

ADVISING THE ACADEMICALLY UNDERPREPARED FIRST-YEAR
COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT ATHLETE FOR
TRANSFERABILITY

by

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Student athletes attending and competing at a two-year community college often aspire to compete their last 2 years at a Division I four-year college or university. The impact of advising community college athletes can influence their ability to transfer to an NCAA Division I institution. Students intending to be Division I athletes after high school fall into one of two categories: qualifiers and non-qualifiers. Non-qualifiers can enroll in a community college with the hope of meeting NCAA criteria to transfer.

Many of these student athletes enter community college underprepared for the rigors of higher education and, of particular importance to academic advisors in community colleges, are the students who are deemed to be of “academically underprepared” status.

The process of taking remedial courses and graduating from a community college combined with meeting the demands of the new NCAA transfer guidelines needs to actively involve the academic advisor.

Some first-year community college student athlete issues to consider are as follows:

1. How is the impact of academic advising affecting community college student athletes who aspire to transfer to NCAA Division I institutions?
2. How is the student athlete educated on transferability to NCAA institutions?
3. How is the student athlete being assured that academic advisors are knowledgeable of transfer guidelines to NCAA Division I institutions?

The most important aspect of this study is the first-year community college student athlete. The student athlete carries the burden of producing “on and off the court,” which entails not only being studious but also athletically successful.

This study examined the experiences of academically underprepared first-year community college student athletes as well as their experiences related to transferability and NCAA Division I athletic programs. An increased awareness of transferability rules by the academic advising staff and the student athletes will only enhance the educational experience and involvement for the students.

Data for this study consist of qualitative interviews from questions that were formulated and posed to academic advisors for student athletes, academically underprepared student athletes, the institution’s coaching staff, and the athletic department personnel within a community college in Alabama.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Due to a relatively open admission standard and affordable tuition, community colleges serve an important role in regard to a well-prepared start toward a bachelor's degree or training relevant to immediate job placement. The institutional characteristics of community colleges reflect four-year universities and colleges in numerous ways, including extracurricular activities, student social organizations, and athletic teams. Five hundred and sixteen American community colleges have athletic teams (NJCAA, 2007) in a range of sports, including football, basketball, and baseball, with many student athletes aspiring for chances to attain bachelor's degrees hopefully with the aid of an athletic scholarship. Students intending to be athletes after high school fall into one of two categories: qualifiers and non-qualifiers. Non-qualifiers can enroll in a community college with the hope of meeting NCAA criteria to transfer and compete by completing 48 transferable units with an associate's degree with a minimum 2.0 grade point average in a two-year period.

At the community college level, there are many similarities between athletes and non-athletes. Many of the community college students are first-generation students with the goal of either acquiring a two-year certificate from a technical or health program or using an Associate's degree to matriculate to a four-year college or university. In many cases, the community college student and student athlete are linked by pre-collegiate academic preparation and the inability to pay higher tuition, books, and fees that are found at four-year institutions. Many of these underprepared and first-generation students see community college as a possible breakthrough

toward upward mobility. This same formula is used by student athletes who aspire to transfer to a four-year school to participate in athletics. Further similarities between athletes and non-athletes include the ability to attend a small local community college at low cost and be within close proximity to their hometown. At the community college level, there are no “athletic dorms” per se as were seen at high profile NCAA athletic programs in the past. The athlete and non-athlete are provided with common housing, dining, technology, and tutorial services thus removing any bias or special treatment of athletes. The small college atmosphere that a community college offers to athletes and non-athletes alike also includes the lower teacher-to-student ratio and a common understanding of the needs for academically underprepared students in a non-traditional setting. The community college student and student athlete can view the community college as providing a low-cost education with many of the amenities of a four-year institution that will provide a path to upward mobility. Many of these student athletes enter community college underprepared for the rigors of higher education and, of particular importance to academic advisors in community colleges, are students who are deemed to be of “academically underprepared” status.

The community college student athlete now faces new transfer rules mandated by the NCAA in regard to transferring and should be educated on the qualifications for a successful transfer during the initial contact with academic advisors. One such transfer rule is the 40/60/80% progress-toward-degree rule, which stipulates that the student athlete must earn 48 semester hours that must be transferable toward their degree at the four-year school (NCAA, 2007).

In this dissertation, I define the term “academically underprepared” student athletes as individuals who did not make the NCAA academic qualifying standards coming out of high

school and thusly continue their athletic and academic careers at a two-year college. Many incoming student athletes at community colleges fall into minority and low socioeconomic groups. This group generally scores lower on college entrance exams (Petrie & Russell, 1995). The literature states that an entrance exam appears to be a valid predictor of graduation for students; student athletes typically score lower on the test therefore decreasing the likelihood of graduating from college (Benson, 1994, 1997). Jones and Watson (1990) have noted that academically at-risk students and their retention have a substantial impact on both institutions and society in general. Specifically, retention affects institutional funding patterns, facilities planning, and the academic curricula offered. Retention also impacts the future labor market. Students who do not have proper training for the workforce are generally unprepared to meet the expected roles and responsibilities associated with particular vocations (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

Traditionally, the lack of academic preparation for college is defined by poor academic performance factors such as low standardized test scores or poor grades (Beck & Davidson, 2001). Athletes are continually being admitted to colleges and universities without being academically prepared for the rigors of college level work (Lapchick & Slaughter, 1989; Sperber, 1990). There are many reasons why student athletes choose to attend a community college. One motivation is a student's low college entrance test scores, low grade point average, and/or a chance to obtain scholarships after their community college eligibility has expired. Not all community college student athletes are non-qualifiers for NCAA institutions but for those individuals who are, meeting the academic, social, and athletic demands of college require institutional support.

Also a matter of concern for the academically underprepared community college student athlete is the transfer process that the student athlete must complete in order to continue to participate in their sport and complete their education at a four-year institution. In order to transfer, the community college student athlete must not only meet the requirements of eligibility to play while at the community college, but they also must prepare for eligibility at the four-year college or university. Since a community college student athlete is only eligible to participate for two seasons of competition, the courses he or she takes during the first year are crucial in determining an eligibility status upon transfer (NCAA, 2002). Often community college student athletes are required to take remedial courses in English, reading, mathematics, or a combination of all three. Almost half of all students beginning their studies at a community college are required to take at least one developmental course (Boylan & Saxon, 1998).

Researchers who examine postsecondary retention and attrition recognize preventing dropouts, assisting academic at-risk students, and fostering student success in the first year of college is a way to increase retention and graduation rates (Levitz & Noel, 1989; Noel, Levitz, Saluri & Associates, 1985; Roueche & Roueche, 1993; Tinto, 1987, 1990, 1993). Many researchers (Ervin, Saunders, Gillis, & Hoglebe, 1985; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Petrie & Russell, 1995; Watt & Moore, 2001; Young & Sowa, 1992) have suggested that student athletes face a unique set of challenges that they are not ready to meet without assistance. Student athletes are a diverse special population because of their roles on campus, their atypical lifestyles, and their special needs (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 1996). In this dissertation, I examine the academic advising experiences of first-year community college student athletes and their transferability. These student athletes will be those who did not meet NCAA qualifying standards upon finishing high school.

High attrition rates among student athletes along with newly established transfer guidelines increase the importance of athletic academic advisors. Under the latest NCAA transfer guidelines, a student athlete entering the third year of full-time collegiate enrollment is required to have successfully completed at least 40% of a specific degree program (NCAA Transfer Guide, 2003). The accuracy and involvement of the athletic academic advisor are paramount to assure the access of community college student athletes to continuing progress at a four-year college or university. The involvement of the academic advisor is directly related to the successful transfer of the two-year college student athlete to a four-year school. My dissertation also examines the academic advising in relation to student athlete retention, persistence, and knowledge of transfer guidelines while attending the two-year community college.

Research Questions/Purpose

Student athletes attending and competing at a two-year community college often aspire to compete their last 2 years at a Division I four-year college or university. The impact of advising community college athletes can influence their ability to transfer to an NCAA Division I institution. For example, the process of taking remedial courses and graduating from a community college combined with meeting the demands of the new NCAA transfer guidelines needs to actively involve the academic advisor. In this dissertation, I focus on the experiences of academically underprepared community college student athletes with academic advising. I consider three research questions:

1. How is the impact of academic advising affecting community college student athletes who aspire to transfer to NCAA Division I institutions?
2. How is the student athlete educated on transferability to NCAA institutions?

3. How is the student athlete being assured that academic advisors are knowledgeable of transfer guidelines to NCAA Division I institutions?

The most important aspect of this study is the first-year community college student athlete. The student athlete carries the burden of producing “on and off the court,” which entails not only being studious but also athletically successful. Therefore, I consider the following aspects of the student athlete to be examined closely as I review the identity, demands, adjustment, and advising of the student athlete.

The Student Athlete

A review of the literature in regard to the college student experience (i.e., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) illustrates that as students move through college, they generally make positive development toward identifying a personal purpose in regard to academic and social issues as well as constructing interpersonal relationships. Students also develop more independence in their thinking and feeling and come to recognize their independence; they have more clearly defined educational, career, and lifestyle goals; they have increased tolerance and acceptance of others; and they have deeper, more meaningful friendships and relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cornelius, 1995). Student athletes are a diverse special population because of their roles on campus, their atypical lifestyles, and their unique needs (Ferrante et al., 1996). In the remaining sections of chapter 1, I consider the identity of the student athlete, the demands that such students must make to the postsecondary environment, and the importance of advising in meeting those demands. Participation in athletics at the postsecondary level can have a positive impact on the student. Athletic participation in college often provides opportunities for social interaction and support (Sellars & Damas, 1996), generates feelings of belonging and acceptance among one’s

peer group (Adler & Adler, 1991), and can develop feelings of pride and attachment to one's school (Melendez, 1991). Through their involvement with sports, athletes are provided with opportunities to exhibit leadership characteristics, which can help promote feelings of optimism, self-assurance, confidence in achieving long- and short-term goals, and confidence in internal stress-coping abilities (Melendez, 2006). But students choosing to compete in intercollegiate athletics at both the two-year and the four-year level face a unique set of challenges and circumstances as they make the transition from high school to college (Ferrante et al., 1996). In addition to common issues associated with making the transition to college, such as living away from home for the first time, developing new social groups, and assuming responsibilities of self-discipline, student athletes also face other significant hurdles throughout the course of their college experience (Parham, 1993).

