How the Perception of Athletic Academic Advisers Affect the Overall College Experience of Freshmen Student-Athletes

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Management - Other (College Sport)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) Saturday, June 3, 2017 2:20 PM
Abstract 2017-408 Room: Torrey's Peak

Over the past two decades, college athletic departments have made more strategic investments on academic services for student-athletes (Wolverton, Kelderman, & Moser, 2008), including spending on athletic facilities and academic support services. While spending habits on building facilities designated towards academic services increased, scholars suggested that spending more on academic personnel also assists for student-athletes to overcome unique challenges (Martens & Lee, 1998; Young & Sowa, 1992).

In order to counter the difficulties in maintaining student-athlete eligibility, Wolverton et al. (2008) pointed out that athletic departments have been more willing to invest in academic services dedicated towards student-athletes. Gayles and Hu (2009) claim that it is necessary to obtain for more information about how student-athletes can improve their overall college experience by being exposed to activities that promote personal and learning development. Little research has focused on the perception that student-athletes have on academic services and how these perceptions influence their college experience.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses
The theories of student involvement (Astin, 1984) and social exchange (Emerson, 1976) guide the theoretical framework for this study. Student involvement theory proposes that individuals may increase their personal and learning development by being involved in meaningful activities during their academic career, leading to an increased satisfaction of their overall college experience (Astin, 1999; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006). Additionally, Gayles (2009) highlighted that students are more open to learning when being involved in important activities during their studies.

H1: Perception of academic services significantly impacts satisfaction amongst freshmen student-athletes.

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) suggested social exchange to be a strong indicator when assessing an individual's behavior in the workplace, which also affects the establishment and formation of relationships. Czekanski and Turner (2014) explained that when student-athletes experience a higher quality of social exchange relationship, they are more likely to be committed to their coach and their teams. However, research has yet to investigate to what extent the student-athletes relationships with academic advising personnel influences their overall college experience regarding involvement and emotional adjustment, thus creating a gap in the existing research literature.

H2: Perception of academic services significantly impacts involvement amongst freshmen student-athletes.
H3: Perception of academic services significantly impacts emotional adjustment amongst freshmen student-athletes.

Due to the challenges faced by student-athletes to balance sports and academics, Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) referred to this combination of intercollegiate athletics and academics as “American higher education’s peculiar institution” (p.39). Additionally, academic support services were created on the basis of Whitener and Myers (1986) findings that identified academics to be the most demanding area for this population to support. Overall, supporting student-athletes can take on various approaches such as academic advising, increasing study skills, and developing general life skills (1986). Besides, scholars have focused on how variables such as satisfaction, involvement, and emotional adjustment affect the student-athletes’ college experience (Astin, 1999; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1998).
Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the perception of freshmen student-athletes regarding their university’s athletic department academic services affects their satisfaction, involvement, and emotional adjustment.

Methods and Expected Results
The research in progress focuses on the perceptions of freshman student-athletes have with their respective academic support services, and how these perceptions influence certain aspects of the college experience such as satisfaction, involvement, and emotional adjustment. In order to examine these areas, a 45-item survey will be distributed online to prospective respondents through the aid of academic services personnel at Division I athletics programs. Convenience sampling procedures will be used to select a sample of freshman student-athletes.

Student-athlete’s perception will be measured using 20 items from the Scale of Service Quality for Intercollegiate Athletics (SSQIA) (Ko, Durrant, & Mangiantini, 2008). These items address various aspects of service quality of the academic services function. Satisfaction items were adapted from the Implicit Service Questionnaire (Douglas, Douglas, & Barnes, 2006), of which eight items were used. Involvement will be measured through six items adapted from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006), while emotional adjustment will be addressed with seven items adapted from the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), created by Baker and Siryk (1989).

Upon completion of data collection, results will be analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis for data fit, and through correlation and regression analyses to address the proposed hypotheses in the study.

Proposed Implications and Conclusion
The current paper explores the research gap of how the perception of freshmen student-athletes on academic support services influences their satisfaction, involvement, and emotional adjustment. With the intensification of eligibility requirements from the NCAA, athletic departments are pressured to increase their student-athletes academic success. Findings of this study will allow for athletic departments to adjust their academic support services based on how freshmen student-athletes perceive their helpfulness. Additionally, the NCAA can reevaluate and modify the rules set in place to further support student-athletes. Furthermore, student-athletes will benefit from these results to develop a better understanding of the purpose of academic support services and appreciate how this has a positive outcome on their overall college experience.