An Examination of Student-Athletes’ Academic Advising Contentment

Katja Sonkeng, Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Rammi Hazzaa, Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Taheo Yob (Advisor), Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Academic excellence is undoubtedly the paramount value of intercollegiate athletics. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its member institutions are strongly committed to providing student-athletes with the best abilities to achieve their educational goals. For example, the NCAA requires its member institutions to make academic counseling and support services available to all student-athletes. In addition, the NCAA implemented the Academic Progress Rate (APR) to measure student-athletes’ academic performance as part of an academic reform effort in 2003. Along with the APR, the NCAA developed the Graduation Success Rate (GSR), which requires all colleges and universities to report student-athletes’ graduation rates. If athletics teams do not achieve the minimum threshold scores, they are subject to various sanctions such as the loss of scholarships and practice time, a postseason ban, and the restriction of membership status.

Despite athletic programs offering a myriad of services and programs to enhance student-athletes’ college experiences, the majority of provided academic support focus on athletic eligibility rather than student-athletes’ educational and personal development (Butterworth & Rich, 2013; Comeaux, 2007; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011, Knight Commission, 2001). To advance knowledge on academic performance in college athletics, scholars have conducted a considerable amount of research. However, the overriding concern in research was driven by topics such as eligibility, academic violations, and graduation rates (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Jones, 2009; Broughton & Neyer, 2001), while student-athletes’ experiences on academic development has received little to no attention (Dillmann, 2008; Huml, Hancock, & Bergman, 2014). Yet, student-athletes’ satisfaction with academic advising has been proven to be one of the most influential factors to individual academic performance (Dillmann, 2008). Studies examining the relationship between satisfaction and performance date back to as early as 1940s and have become a research tradition in various practical and academic fields (Davar & Ranjubala, 2012). Scholars in sport have also conducted a significant amount of research on this specific relationship in various other areas, including coaching (Agarwal, Angst, & Magni, 2009; Lorimer, 2013), team and individual sports participation (Balaguér, Duba, Atienza, & Mayo, 2002; Jowett & Nezlek, 2011)), sport organization employees (Chiu, Cho, & Won, 2014; Nadaee, Alavi, Hadavi, & Rad, 2012), sport education (Omid, Ebrahim, & Bagher, 2014), youth sport participation (Su, Xiang, & McBride, 2014), and sport volunteerism (Bang & Ross, 2012). These studies found that there is a positive correlation between satisfaction and performance. Although the development of academic excellence is one of the most vital missions of college athletics, there is a dearth of research on factors influencing college student-athletes’ satisfaction with academic services, which will lead to positive academic experiences and performances.

The primary purpose of this study is to shed light on the satisfaction of student-athletes’ on their received academic services. Additionally, this research attempts to provide academic advising staff valuable insights that will help create and tailor more effective academic services for student-athletes. Participants for this study were 226 randomly selected student-athletes from a major mid-western university. A survey, which consisted of a 5-point Likert scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used to measure the student-athletes’ overall satisfaction with academic services and the influence of factors on student-athletes’ satisfaction. The initial survey was created through interviews with student-athletes and a review of related literature. A pilot study with 52 student-athletes was designed to assess the reliability and validity of the instrument. The initial questionnaire consisted of 25 questions, including five demographic questions. However, following the results of a factor analysis, the total number of questions was reduced to 22 items, and the four major factors were determined. Those factors included tutoring, academic support programs, staff, and advising facilities that influence student-athletes’ satisfaction with academic services. The composite reliabilities (Cronbach’s α) of the four factors range from .78 (Facilities) to .89 (Staff). The average variance extracted (AVE) of the four constructs ranged from .56 to .65, which exceeded the threshold .5 and greater than the squared correlation (.434) between the four constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Hence, the discriminant validity was also supported. For the convergent validity, all estimated loadings of indicators for the
underlying constructs were significant. The CFA goodness-of-fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 131.57$, $p < .01$, $CFI = .91$, $GFI = .89$, and $RMSEA = .71$) showed an adequate overall fit, and the four antecedents explained 64% of the variance in student-athletes’ satisfaction.

Descriptive statistics revealed that student-athletes’ overall satisfaction with academic services was considerably high ($M = 4.17$). Furthermore, the results of ANOVA showed that the overall satisfaction with advising services did not significantly differ between genders and types of sports (team vs. individual sports). However, the overall satisfaction significantly differed among class levels ($F = 3.567$, $p = .008$). Specifically, a post hoc of Tukey test indicated that the freshmen’s satisfaction ($M = 3.67$) was significantly lower than that of the juniors’ ($M = 4.29$) and the seniors’ ($M = 4.19$). In addition, there was no statistically significant correlation between student-athletes’ GPA and the overall satisfaction rate. Particularly in terms of the satisfaction with the four major factors, student-athletes had the highest satisfaction with the advising facilities ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .45$), followed by the advising staff ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .52$), the tutoring ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .56$), and the advising programs ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .63$). Furthermore, the results of a path analysis revealed that among the four factors, the facilities ($\beta = .417$, $p < .001$) and the staff ($\beta = .173$, $p < .003$) were found to have significant influences on student-athletes’ satisfaction with academic services.

The findings of this study provide several practical recommendations for academic service personnel. First, athletic departments should make sufficient efforts to provide clean and comfortable academic service facilities in order to increase student-athletes’ satisfaction. This includes well-maintained and updated equipment for academic services, such as computers, printers, and study desks, not to mention approachable and courteous athletic service staff. Second, athletic departments should continuously assess the needs of student-athletes to provide the most tailored academic advising programs. Considering the significantly lower satisfaction scores of freshmen, this study may be particularly useful for athletic academic service staff in their efforts to developing effective strategies for managing the student-athletes’ transition from high school or community college.

This study further provides new avenues of future research. One may include a comparative analysis of specific academic advising services provided by athletic programs as they provide a variety of educational resources, which may have different impacts on student-athletes’ satisfaction. Another future research may involve an investigation whether the satisfaction levels on academic services varies among student-athletes in different divisions or conferences. Athletic departments in bigger conferences tend to have more available resources to support their student-athletes, which however does not always lead to better results. Hence, it may be also valuable to explore if satisfaction from student-athletes in revenue sports differs from the ones in non-revenue sports. Lastly, it is recommended for future studies to investigate the relationships between student-athletes’ satisfaction with academic services, APR and GSR.