Two such hurdles are balancing athletic and academic roles during the first year as a student athlete. The additional challenges which student athletes face beyond those of a normal college student include learning to balance athletic and academic pursuits; adapting to a certain degree of isolation; managing success or lack thereof in terms of athletics and academics; attending to their physical health in a more deliberate way compared to their peers as to avoid injury and subsequent rehabilitation; satisfying multiple relationships, including those having to do with coaches, parents, friends, and community; and terminating an athletic career and finding other activities in which participation will bring about a similar, if not more heightened, level of satisfaction (Parham, 1993). For the student athlete at either the two-year or four-year institution, the daily schedule in regard to academics, athletics, and nurturing friendships is limited, impacting the possibility of developing extracurricular participation and contact at the institution. Given these time constraints and decreased attention to social and leisure activities, student

athletes often report feeling estranged, left out, and not in touch with campus life (Parham, 1993). Even for those college athletes who exceed academic standards and enroll at the institution with strong academic preparation, the demands of practice, competition, and the rigors of academic and athletic life in college present difficult challenges (Naughton, 1996).

Identity and Demands of the Student Athlete

A common perception of the student athlete includes being over-privileged, taking easy courses, and “coasting” through college doing very little work of substance (Parham, 1993). What most individuals do not realize is the near full-time commitment that sport participants have such as pre- and post-season activities and strength and conditioning sessions, often year round (Adler & Adler, 1985). Student athletes operate on schedules with limited flexibility; they typically attend classes in the mornings and early afternoons, participate in sports related activities during the afternoons and early evenings, and devote evenings to study or other necessary daily activities (Jordan & Denson, 1990).

Most student athletes start college with the same degree aspirations as other students, but after 4 years of college, football and men’s basketball players at all postsecondary institutions have a significantly lower degree attainment and degree aspirations when compared to their peers (Briggs, 1996). The level of degree aspirations drops significantly more after being enrolled for 1 year (Briggs, 1996) due to these athletes being the most highly sought after and receiving more extrinsic rewards in the areas of publicity and social support (Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). Athletes in men’s basketball generally receive more positive reinforcement and accolades for their athletic performance rather than for their academic achievement, which can

shift their priority away from academics toward athletics (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen & Purdy, 1986).

Bowen and Levin (2003) found that student athletes who were recruited by coaches were more prone to under-performance academically than were student athletes who were accepted and then sought to participate in athletics as “walk-ons.” In the athletic scholarship system, there is far less of an incentive for coaches to accommodate the academic needs of athletes than is the case when athletes are true amateurs (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Coaches are more interested in maintaining eligibility than in educating athletic youngsters, and neophyte intercollegiate athletes who often are ill-prepared for university level work have typically followed a particular eligibility strategy--by avoiding core courses required for graduation, athletes may skirt some of the more difficult courses in the university (Chu, 1989).

Revenue sport student athletes often take a downgraded curriculum, which is designed specifically for them, at the insistence of their coaches. This could significantly reduce the educational value of their time in college (Adler & Adler, 1991; Briggs, 1996). Not all student athletes pursue such a curriculum, of course. But when considering characteristics of this group in comparison with their peers, student athletes will often decide in favor of athletics when a conflict exists with academics (Adler & Adler, 1991) to please their coaches who possess the power to decide who starts in games and who is put on scholarship (Simons et al., 1999). Research has examined and identified administrators and coaches articulating the student-first-athlete-second philosophy, supposedly affirming the priority given to academics (i.e., Mallette, 1992). Yet other studies document the winning-at-all-costs objective, leaving the classroom experience as a distant second in the prioritization (Benson, 1994).

While there is increasing concern for student athletes' social and emotional well-being, there continues to be a lack of understanding about their assimilation and acceptance into the college mainstream world (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Wiggins, 1991). Nishimoto (1997) found that the student athlete peer culture did function as the main social support network for the participants. Athletes tend to identify their athletic peers as their primary reference group. Findings generally indicate that the primary point of contact for the student athletes in both their scholastic and athletic environments lay within the membership ranks of their respective team's culture (Nishimoto, 1997).

Adjustment of the Student Athlete

Historically, college satisfaction and adjustment has been viewed as either a function of academic success and achievement (focused on GPAs or other cognitive measures; Sedlacek, 1989) or as an indicator of graduation and retention rates (Eitzen & Sage, 1997). Over the last few decades, research has typically revealed low levels of academic achievement and success, lower graduation rates, and higher rates of attrition for student athletes (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen & Sage, 1997). Although graduation rates for student athletes have improved steadily over the past 2 decades, research examining the effects of sport participation on college adjustment is deficient. The ability to adjust to college life and maintain enrollment is affected by a number of non-academic issues such as finances, loneliness, health, interpersonal struggles, autonomy, and change (Kaczmarek, Matlock, & Franco, 1990). The adaptation to college adjustment may also be influenced by racial/ethnic variables. For example, African American student populations perceived social support as an important predictor of college retention, while White students perceived it as less important (Mallincrodt, 1988).

Specific psychosocial and developmental influences associated with sports participation may be beneficial to the development and adjustment of college students (Melendez, 2006). Although athletic participation has been theorized to influence psychosocial development in general (Cornelius, 1995), the role of the student athletic subculture is often overlooked as a key developmental force on the college campus (Melendez, 2006). In a study by Astin (1993), athletic participation was seen as a positive aspect associated with overall satisfaction with the college experience, motivation to earn a degree, and the development of interpersonal and leadership skills. Athletic participation in high school resulted in many positive secondary and postsecondary outcomes, including improved orientation (adjustment), higher grades, higher self-esteem, and higher educational aspirations (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). Athletic participation also eased social adjustment for college student athletes. Due in part to the social networks created by sports teams on campus, athletic participation was shown to ease feelings of loneliness and stress that often accompany major life changes in the first year of college (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

These findings suggest that sport participation can promote certain developmental, social, emotional, and attitudinal experiences that ease the transition into college for many student athletes. This may especially be the case for minority student athletes, whose transition to college is often associated with considerable degrees of stress (Young, Ekeler, Sawyer, & Prichard, 1994). These potentially positive influences of athletic participation may allow for the development of key social support networks, institutional pride, and a sense of belonging and attachment that many minority student non-athletes seem to lack when they attend predominantly White colleges and universities (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Yet sport participation may also hinder the college adjustment of student athletes for a variety of reasons. Increased time

demands due to practice and study hall schedules, less time and opportunity for social interactions with the general student body, lack of money due to time constraints hindering employability, and excessive focusing on the athlete role resulting in the neglect of academics may hinder college adjustment for student athletes (Cogan & Petrie, 1996).

Certain factors maintain dual positive and negative influences on college success and adjustment. For example, increased focus on the athletic role by student athletes may result in the formation of an overly strong “athletic identity” (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Defined as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role, athletic identity was theorized within the framework of multidimensional self-concept theory. Individuals who develop strong athletic identities seem to place sport in the domain of high-perceived importance, linking sport performance with self-esteem. Furthermore, due to its social aspects, the extent to which one identifies as an athlete may be strongly influenced by family members, friends, coaches, teachers, and the media (Simons et al., 1999).

Advising the Student Athlete

First-year students enter college with aspirations of being successful, but they simultaneously sense loss of family ties and friends while experiencing changes in their everyday lives. As a result of this complicated situation, they desire a complete independence while at the same time needing someone--often the academic advisor--to tell them exactly what to do (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Research shows that students who make a connection to at least one adult on campus experience higher levels of satisfaction and higher retention rates than students who do not (Astin, 1978; Tinto, 1987). Academic advisors are among the first staff

members to interact with first-year students and can serve as important resources for them (Gordon & Habley, 2000).

Limited evidence suggests that high-quality advising has a positive but indirect impact on persistence through its influence on grades and satisfaction with college and its negative influence on intent to withdraw (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Many researchers (Petrie & Russell, 1995; Young & Sowa, 1992) suggest that student athletes face a unique set of challenges that they are not ready to meet without assistance. Broughton and Neyer (2001) advocated a practical approach to advising and counseling college student athletes. They classified student needs into four areas: academic advising, life skills development, clinical counseling, and performance enhancing. To better serve student athletes, student services must consider the constraints that inhibit effective results, such as time limitations and over commitment to sports (Ferrante et al., 1996; Martens & Lee, 1998).

Colleges admit athletes as targeted populations in their efforts to pursue the bifurcated goal of athletic and academic excellence (Ferris, Finster, & McDonald, 2004). Athletes may be admitted to college under a special exemption and typically may need supportive academic services available only to student athletes to attain graduation (Benson, 1994). For example, an effective advising program for student athletes with learning disabilities provides services that will address the following domains: academic, athletic performance, and emotional behavioral functioning (Dede & Lane, 1998).

In a study by Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte, and Mahar (1993), intercollegiate student-athletes may commit to the role of “athlete” without exploring alternative identities (career development issues, mentoring). When students are recruited and paid to attend college primarily because of their athletic skills, it is very likely that some of them will have neither the

motivation nor the aptitude to perform college-level work (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). The sheer competitive nature of athletics and the desire to get the best athletes can persuade coaches to just look for the best athletes and not the academically oriented ones (Ridpath, 2002).

