The Effect of Athletic Identity on the Usage of Athletic Department Support Services and Career Transition Readiness

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University athletic departments (UADs) often provide career support services to student-athletes. Positive awareness of these services can empower student-athletes' engagement in help-seeking behaviors and develop skills pertinent to development of potential alternate career paths (Shurts & Shoffner, 2004). However, what may affect the perception and subsequent utilization of services is the extent to which student-athletes identify as “athletes”, since highly identified individuals are less likely to explore alternative roles (Good et al., 1993; Murphy et al., 1996). Student-athletes are more likely to have a high “Athletic Identity” when competing at an elite level (Cieslak II, 2004) and those with an inflated optimism of becoming a professional athlete are less likely to consider or engage in developmental opportunities for alternative careers (McQuown-Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010). This should be a concern for collegiate administrators given that 98% of student-athletes will not compete in professional sport (NCAA, 2018) and instead will follow other career pathways. While UADs are providing more support services, there has been some criticism that rather than fostering support and guidance into career pathways, services are utilized more for compliance purposes (Ridpath, 2010). Given these circumstances, the purpose of this study is to determine the effect of Athletic Identity on student-athletes’ perceptions and utilization of career support services.

To be explored:

1. Does Athletic Identity impact perceptions of effectiveness and/or voluntary utilization of UAD career support services?

2. Are such perceptions and/or help-seeking behaviors predictors of career readiness in student-athletes?

Method

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2010) will be used. A convenience sample of student-athletes from a DI institution in the Midwest will be recruited via UAD gatekeepers. Participants will complete an online survey composed of questions on demographics, career service usage, the revised Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001), the Career Factors Inventory (Chartrand et al., 1990), and a Likert-scale developed to assess perceived effectiveness of support services. Comparative, correlative, and regression analyses of the previous scales will be conducted utilizing SPSS. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews will be conducted on student-athletes’ experiences of support services to assist in interpretation of quantitative results. Qualitative data will be analyzed using initial, followed by focused coding as recommended by Saldaña (2014). Two researchers will conduct qualitative analysis and intercoder reliability assessed.

Implications

While research has been conducted with student-athletes, few studies have examined the role identity plays in engaging in help-seeking behaviors and career readiness. As the NCAA and its member institutions continually strive to revamp programming and services to accommodate the needs of student-athletes, this could be a crucial component to understanding service usage and delivery. This would have implications for UAD administrators and the design and delivery of more effective supplemental career services, especially for those athletes at higher risk for identity foreclosure and related difficulty in career transition aspects. This information could also help mitigate some of the concerns raised by Ridpath (2010) that support services may generally be viewed as mere public relations efforts or solely for compliance purposes.