased problem of student-athletes struggling to adequately explore, choose and prepare for career roles, change to the system was necessary (Baille & Danish, 1992; Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993). Recognizing this need for additional support, the NCAA introduced the CHAMPS/Life Skills program in 1991, which drastically changed the mission of student-athlete support services internal to athletics (Broughton & Neyer, 1993).

Literature (i.e., Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Danish et al., 1993, Petitpas & Champagne, 1988) suggests career development programming specific to student-athletes is necessary for these individuals to explore, choose and prepare for careers following intercollegiate athletics participation. However, no studies to date examine how formalized student-athlete career development programs may facilitate this psychosocial career maturation process of exploring, choosing and preparing for careers from the perspective of student-athletes. Given this gap in the literature, intercollegiate athletic departments desire additional consult supported by research to improved career-development programming for student-athletes. In turn, intercollegiate athletics practitioners look to researchers to understand which programmatic changes will be most beneficial to this special population.

Subsequently, the purpose of this empirical study is to build upon current knowledge of the Life Development Intervention (LDI) conceptual model and Erikson's stages of psychosocial development theoretical framework. This study aims to assist sport organizations and intercollegiate athletics practitioners as they seek to understand how formalized career development program internal to athletics influences student-athletes’ individual identity development processes. Moreover, this study will implement individual one-on-one interviews to examine senior student-athletes’ perceptions of career maturity upon completion of a four-year athletic specific career development program. Data analysis will be guided by the Life Development Intervention (LDI) conceptual model and Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development theoretical framework. Implications for intercollegiate athletics sport organizations and practitioners, who seek to implement career development programming supported by empirical research, will be presented.