Freshmen student athletes, inexperienced with the college environment and faced with the potential disruption of their existing support systems (such as moving away from family and established friendships), may be particularly vulnerable to the stressors associated with becoming a young adult, with beginning school, and with competing as a college athlete (Petrie & Stoeber, 1997). Broadbridge (1996) reported that students needed extra time with an advisor/mentor at the beginning of their academic careers because of uncertainty and lack of awareness in regard to the scope of changes associated with college attendance. Indeed, student athletes are at risk for personal and academic distress (Pinkerton, Hintz, & Barrow, 1989), and athletic departments are taking steps to develop programs aimed at helping freshmen adjust to college and succeed academically and personally (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993). Research on college student athletes (Petrie, 1993; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992) and non-athletes (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987) supports the relationship between strong support systems and academic success, particularly in the initial semesters. Unfortunately, support systems are not always present, accessible, or satisfactory for first-year student athletes at either two-year or four-year institutions entering a new environment and leaving behind established support resources. In fact, many authors (such as Parham, 1993) have noted the social isolation student athletes experience due to the time demands and stigma associated with college sport participation.

Counselors, mentors, and other student services professionals are well-suited and situated to assist student athletes with social support concerns. Advising college student athletes at many institutions continues to focus only on maintaining academic eligibility and graduation rates

rather than enhancing the academic, personal, and athletic development of the student athlete (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Due to the challenging nature of transfer guidelines by the NJCAA and NCAA, a focus on academic demands is crucial. Any individual counseling or mentoring should be focused on assisting student athletes work through possible barriers to establish broader support networks on campus, such as other students' biases toward athletes, role conflict or overload, an over reliance on coaches and teammates, or the belief that student athletes should be able to handle things without the help of others (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Ferrante et al., 1996).

Because of the potential for experiencing significant life changes, many researchers have focused on the freshman year and the transitional stressors related to it (Greenberg, 1993; Noel-Levitz, 1993). Lucas (1993) examined the concerns of African American freshmen students. The concerns the students listed included academic adjustment, grades, time management, developing effective study habits, and examination fears. The African American freshmen also felt that they lacked information about careers, knowledge about interests and skills, and were deficient in decision-making skills. They were also concerned about discrimination. A finding of Lucas (1993), which is important for counselors, is that minority students were reluctant to seek help for concerns they had about career-related issues. One method through which many colleges address the needs of the freshmen students is the development of freshmen orientation programs or courses (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994). These courses provide students with much needed information about the university as well as providing frequent contact with at least one faculty member whose assignment is to assist them in their transition.

Another method through which universities can help students adapt to their new environment is through the use of faculty mentors. Research has shown that many first

generation students and/or minority students drop out of college because of inexperience or frustration with the academic environment. Many students feel rejection and cultural isolation, confusion about academic goals and how to attain them, and frustration with the bureaucracy of academic requirements or the environment (Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Tinto, 1987).

Summary

When examining issues in higher education, it is important not to overlook the contribution of the community college. The literature on retention (Tinto, 1987) and academic advising (King, 1993) indicates a strong connection between faculty activities and student persistence at the four-year level, but the research is less developed at the two-year level. Identifying and assisting the student athletes that may need additional academic assistance would allow community college student services personnel to focus and to more effectively provide services and interventions to help develop the academic skills required for success in the college environment (DeBerard, Spielmans & Julka, 2004; Entwistle & McCune, 2004). While faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals all serve as student advocates and play an integral part in student retention and attrition, advisors are typically in the best position to assist students in making quality academic decisions (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). Their importance to the success of the student athlete cannot be overstated. In addition to being knowledgeable about academic programs and curricula requirements within the institution, the advisor's ability to give accurate and correct academic guidance is often the most commonly stated expectation of students receiving advising services (Creamer & Scott, 2000).

The accuracy and involvement of the athletic academic advisor are paramount to assure the access of the two-year student athlete's pursuit of continuing their education at a four-year institution. The involvement of the athletic academic advisor is directly related to the successful transfer of the two-year college student athlete to a four-year school. The role of athletic academic advisor and the advising experiences of the student athlete in preparation to transfer to a four-year NCAA institution is the focus of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Community college student athletes, coaches, academic advisors, and administrators need to be knowledgeable of the NCAA transfer rules in order to have a positive impact on community college student athletes. If the student athlete wishes to attend an NCAA Division I institution, all of the aforementioned groups should be become involved for the betterment of those in need. I consider an overview of advising, the role of the academic advisor, the student athlete, the first-year student, and student involvement to be pertinent issues to be reviewed for this study.

Overview of Academic Advising

Harvard President Charles W. Eliot is the historical godfather of all academic advising administrators. In 1870 he appointed the first administrator in charge of student discipline and development and initiated the elective system that created the need for advisement about course choices (Rudolph, 1962; Veysey, 1965). In 1876 Johns Hopkins University established a faculty advisor system, and by the 1930s most colleges and universities had developed organized approaches to academic advising (Bishop, 1987; Grites, 1979). And although the huge growth of enrollment after World War II spawned the plethora of student services common on campuses today, academic advising received little attention because it was seen as a faculty function (Tuttle, 2000). But as the research focus of faculty, the diversity of the student body, and concerns about

student retention increased, so did the need for professional advisors and comprehensive advising systems (Frost, 1991).

According to Boyer (1987), continued formalization of academic advising on most campuses was one response to two forces: student populations that were increasingly numerous and diverse, and faculties that were devoted to research. By the late 1970s, academic advising had begun to resemble an organized profession (Gordon & Habley, 2000).

Since Beal and Noel (1980) published their landmark report in which they found academic advising to be one of three major areas promoting student satisfaction and retention across 947 institutions of higher education, the importance of academic advising with universities has increased (Bedford & Durkee, 1989; Carstensen & Siverhorn, 1979; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Steele, Kennedy, & Gordon, 1993; Tinto, 1998; Trombley & Holmes, 1981). Academic advisors can be reminded of the critical impact they can have with all students; academic advising has been cited as the most critical supportive resource to assist in the retention, satisfaction, and positive integration of minority students (King, 1993). Advisors can foster a positive connection with their students by demonstrating themselves as knowledgeable student advocates (Smith, 2002).

In 1991, Pascarella and Terenzini summarized the findings of this inquiry in “How College Affects Students.” They explained their strongest conclusion about the academic experience: “The greater the student’s involvement in academic work or in the academic experiences of college, the greater his or her level of knowledge acquisition and general cognitive development” (Canonica, 2002, p. 30). In addition to educational intentions, the level of academic self-efficacy, self-regulation, and intrinsic motivation also play a role in student success and persistence (Carpenter, 2005). As evidence indicated, some instructional and

programmatic interventions not only increased the students' active engagement in learning and academic work, but also enhanced knowledge acquisition and some dimensions of both cognitive development and psychological change (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Under the leadership of John N. Gardner, community college institutions demonstrated their interest in the first year of college (Gordon & Habley, 2000). National interest in improving the experience of first-year students also developed during this time (Canonica, 2002).

According to Gordon and Habley (2000), many community colleges organized formal programs not only to orient and advise students, but also to strengthen the students' experiences during the entire first year.

New ideas about some theoretical foundations of advising and about the specific ways students benefit from college also emerged and offered promising routes to improved practice (Crookston, 1972). According to Frost (1991), advising remained largely unevaluated at that time; advisors knew little about the effects of services on students. However, because they also exist to serve the mission and purpose of the community college, perhaps they should be evaluated like other academic departments (Bednorz, 2005).

Willett (2001) reported that students who were contacted by and visited with a counselor were more likely to persist than other students. First-year students enter college with aspirations of being successful, but they simultaneously sense loss of family ties and friends while experiencing changes in their everyday lives. As a result of this complicated situation, they want to be totally independent while at the same time they want someone, often the academic advisor, to tell them exactly what to do (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Academic advisors are among the first staff members to interact with first-year students and can serve as important resources for them (Gordon & Habley, 2000). Research shows that students who make a connection to at least

one adult on campus experience higher levels of satisfaction and higher retention rates than students who do not (Astin, 1978; Tinto, 1987).

Higher education professionals who come in contact with students and understand the challenges they face are primary candidates for advisor roles. While faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals all serve as student advocates and play an integral part in student retention and attrition, advisors are typically in the best positions to assist students in making quality academic decisions (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). School counselors assist students with employing various strategies to be successful in academic endeavors (Rhodes, 2003; Sparks, 2003; Trusty & House, 2004). They are equipped to work with students who are interested in pursuing postsecondary options, have difficulty with learning, and are confronted with educational barriers that impede successful outcomes (Bergin & Bergin, 2004; Melton, 2004; West & Schwallie-Gaddis, 2004). Creating a hospitable environment as defined by students may help them succeed in the academic setting, improve their retention, and, ultimately, increase degree attainment (Kindie, 2005).

The accuracy and involvement of the athletic academic advisor are paramount to assure the access of community college student athletes to continuing progress at a four-year college or university. The involvement of the academic advisor is directly related to the successful transfer of the two-year college student athlete to a four-year school. I consider the following models of advising to be most effective in relation to community college student athletes.

Models of Advising

Three models of advising that have been most often advocated in the professional literature are the prescriptive, developmental, and integrated advising approaches. Prescriptive

advising, first described by Crookston (1972), is characterized by an authoritarian relationship in which the advisor makes a diagnosis of the student's needs, prescribes a specific treatment, and the student follows the prescriptive regimen. The student assumes no responsibility for the decision making, and relies totally on the advisor's recommendations. Specific prescriptions typically focus on course selection, degree requirements, and registration (Crookston, 1972).

While Crookston (1972) reported negative aspects of this model, particularly the lack of student involvement, other researchers have noted advantages to the model. For example, Fielstein (1989) found that over 50% of students rated six prescriptive activities as high priority: (a) explaining graduation requirements, (b) discussing course selection, (c) planning a course of study, (d) discussing education goals, (e) exploring career options, and (f) explaining registration procedures. Pardee (1994) noted that many students are conditioned to expect prescriptive advising, as they have not been exposed to other approaches. Minority students show a preference for prescriptive approaches, according to Brown and Rivas (1994). When an advisor is directive and informs students about the nuances of college life, many minority students may have a tendency to perceive the advisor as competent, listen more intently, and assume more responsibility for their own actions (Chando, 1997).

Developmental advising, first described by Crookston (1972), refers to a shared responsibility between the student and the advisor that promotes initiative and growth in the student. Instead of routinely answering questions relevant to a student's needs, the advisor directs the student to proper resources thus facilitating the development of greater dependence, decision making, and problem solving (Chando, 1997). Support for the positive aspects of and student preferences for developmental advising have frequently been reported in the literature (Ender, 1994; Gordon, 1994; Pardee, 1994; Winston & Sandor, 1984). Weaknesses have also

been noted. For example, Gordon (1994) listed shortcomings that included (a) time, (b) large caseloads, (c) lack of advisor training, (d) lack of consistency in advisor contacts, (e) autonomous advising units, (f) poor integration between student and academic services, (g) lack of training and working with a diverse student body, and (h) lack of effective evaluation strategies. Ender (1994) suggested that ineffective developmental advising tended to be associated with faculty advisors who experience increased out-of-class expectations, lack of institutional reward incentive for performing developmental advising, and a tendency of institutions to rely more heavily on part-time faculty.

Integrated advising is a combination of both the prescriptive and developmental models of advising. Despite the shortcomings of both prescriptive and developmental advising models, strengths have been noted in both approaches, suggesting that elements of the two be implemented in higher education settings (Fielstein, 1994). Numerous authorities have proposed a comprehensive approach to advising that emphasizes informational and counseling roles (e.g., Andrews, Andrews, Long, & Henton, 1987; Frost, 1993; Trombley, 1984).

A developmental model, such as Chickering's (1969) psychosocial model, offers valuable information about issues that might challenge student athletes during their athletic tenure and after they graduate. Chickering and Reisser (1993) proposed that college students must successfully master developmental tasks such as developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Certain advising activities described in the literature as "growth-oriented," such as exploring the student's values and how they relate to career choice as well as helping the student with interpersonal problems or with interpersonal skills (Winston & Sandor, 1984), are associated with the developmental approach. Chickering and Reisser (1993) used student development theory to

suggest that students are more likely to work independently early in their academic career and not recognize the importance of taking advantage of the resources offered by the college. In contrast, concrete task-oriented activities, such as discussing course selection, explaining degree requirements and registration procedures, and making referrals to other resources on campus, are associated with the prescriptive approach (Fielstein, 1989). Advisors limit prescriptive-advising activities to academic matters (Winston & Sandor, 1984).

Models of Academic Advising in Higher Education

Although academic advising of undergraduate students has traditionally been seen “as a faculty function” (Tuttle, 2000, p. 15), in recent years higher education institutions have made a more concerted effort to broaden the scope of advising services. At least seven different institutional models have been developed under which academic advising is commonly structured (Tuttle, 2000). These models are as follows:

- The faculty-only-model--Each student is assigned to a faculty member, usually in the student’s major program of study, for all academic advising.
- The satellite model--Sometimes referred to as the multiversity model, this structure has separate advising offices that are maintained and controlled by the different academic units.
- The self-contained model--All student advising takes place in a centralized office that frequently does not have any direct interaction with faculty. Usually the office is staffed by professional academic advisors and overseen by a dean or administrative director.

- Shared-supplementary model--Faculty members provide academic advising, but are assigned by professionals in a supplementary office. Often, this office provides coordination and training for faculty, as well as additional services such as transcript evaluation and graduation clearance for students.
- Shared-split model--This model is similar to the shared-supplementary, except that in the shared-split model students are grouped for advising according to some measure of their academic progress. For example, students might be asked to an advising center until they complete general education requirements--then they would be shifted to a faculty member in the student's discipline for further advising.
- Shared-dual model--In this model, students are assigned to two advisors. Commonly, one of those advisors is a faculty member and the other is a professional staff member. The faculty member can help students with curriculum and major sequence issues, while the professional staff member helps with registration issues and general academic progress.
- Total intake model--Colleges and universities that use the total intake model use an advising center to provide initial advising help to all students. At the point where students have completed their first year, earned a certain number of credits, or met some other pre-set criterion, students are released to faculty for advising.

Academic advising has been increasingly regarded as an important concern on college campuses, particularly as a partial solution to the problem of student retention (Canonica, 2002). Tinto has pointed out that few colleges have seriously addressed how to improve student learning and how to help more students succeed (Bednorz, 2005). He suggested that a process for helping more students to succeed must involve attending to the needs of the students as well as the

educational setting in which they are attempting to prosper (Bednorz, 2005). According to Beal and Noel (1980), academic support services available on a campus can represent critical elements in a retention strategy, and the academic advisement process has been viewed as the cornerstone of student retention. According to Wilder (1981), the quality of academic advising has been found to relate not only to student satisfaction, but to student retention as well. College students consistently report that they have difficulty progressing through the maze of options without the guidance of a competent, experienced, and caring academic advisor (Mastrodicasa, 2001).

Regardless of which institutional model is in use in a given institution, faculty members still play a critical role in the process (Kramer, 1995). The effort to make faculty recognize this fact and get connected with the process is referred to as faculty engagement with academic advising. Faculty engagement is operated through “a mentoring relationship” between faculty members and students (Yarbrough, 2002, p. 65). In this relationship, faculty is expected to provide “specific insight and expertise” that will help guide students through the academic experience (Yarbrough, 2002, p. 67).

Faculty engagement benefits the university in a number of ways. When faculty make the commitment to be actively involved in students’ academic planning, they contribute to quality education in all areas--and not just within their academic unit (Tinto, 1993). They become involved in the decision making that impacts students socially and educationally (Tinto, 1993). The result is “the promotion of a stronger educational community among students, faculty, and staff” (Mastrodicasa, 2001, p. 6).

There is no question that increasing the amount of contact between students and faculty can help students to be more motivated and involved with their academic work (Pascarella &

Terenzini, 1991). A higher level of contact between faculty and students results in “greater student persistence” toward their degree completion (Mastrodicasa, 2001, p. 6). Academic advisors are among the first staff members to interact with first-year students and can serve as important resources for them (Gordon & Habley, 2000). Research show that students who make a connection to at least one adult on campus experience higher levels of satisfaction and higher retention rates than students who do not (Astin, 1978; Tinto, 1987).

Overview of Counseling and Advising Student Athletes

The need for athletic academic support services or programs has been well established (Berg, 1989, 1992; Coleman & Barker, 1991; Cone & Rosenbaum, 1990; Gurney & Johnston, 1986) for student athletes who may need additional academic support (Stratten, 1990), and have the additional demands of intercollegiate athletic participation. Willoughby, Willoughby, and Moses (1991) stated that student athletes should be facilitated by programs that provide assistance for their personal developmental needs (Ferrante & Etzel, 1991) and academic success. Coakley (1990) reported that student athletes with less than adequate scholastic preparation from either high school or community colleges without extra academic assistance will fail without extensive assistance at four-year institutions.

Shriberg and Brodzinski (1984) add that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, athletic administrators and student affairs professionals began to view college student athletes as a special population with unique concerns and issues. An effective program for student athletes with learning disabilities should provide services that will address the following domains: academic, athletic performance, and emotional behavioral functioning (Dede & Lane, 1998). Higher education institutions have realized their obligation to provide a supportive environment as soon

as possible for student athletes to succeed. In recognition of the unique needs of student athletes, institutions have begun to enhance their support services programs (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Carodine et al. (2001) suggest monitoring of student athletes must include accurate academic advising and the athletic support staff should work in conjunction with the college major and faculty advisers to ensure that student athletes are enrolling in courses that will lead toward completion of their designated degrees.

Finch and Gould (1996) contended that the “collegiate athlete began participating in sports long before walking on campus and came to the university with a unique individual history of physical and psychological athletic experience” (p. 225). As early as the 1980s, school counselors were considered an integral part of the implementing appropriate services to student athletes (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Goldberg, 1991; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Harris, 1993; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; Lapchick, 1987; O’Bryant, 1993; Phelps, 1982).

Recruited student athletes enter the college environment with various athletic experiences that may have profound influences on their personal development (Goldberg, 1991). Goldberg (1991) believed that early identity formation as an athlete predicted negative consequences for student athletes who were attempting to master stage relevant tasks, develop personal competence, transition from high school to college, and prepare for career planning. Several student services professionals have stated that athletes need and can benefit by advisement that recognizes the pressures and experiences that make them different from other students (Grites 1982). Academic support programs usually report to the athletic department rather than to an academic unit, and hence tend to place more emphasis on keeping varsity athletes eligible for athletic competition than on track to academic success (Duderstadt, 2000).

Coleman and Barker (1991) identified additional challenges and problems that may arise from being a highly sought after student athlete. They listed problems such as underachievement in the classroom, fear of success and/or failure, inadequate decision-making skills, and conflict between personal values and athletic goals as barriers that can impede the development of student athletes. Chartrand and Lent (1987) urged counselors to gain a better understanding of student athlete's cognitive development as a means to optimize adjustment and transitional issues and to enhance overall development.

Goldberg (1991) pointed out the importance of school counselors acquiring knowledge regarding recruited student athletes by stating that

counselors need to understand the consequences of an athletic-based ego value system on the efforts of high school athletes to master the stage-relevant tasks of identity formation, developing personal competence, educational and career planning, and preparation for the transition from high school to college. (p. 333)

It was suggested that more understanding and knowledge about student athletes would yield fundamental differences in counseling services (Bailey, 1993; Carodine et al., 2001; Ferrante et al., 1996; Goldberg, 1991; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; O'Bryant, 1993).

According to these researchers, school counselors who are knowledgeable about the unique academic, personal, and vocational needs of student athletes may be better equipped to develop comprehensive programs and services for these students.

Finch and Gould (1996) contended that in order for student athletes to make a successful transition to the college level, counseling professionals, as well as other support services, are sorely needed during this critical time in a student athlete's life. Echoing these sentiments were Carodine et al. (2001), who indicated that it is imperative that services to incoming college athletes include approaches that incorporate mentoring, workshops or seminars about adjusting to college life, and programs involving the use of campus resources and other support services.

Because of their unique talents and challenges, it has been argued that recruited student athletes have a need for differential counseling (Bailey, 1993; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Kirk & Kirk, 1993).

The professional literature has called for giving more attention to the counseling needs of student athletes in general (Bailey, 1993; Finch & Gould, 1996; Goldberg, 1991; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; O'Bryant, 1993). Person, Benson-Quaziena, and Rogers (2001) reported that in addition to the pervasive challenges of the academic needs of African American college students, the problems become more acute among highly recruited minority student athletes. Person et al. suggested that because minority student athletes enter college inadequately prepared, they waste valuable time struggling to convince their professors that they are serious students.

School counselors are able to actively plan and assist student athletes with academic guidance in several ways. They can intensify academic advising by monitoring student athletes' progress, educating students and parents about NCAA eligibility requirements and guidelines, coordinating course schedules, and developing educational seminars relevant to student athletes (Fitch & Robinson, 1998; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; O'Bryant, 1993). Hinkle (1990) contended that counselors have invaluable skills with developmental problems and personal development but that "they may lack a knowledge base including information about a particular sport and the psycho emotional difficulties associated with it" (p. 53). Many student athletes will be confronted with having to transition out of sports because of deselection, graduation, or injury (Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 1996), perhaps making this one of the most critical periods in an athlete's life. For these reasons, school counselors should introduce student athletes to an

array of career options, knowledge, and experiences to assist with healthy transitioning (Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001).

A common challenge for many student athletes is the lack of balance between academics and athletics (Bailey, 1993; Carodine et al., 2001; Ferrante et al., 1996; Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; O'Bryant, 1993; Petitpas et al., 1996; Watt & Moore, 2001). Consequently, the assistance that student athletes receive, if applied in a manner that does not prepare the student athlete to be productive academically, may lead to the primary focus of maintaining eligibility or securing an athletic scholarship (Kirk & Kirk, 1993). Because of institutional and social pressures to succeed athletically, dedicating the time to be a successful student often becomes secondary to athletic endeavors (Pinkney, 1996; Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). Advising college student athletes at many institutions continues to focus only on maintaining academic eligibility and graduation rates rather than enhancing the academic, personal, and athletic development of the student athlete (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Kirk and Kirk (1993) maintained that educational systems inadvertently assist student athletes in pursuing eligibility and prestige over education.

Limited evidence suggests, for example, that high-quality advising has a positive but indirect impact on persistence through its positive effect on grades and satisfaction with college and its negative influence on intent to withdraw (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Many researchers (Petrie & Russell, 1995; Young & Sowa, 1992) suggest that student athletes face a unique set of challenges that they are not ready to meet without assistance. To better serve student athletes, student services must consider the constraints that inhibit effective results, such as time limitations and sport over commitment (Ferrante et al., 1996; Martens & Lee, 1998). These academic demands are compounded by intensified academic monitoring and meeting NJCAA and NCAA eligibility requirements and public exposure, while balancing practice schedules along

with the rigors of class work (Fitch & Robinson, 1998). Advising college student athletes at many institutions continues to focus only on maintaining academic eligibility and graduation rates rather than enhancing the academic, personal, and athletic development of the student athlete (Broughton & Neyer, 2001).

A model program from Broughton and Neyer (2001) would include trained personnel who can assess and treat student athletes' academic, athletic, and personal needs. Without this kind of support, student athletes will continue to have needs unmet, to the detriment of their growth and potential as students, athletes, and young adults. During the 1970s, advising and counseling for college student athletes focused on three main areas: class scheduling, academic tutoring, and time management (Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984). Figler and Figler (1984) indicated that, in addition to personal and career counseling, academic advisors and counselors for athletes provide eligibility monitoring, course selection, assessment of skills deficiencies, tutorial assistance, and study hall.

Perhaps the intervention with which most school counselors are comfortable providing services to recruited student athletes is course scheduling (Bailey, 1993). The school counselor is the primary individual who ensures that the recruited student athletes are enrolled in courses that will fulfill NCAA eligibility requirements (Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; O'Bryant, 1993; Sailes, 1993). For example, school counselors can stay abreast of NCAA eligibility requirements each academic year by perusing the NCAA Clearinghouse website (Cole, 2006). School counselors should understand the significance of academic advising and monitoring. Academic monitoring could entail ensuring that recruited student athletes are performing satisfactorily in their courses, making progress toward the completion of NCAA

eligibility requirements, and consulting with student athletes, parents, coaches, and teachers to identify areas of strengths and challenges in an effort to develop a plan of action (Cole, 2006).

School counselors advise students about postsecondary options such as furthering educational aspirations, obtaining immediate employment, and preparing for a vocational trade (Mau, Hitchcock, & Calvert, 1998). School counselors who advise recruited student athletes may be influential in assisting students with selecting colleges. They are knowledgeable about college admissions and course selection (Fallon, 1997). Advisors can encourage recruited student athletes to take rigorous and challenging courses. Too often, recruited student athletes find themselves in a position of trying to maintain academic eligibility in order to compete athletically or falling short of qualifying for a Division I four-year school. Academic advisors may be doing student athletes a disservice by enrolling them in courses that are not academically challenging or do not meet NCAA requirements if the student athlete is intent on transferring to a Division I four-year institution (Cole, 2006).

Other strategies that academic advisors may be able use for addressing the academic needs of recruited student athletes include providing intense academic advising, monitoring grades, and discussing the opportunities of transferring to a four-year school. The goal must be to design and implement a program that reduces the dysfunctional impact of athletics on the education of student athletes and that is perceived as having integrity because the athletic community is fulfilling its responsibilities (Bailey & Littleton, 1991). Student athletes are challenged to maintain a balance between athletics and academics. It has been suggested by educators that interventions such as time-management skill building, intense academic planning and monitoring, and academic assistance be employed (Bailey, 1993; Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Kirk & Kirk, 1993). An essential school counseling intervention involves the sharing of ideas

and information, encouragement of ongoing student support, and monitoring of student progress (ASCA, 2006; Myrick, 1997).

The academic advisor for student athletes should recognize the importance of remaining current with the NCAA initial eligibility requirements. The student athlete must feel confident that the academic advisor is knowledgeable of NCAA transfer guidelines. This confidence will bolster the student athlete's academic motivation and persistence toward graduation. Ensuring that recruited student athletes meet eligibility requirements is an important responsibility of the academic advisor counselor. Academic advisors for athletes must be aware of any academic changes mandated by the NCAA in reference to transfer rules.

The academic advisors also may assist recruited student athletes by monitoring course selections and ensuring junior college course work fulfills the NCAA eligibility requirements. The academic advisor should ensure the student athlete that the courses they take will indeed transfer to a four-year school. If the student athlete enrolls in courses that will not transfer, the student athlete may fall short of NCAA transfer guidelines. Division I college recruiters continuously peruse student athlete transcripts to determine a student athlete's ability to transfer academically. If the course work is not aligned for the junior college athlete to successfully transfer then the recruiting process will cease. Intense involvement on the part of academic advisors for athletes will manifest into higher transfer rates among student athletes if the academic advisors are educated on the transfer guidelines for four-year schools.

To date, little empirical evidence has specifically discussed the degree of academic advisors' knowledge about recruited student athletes transferring successfully to NCAA Division I institutions. However, many scholars have urged academic advisors for student athletes to be more knowledgeable in these areas. Miller and Wooten (1995) contended that counselors already

possessed the skills necessary to work with recruited student athletes, and the “development of specific training standards will enhance the preparation of counselors and the delivery of services to student athletes at various institutions” (p. 172).

The level of the academic advisors knowledge to NCAA transfer rules is imperative to the success of the community college student athlete. The understanding of how eligibility both at the two-year school level and the four-year school level can have an impact on the academic choices of recruited student athletes. Broughton and Neyer (2001) emphasized the significance of supporting collegiate student athletes academically, personally, and athletically. Although no empirical evidence was found, it was suggested that additional training could result in more school counselor knowledge concerning the needs of recruited student athletes and more counselor knowledge would result in better services provided to these individuals (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; Miller & Wooten, 1995).

Underprepared Students and Advising

Community colleges are serving greater numbers of students who need additional academic support and academic advising than ever before (Jarrell, 2004). Universal access to most community colleges greatly increased their number of total students. Students in need of extra assistance in academic advising represent a large proportion of today’s community college student populations. They also span a spectrum of differences not only in academic preparedness but also in socioeconomic challenges and an ethnic and age variability that is far wider than traditional college-age student populations (Grimes & David, 1999). Identifying the student level of preparedness, academic ability, and degree of risk is complicated by the heterogeneity of this population.

While some students may need minimal assistance in adjusting to college, the student athletes may need additional help from mentors to ease any apprehension of persisting. The nonqualified student athletes may also lack student academic motivation and self-regulatory behavior (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002), emotive characteristics (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994), and receptivity to the services provided by the institution (Astin, 1984). Although academic preparation (i.e., course taking and high school academic achievement) appears to be the strongest predictor of academic success in college (Ingels, Curtin, Owings, Kaufman, Alt, & Chen, 2002), there are several nonacademic factors associated with academic success at college.

Assessment of student ability to learn and college faculty and staff to predict academic achievement in order to better serve student learning needs is an important part of teaching and student services in community colleges. Kroll (1990) described an advising model consisting of five key service components that were perceived favorably by both students and advisors: (a) preservice and inservice advisor training, (b) intrusive student advising, (c) dissemination of profile data on new students to advisors, (d) streamlined registration and group advising, and (e) development of advising support materials.

The importance of assessing student ability has been, in part, the result of greater research in this area but also it is due to the increasing accountability requirements levied on colleges and universities to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency (Entwistle & McCune, 2004; Jakubowski & Dembo, 2002).

Efforts to address the need to assess effectively the needs of at-risk students includes work done by DeBerard et al. (2004) using Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, among other psychosocial variables such as smoking, drinking, coping, social support, and others, to predict achievement and retention in first-year college students. Others have used various instruments

such as interest surveys, skills assessments, and self-report mechanisms (Abaili, 1997; Jarrell, 2004; Ruban, McCoach, McGuire, & Reis, 2003). Abaili (1997) found that personal motivation and cognitive factors played a significant role in student success. Jarrell (2004) reported that assertive college-wide programs in support of enhancing students' personal college "survival skills" resulted in greater student engagement and satisfaction. Ruban et al. (2003) reported that differences in motivation and self-regulation between students with learning disabilities and those without was significant in explaining differences in academic achievement.

In addition to lack of academic preparedness, the nonqualified student athletes may also often lack the intra-personal skills needed to be academically successful. These skills have been variously described in the literature as related to the personal abilities to self-regulate, to be felt as effective within oneself, to be able to learn strategically, to be able to critically analyze one's own beliefs and inner motivations, to think critically, or to be able to effectively manage the social environment of the college community of learners (Entwistle & McCune, 2004; Ruban et al., 2003).

According to Jarrell (2004), services developed and provided for students deemed to be at risk range from in-class efforts, to freshman experience courses, to tracking of students throughout their academic career at college, as well as improved and more comprehensive counseling services. Many students do not understand the role of an academic advisor (Fielstein, 1987). In a study by Smith (2002), students expected advisors to identify professors and classes that were easy. Many universities have developed academic support programs that are designed to improve the academic performance of those students in need (Robyak & Patton, 1977).

Since over half of all national two-year colleges rate the academic preparation of their students as fair or poor, the issue of student preparedness and what to do about it is generally

agreed to be a problem in need of attention (Grimes & David, 1999). Identifying the level and type of this risk inherent in these students would allow student services personnel to focus and to more effectively provide services and interventions to help develop the personal and academic skills required for success in the college environment (DeBerard et al., 2004; Entwistle & McCune, 2004). This is not a new problem, and measures have been taken since at least the late 1940s to deal with large groups of students who needed both the access to a college education and the assessment required to effectively meet the students' needs and also the needs of the higher educational institution to provide a quality education (Cole, 1947).

Student self-interest in early and effective recognition of both learning skills and limitations can mean the difference between success and failure in making the transition from high school, workplace, or home, to the role of a successful college student (Deen, 2005). The ability to assess and to predict the self-regulatory and learning strategy levels and needs of underprepared students in today's community college population was a recognized need to both teach and serve these students successfully (Weinstein, Husman, & Dierking, 2000). In a study of the underprepared community college student using logistic regression analysis, Zhao (1999) reaffirmed that college credits earned, good academic standing, cumulative grade point average, course load including the number of developmental courses, and race/ethnicity have varying degrees of impact on student achievement. His model offers an attempt to address the complexity associated with underprepared students and once again points to the difficulty of a quick fix for open enrollment community colleges in identifying ways of dealing with underprepared students.

Six basic communication skills are necessary for establishing rapport in the underprepared student advising relationship. These include (a) establishing and maintaining eye contact (Peterson & Nisenholz, 1999), (b) allowing students the opportunity to fully explain their

ideas or problems (Egan, 1994), (c) being sensitive to body language (Carkhuff, 1987; Peterson & Nisenholz, 1999), (d) focusing on the content and tone of the student's words (Peterson & Nisenholz, 1999), (e) acknowledging what the student is saying through verbal and nonverbal feedback (Peterson & Nisenholz, 1999), and (f) reflecting on or paraphrasing what the student said (Nutt, 2000).

Advisors working with underprepared students must be adept at using questioning skills (Nutt, 2000). The key effective questioning is to focus on student concerns versus issues/topics deemed important by the advisor. Generally, advisors rely on two types of questions during the advising process: (a) open-ended (those allowing students to select subject matter of interest to them, thus providing their own structure to the session; Ivy, 1971); and closed-ended (short answer, thus facilitating the gathering of factual information; Nutt, 2000).

Successful underprepared student advising relationships typically are not established unless the advisor moves beyond simply asking a student questions to making referrals based on the information gained through the questioning process (Heisserer & Perotte, 2002). Nutt (2000) believed making referrals should be a genuine desire to assist the underprepared student. Advisors should openly and clearly communicate why the student should seek outside assistance (i.e., from another source; Heisserer & Perotte, 2002).

Another approach that has gained increased attention in the literature is intrusive advising with underprepared students. Generally, intrusive advising approaches include a range of intervention strategies that connote interest in and involve the advisor in the affairs of the student (Glennen, 1995), and which culminate in increased motivation on the part of the student (Earl, 1988). Intrusive advising is defined as intensive advising intervention with an underprepared student that is designed to (a) facilitate informed, responsible decision making; (b) increase

student motivation toward activities in his/her social and academic community; and (c) ensure the probability of the student's academic success (Earl, 1988). Intrusive advising has many advantages such as the positive effect it has on retention rates and increased number of credit hours completed (Bray, 1985; Brophy, 1984; Nichols, 1986); increased grade point average demonstrated by students (Schultz, 1989; Spears, 1990); and use of study skills, time management strategies, and classroom attendance (Spears, 1990).

Recent studies have also supported the use of intrusive advising strategies with special populations of students, including those exhibiting classroom behavioral problems (Chandler, 1999), transfer students on academic probation (Cooper & Franke, 1992), minority students (Walton, 1979), and disadvantaged students (Wagner & McKenzie, 1980). Intrusive advising has also produced positive results in graduation rates and time to graduation among targeted groups of students (Glennen & Vowell, 1996).

Reiff (1997) described a range of approaches that have been used with adults having learning disabilities, and suggested that such integrated approaches (strategic goal planning; interactive learning; promotion of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-reliance) are useful with underprepared students in college settings. The literature clearly suggests that the single most important factor in advising students who are underprepared is helping them to feel that they are cared for by the institution (Bray, 1985; Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995; Tinto, 1993).

Advisors must also give accurate and correct academic guidance during their contacts with students, as this has been expressed as a high priority need by underprepared students (Creamer & Scott, 2000). Zhao (1999) shows that the degree of student persistence in enrollment

can be a predictor of future academic success and that engagement and support of students can affect both their persistence and college achievement.

Underprepared Student Athletes

The reality for individuals who work with student athletes from an academic or student services perspective is that they are confronted daily with people who are underprepared, unlikely to graduate, priority skewed, and manipulated by the demands of their sport (Whitner & Myers, 1986). Freshmen student athletes must master developmental tasks associated with young adulthood (Chickering, 1981). It is during this time that young adults are challenged to make life decisions, cultivate and maintain relationships with peers and authority figures, and identify and select college majors (Goldberg, 1991; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; O'Bryant, 1993).

The problem of ensuring the academic success of student athletes intensifies when academically underprepared freshmen athletes are declared eligible to compete in intercollegiate athletic events immediately upon admission to the university (Swann, 1989). The assumption that the first year of college is the most valuable time to assess and address student risk of academic nonsuccess is supported by the literature, as well as in the common descriptions of the needs of current first-year, community college students compared to past years (Beck & Davidson, 2001; DeBerard et al., 2004).

Freshmen student athletes, inexperienced with the college environment and faced with the potential disruption of their existing support systems (e.g., moving away from family and established friendships), may be particularly vulnerable to the stressors associated with becoming a young adult, with beginning school, and with competing as a college athlete (Petrie & Stoeber, 1997).

Student athletes are at risk for personal and academic distress (Pinkerton et al., 1989) and athletic departments are taking steps to develop programs aimed at helping freshmen adjust to college and succeed academically and personally (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993). Research on college student athletes (Petrie, 1993; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992) and non-athletes (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987) supports the relationship between strong support systems and academic success, particularly in the initial semesters.

Any individual counseling or mentoring should be focused on assisting student athletes work through possible barriers to establish broader support networks on campus, such as other students' biases toward athletes, role conflict or overload, an over reliance on coaches and teammates, or the belief that student athletes should be able to handle things without the help of others (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Ferrante et al., 1996). In a study by Good et al. (1993), intercollegiate student athletes may commit to the role of "athlete" without exploring alternative identities (career development issues, mentoring).

Structured or assertive counseling programs have also been shown to be of value for underprepared student populations. According to Jarrell (2004), college services developed and provided for students deemed to be at risk included in-class interventions and programs, freshman experience courses, tracking of students throughout their academic career at college, and improved and more comprehensive counseling services.

College student engagement, often assertive, is seen as a key ingredient needed for successful efforts in this arena (Cukras, 2006; Heisserer & Parette, 2002) and is often what the students say themselves (Deen, 2005). As noted by previous research, student personal engagement and the need for structured and predictable academic settings has been shown to be a factor connected with college student success (Beck & Davidson, 2001).

Underprepared Students and Mentoring

Academic at-risk college students, those who are socially, financially, or academically underprepared or under supported, are particularly in need of mentoring in college (Vivian, 2005). An effective mentoring program for student athletes with learning disabilities should provide services that will address the following domains: academic, athletic performance, and emotional behavioral functioning (Dede & Lane, 1998). The mentoring approach to supporting the academic development of students is clearly allied to the “remedial” approach of learning support or academic advising (Quinn, Muldoon, & Hollingsworth, 2002). Broadbridge (1996) reported that students needed extra time with an advisor/mentor at the beginning of their academic careers because they were nervous and not aware of the scope of changes associated with college attendance.

One important purpose of undergraduate mentoring has long been to assist undergraduate students who are considered “at risk” (Kerka, 1995). Thus, many of the mentoring programs in undergraduate institutions have targeted groups they designate “at risk,” such as African Americans, Latinos, and women. The one-on-one relationship between a mentor and a mentee is seen as a way of increasing retention of these student groups as well as of those students who find traditional educational environments alienating or hostile (Johnson, 1996; Ugbah & Williams, 1989). Students may need help in negotiating the complexities of working with multiple mentors, including managing potentially conflicting advice or time management (Baugh & Scandura, 1999).

Retention and graduation rates and other indicators of quality are closely monitored, and institutions are dealing with problems of inadequately prepared students, increasing attrition rates, decreased government funding, and consequent pressure to attract and maintain students

(Mackechnie & Mackechnie, 1999; Najar, 1999). Mentoring relationships with underprepared students are less likely to occur than with high-performing students who are more likely to seek out professors for advice (Vivian, 2005). First-generation college students face uncharted academic and social territory--a circumstance that can lead to unfulfilled expectations, self-doubt, frustration, and departure (Hicks, 2002). College counselors and advisors need all the help they can get to effectively guide students to academic success. Some have enlisted the aid of underprepared students themselves (Deen, 2005).

Minority students may have difficulty understanding and adapting to the college culture, which can lead to a lack of academic success even for those students who are academically prepared and capable (Freeman, 1999). Hattie, Biggs, and Purdie (1996) contended that assisting underprepared first-year students to maximize their academic potential, recognizing that academic and personal issues frequently coexist, and cognitive, metacognitive, and effective components of learning (Hattie, Biggs, & Purdie, 1996) needed to be addressed. Wilson (1997) pointed out that minority students are likely to be affected adversely by negative mentoring, which can occur when a mentor has low expectations of protégé. In this situation, mentoring actually depresses the student's aspirations and performance (Vivian, 2005).

The fact that community colleges have multiple missions and their students have diverse goals was underscored by the results of the *Community College Survey of Student Engagement* (2006). Also emphasized was the importance of the faculty member-student relationship in community colleges. This relationship was determined to be even more important to the community college student as compared to the traditional university or four-year college student because the vast majority of community college students commuted. Therefore, the primary, and

sometimes only, contact the community college student had with the college faculty and staff occurred within the classroom.

First-year Students

The first year of college is known to be the most stressful year and a time in which the greatest number of college students withdraw or drop out of school (Misra, McKean, West, & Russo, 2000). Academic stress may be especially salient for first-year college students who face new and higher expectations for academic work (Sand, Robinson-Kurpius, & Dixon-Rayle, 2005). Furthermore, traditional freshmen may lack strong social support networks at school and may not have developed the coping mechanisms to deal with stress; thus, they have fewer resources for managing stress and the anxiety of demanding school work and tasks (Misra et al., 2000). However, it is well known that social support systems at college may help first-year college students manage their academic stress (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001).

The transition from high school to college is often troublesome for traditional students who encounter many challenges and opportunities for growth, and who experience the loss of the familiar and a fear of the unknown (Paul & Kelleher, 1995). The challenges first-year college students may face include a variety of life adjustments such as being away from loved ones, depression, isolation, searching for independence, building a new social support network, making life-altering decisions, and academic stress (Feldman, 2005; Sand et al., 2005). Many students are able to rise to the challenges they face; however, one-fourth of all students, regardless of gender, do not return to school after the first year of college (Arizona State University, 2005), with the majority of non-persisters leaving at the end of their first semester (Sand et al., 2005).

Some scholars and practitioners argue that community colleges cannot do much about high rates of attrition because of the primary causes identified in student integration or involvement models (such as students' lack of academic preparation, lack of campus engagement, and work and family responsibilities) are largely beyond the control of the institution (Schuetz, 2005). Yet rates of degree, credential, and course completion are found to vary significantly even among colleges with similar student demographics and curricula, suggesting that some institutional best practices exert influence on students' experiences and behaviors and improve local success rates (Bailey, Jacobs, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2003).

Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2003) suggested that colleges could improve retention by fitting themselves more to the students--by identifying and eliminating bureaucratic barriers, resolving confusion over college and program requirements, and reorganizing services to help students develop the organizational know-how required to navigate the college experience, especially during the first semester and year of attendance (Schuetz, 2005).

According to Levine and Cureton (1998), first-year students enter college with aspirations of being successful, but they simultaneously sense loss of family ties and experience a dramatic alteration of their everyday lives. As a result of this complicated situation, they want to be totally independent while at the same time they want someone, often the academic advisor, to tell them exactly what to do (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). College personnel are well aware that despite counseling retention interventions across United States colleges, only about one-half of all students just out of high school who enter four-year colleges complete their degrees (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Sharkin, 2004). When compared to older students, first-year college students experience higher stress due to numerous changes, conflicts, and frustrations (Misra et al., 2000).

Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum (2003) found that community colleges require “social know-how” to navigate the bureaucratic structures of the college environment and that this know-how is less available to marginalized students. They identify seven environmental obstacles to student success: bureaucratic hurdles, confusing choices, student-initiated (rather than college-initiated) guidance, limited counseling availability, poor advice from staff, delayed detection of mistakes, and poor handling of conflicting demands. The *Community College Survey of Student Engagement’s* (CCSSE) analyses (Marti, 2007) document the reality that community colleges lose large numbers of students during their first term and first year of college. CCSSE’s premise is that colleges can address this issue by focusing institutional attention and resources on the task of engaging students effectively from their first moments on campus through their first few weeks and months as college students (*Community College Survey of Student Engagement*, 2004).

Grade point averages achieved during the first year of college, including analyses of first-semester-only grade point averages, have been identified as having a stronger association with retention and persistence than many variables researched (Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999). Many feel rejection and cultural isolation, confusion about academic goals and how to attain them, and frustration with the bureaucracy of academic requirements or the environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1980; Tinto, 1987). Selecting one’s major program of study is a challenge that many students face (Peterson, 1993). While the majority of students have selected their majors prior to enrollment in college, including whether they will pursue a 2- or four-year degree, many do so with limited information or in light of previous academic difficulties (Kramer, Higly, & Olsen, 1994).

Freshmen student athletes are young adults who face challenges related to identity formation, educational preparation, personal and social competence, and college transitioning (Goldberg & Chandler, 1995; Harris, Altekruise, & Engels, 2003; Harrison, 1981). Broadbridge (1996) reported that students needed extra time with an advisor at the beginning of their academic careers because they were nervous and not aware of the scope of changes associated with college attendance. Crookston (1972) described the role of advisor as teacher and encouraged advisors to foster growth in the whole student. In general, a review of literature reveals that students with higher career aspirations are more likely to persist than those with lower degree aspirations (Feldman, 1993; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Sydow & Sandel, 1998).

Orientation, First-year Programs, and Involvement

One method through which many colleges address the needs of the freshmen students is the development of freshmen orientation programs or courses (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994). Orientation courses are important for community colleges for assisting in the reduction of retention barriers. Since Astin (1971, 1975, 1978) began advocating developmental programs that assist minority students' retention and matriculation through the conscious reduction and awareness of retention barriers, 30 years have passed. This sentiment is echoed by Parker (1997, 1999) and Ross (1991) as they encourage community colleges to play an integral role in individual problem solving and reduction of retention barriers.

Research indicates that programs designed to target first-year students increase their likelihood of success during that year and their chances of completing an undergraduate education (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994). Institutions have assumed a major role in assisting students in making a "fit" with the institution. Since Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe (1986)

provided evidence that merely attending a college orientation program was associated with higher retention rates, colleges have put forth tremendous effort and funds into orientation programs. Theoretically, such programs should help, in part, because they foster integration into campus communities and help align personal goals with institutional goals (Noble, Flynn, Lee, & Hilton, 2007).

When students feel involved in their learning process, they are more apt to form groups that are related to that learning, and also extend this involvement to groups that are unrelated to the specific classroom exercises (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). The end result is increased academic integration and a greater likelihood of remaining at an institution (Braxton et al., 2000). Such programs have been shown to have a positive effect on the academic success, retention rate, and/or graduation rate of freshmen college students (Ting, Grant, & Plenart, 2000; Williford, Chapman, & Kahrig, 2000). However, some research showed that the programs may have little or no significant effect on academic performance, retention rate, and graduation rate (Hendel, 2001), and still others yielded mixed results (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994; Micceri & Wajeih, 1999).

The initial introduction to the college environment plays a major role in determining whether students become involved, committed, and persist. Students experience campuses in different ways that may affect how they invest their time and effort in utilizing institutional resources and agents. Orientation is one way to assess individual students' needs and address problems as they arise. For example, at many four-year institutions, a first-year seminar course might assist students with initial adjustment and transitional issues on campus (Derby & Watson, 2006).

Despite the paucity of literature concerning orientation course participation and outcomes, initial studies indicate grade improvement and persistence (Carnevale, 2002; Waschull, 2001), information about institutional processes, procedures, and services, decision-making strategies, career development, and academic coping strategies (Bourdeau & Kromrey, 1994). Orientation courses should be structured to increase students' awareness of the college, and its offices and departments, processes and systems, to set personal and professional goals, create academic plans, as well as interact with faculty and administrators, which all embody Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1984).

Regarding student involvement, Schmid and Abell (2003) noted significant differences in involvement, depending upon the type of institution of higher education the student first attended. Students enrolled in community colleges were less likely to participate in study groups, speak to faculty outside of class, and participate in clubs or organizations as compared to students in four-year colleges and universities (Schmid & Abell, 2003).

On campus, groups, clubs, and other activities should be made available for all types of students, regardless of interests (Foley, Nicpon, Huser, Blanks, Sollenger, Befort, & Robinson-Kurpius, 2006). Getting involved in campus activities of any type also fosters a sense of belonging and commitment, which Tinto (1993) has established as an important predictor of persistence. College programs can aid students in developing a social support network in their new environment, thus decreasing the probability that students will revert to old settings that were more comfortable and secure, such as their hometown (Foley et al., 2006).

The process for the underprepared student athlete of taking remedial courses and graduating from a community college combined with meeting the demands of the new NCAA transfer guidelines needs to actively involve the academic advisor. The active involvement of the

academic advisor will promote graduation from the two-year school and transferability to a four-year institution.

The Role of Academic Advisors

A number of authorities have indicated that regular faculty-student contact is the most important factor in student involvement and motivation and can provide students with the needed support to get through the tough times and keep working toward academic success (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennen & Vowell, 1996). Of particular importance is the one-to-one relationship that is typically present between the student and advisor that provides an opportunity for the student to build a personal link with the institution (Nutt, 2000). Often the academic advisor is the only link the student has with the institution, having a profound effect on the student's academic career and the student's level of satisfaction with his/her college choice (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennen & Vowell, 1996; Nutt, 2000).

In addition to being knowledgeable about academic programs and curricula requirements within the institution, the advisor's ability to give accurate and correct academic guidance is often the most commonly stated expectation of students receiving advising services (Creamer & Scott, 2000). In addition to the advising competencies, three specific skills appear to be associated with effective one-on-one advising. These include communication, questioning, and referral skills (Nutt, 2000). Unfortunately, most advisors focus primarily on the academic information they need to deliver to the student, act as the expert in the relationship, and ignore or overlook other important student needs (Frost, 1991).

Of course, the primary function of the faculty is to facilitate learning, but because the student experience on campus is so transitory, the faculty role becomes even more crucial at a

commuter college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). According to King (1993), academic advisement and the role the faculty plays in the delivery is the most critical service available for community college students. Studies of transfer students (Volkwein, King, & Terenzini, 1986) and freshman students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977) confirmed the importance of student-faculty contact as an influential factor in student achievement, persistence, academic skill development, and personal development.

When examining issues in higher education, it is important not to overlook the contribution of the community college. The literature on retention (Tinto, 1987) and academic advising (King, 1993) indicates a strong connection between faculty activities and student persistence at the four-year level, but the research is less developed at the two-year level. Higher education institutions have realized their obligation to provide a supportive environment as soon as possible for underprepared student athletes to succeed. In recognition of the unique needs of student athletes, institutions have begun to enhance their support services programs (Carodine et al., 2001). Carodine et al. (2001) suggest that monitoring of student athletes must include accurate academic advising and the athletic support staff should work in conjunction with the college major and faculty advisers to ensure that student athletes are enrolling in courses that will lead to completion of their designated degrees.

Identifying the underprepared student athlete would allow student services personnel to focus and to more effectively provide services and interventions to help develop personal and academic skills required for success in the college environment (DeBerard et al., 2004; Entwistle & McCune, 2004).

The academic advisor for student athletes should recognize the importance of remaining current with the NCAA initial eligibility requirements. The student athlete must feel confident

that the academic advisor is knowledgeable of NCAA transfer guidelines. This confidence will bolster the student athlete's academic motivation and persistence toward graduation. Ensuring that recruited student athletes meet eligibility requirements is an important responsibility of the academic advisor counselor. Academic advisors for athletes must be aware of any academic changes mandated by the NCAA in reference to transfer rules. Although no empirical evidence was found, it was suggested that additional training could result in more school counselor knowledge concerning the needs of recruited student athletes and that more counselor knowledge would result in better services provided to these individuals (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; Miller & Wooten, 1995).

Transferability

Underprepared student athletes attending and competing in athletics at a two-year community college often aspire to compete their last 2 years at a Division I college or university. The National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) 40/60/80% rule or progress toward degree greatly impacts the underprepared community college student athlete and transferability. With the passage of the 40/60/80% rule, the requirements to become eligible from the community college become more stringent. The typical community college student athlete needs to take remedial classes, does not utilize academic support services to the utmost, and usually is not clear on what it takes to transfer to a Division I institution (Wong, 2006). Additionally, when the student athlete is bewildered by not being recruited by Division I schools they usually question themselves about their athletic ability to go to the next level. Rarely, until it is too late in the recruiting process, do the student athletes realize that the problem of not being recruited by Division I schools is academically related.

The implications of the NCAA 40/60/80% rule, or progress toward degree, and its impact on community college student athletes can affect their ability to transfer to an NCAA Division I institution. Some issues for the community college athletes, academic advisors, and administration to consider are (a) attempting to transfer to a Division I institution without proper academic advising, (b) unfamiliarity of NCAA rules on transferring, and (c) use of a comprehensive academic advising program for student athletes.

The goal of this study was to examine the academic advising experiences of the underprepared community college student athlete who intended to transfer to an NCAA Division I institution and compete athletically. In a survey by Wong (2006), 82% of the surveyed community college athletes indicated wanting to transfer and compete athletically at a higher level, but 91% were not familiar with the NCAA 40/60/80% progress toward degree requirements. The lack of knowledge for the student athlete could be detrimental to their ability to transfer.

The new NCAA 40/60/80% progress toward degree legislation requires that a student athlete must have completed 40% of degree requirements before entering the third year of full-time enrollment in order to compete athletically at the Division I level. The community college underprepared student athlete who did not academically qualify out of high school to compete at the Division I level must graduate from the two-year school in order to further their athletic career at a Division I institution. Division I athletic coaches will identify athletes to recruit-- usually and initially in high school. However, many Division I programs recruit two-year college athletes who have "blossomed" into Division I caliber athletes while attending community college. These student athletes are sometimes overlooked by Division I schools because of poor academic performance from high school. While these underprepared athletes have perhaps

“blossomed” at the two-year level, they also must concede to the NCAA transfer rules if they want to transfer to Division I schools. The Division I coaches begin academic evaluation of the recruitment of community college athletes either in the freshman year or sophomore year to gauge whether or not the student athlete predicts to graduate. Therefore, the knowledge of the new NCAA progress toward degree requirements is paramount in securing a Division I athletic scholarship. This knowledge is pertinent for not only the underprepared student athlete but the coaches, academic advisors, and administrators, as well.

Problems with Transferability

Academic reform has included changes in initial and continuing eligibility for NCAA Division I institutions. The progress toward degree rule for Division I student athletes was changed in 2003 from the 25/50/75% format to 40/60/80% format. Now a student athlete must have completed 40% of his or her degree requirements upon entering the third year of full-time enrollment at a Division I institution. Upon entering the fourth year of full-time enrollment, the student athlete must complete 80% of degree requirements to be eligible for athletic competition. One problem the underprepared community student athlete must contend with has to do with taking remedial courses at the two-year level. These courses must be taken and passed prior to attempting a more rigorous academic schedule. For the underprepared community college student athlete, having to take remedial courses could deter the progress toward the degree timeline as stipulated by the NCAA. These remedial courses could stretch the two-year college education into a 3-year college education and thus eliminate chances of being recruited and signed to play at an NCAA Division I school. If the two-year student athlete has to stay at the two-year school an extra year, usually the Division I coaches shy away from that student athlete

in order to recruit one who is academically and athletically ready after 2 years at the community college level. The 40/60/80% rule is intended to increase graduation rates of student athletes but the lack of knowledge associated with this rule has influenced the plight of the underprepared two-year college student athlete and his or her transferability to a Division I institution.

Currently, the NCAA mandates academic support services for student athletes while there are no such requirements for two-year schools.

Student athletes taking a heavy load of remedial courses are at a disadvantage because they may be ill prepared for collegiate classes, their remedial classes do not count toward a degree or eligibility to transfer, and Division I schools may be less accessible as a result of all these factors. If the underprepared student athletes are not properly and aggressively advised by the athletic academic advisor then issues of access arise. All underprepared student athletes need to be correctly academically advised to be eligible for NCAA Division I institutions. If identified early during the freshman year, the academically underprepared student athletes can prepare for any additional summer coursework that will keep them on track to be Division I eligible. Even if the underprepared student athlete falls short of the ultimate goal of being Division I eligible they could still be eligible for a lower division of NCAA athletic competition by making progress through the community college. The inability to transfer units required from student athletes who may be ill-prepared for collegiate courses may cause the students to take a heavier remedial course load. Since remedial classes do not count toward a degree or eligibility to transfer, students at a community college will have a more difficult time meeting the NCAA 40/60/80% rule.

It appears that by taking a course before enrolling in a community college, student athletes fare better academically (Hollis, 2001). One way to improve the opportunities for the

community college athlete is a summer program. Data indicate that summer school before the beginning of the freshman year of college is statistically significant and has a positive impact on student athlete graduation rates (Hollis, 2001). The summer transition for student athletes just prior to attending college is significant for setting the tone and expectations for their upcoming career in college.

Underprepared community college student athletes, coaches, academic advisors, and administrators need to be knowledgeable of the NCAA transfer rules in order to have a positive impact on the student athletes. If a student athlete wishes to attend an NCAA Division I institution, all of the aforementioned groups should be become involved for the betterment of those in need. This study will examine the experiences of underprepared first-year community college student athletes and their transferability to NCAA Division I athletic programs.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the advising experiences and aspects of advising on underprepared first-year community college student athletes and how advising cultivated their transferability to four-year schools. The study used interviews from underprepared student athletes, academic advisors, coaches, and administrators to examine the emphasis placed on advising the underprepared student athlete. The level of involvement by the student athletes, academic advisors, coaches, and administrators was also examined. Additionally, documents related to the student athletes and their transferability were examined. Student involvement with the campus environment, interaction with faculty and peers, engagement in enriching educational experiences, and use of student support services, positively impact student learning and development (Astin, 1991, 1993; Feldman, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Kuh, 1995, 2001, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994).

The particular community college selected for this study was Southern State Community College in a rural community of Alabama. The emphasis on athletics throughout the history of Southern State made this institution interesting to assess the literature and explore the research findings. The coaches at Southern State had successfully fostered relationships with NCAA Division I coaches to enroll student athletes who do not academically qualify for the Division I level. Southern State competes athletically in the Alabama Community College Conference

(ACCC) as the region XXII representative of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) and has captured 15 All-Sports conference championships in its history.

Southern State Athletics

The Southern State Community College athletic teams compete in Division I of the Alabama Community College Conference (ACCC) and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). With four Olympic medalists, five national championships, and 15 ACCC All-Sports trophies, athletics at Southern have become nationally recognized.

The college came to be called “the crown jewel of community colleges in Alabama.” The size of the physical campus increased from 4 buildings on 4 acres to 41 buildings on 217 acres. The passion for athletics situated Southern State as the dominant force in the Alabama Community College Conference, a position it still holds today.

Teams compete in men’s golf, men and women’s basketball, men and women’s cross-country/track and field, baseball, softball, men’s soccer, volleyball, and cheerleading. All of the sports also have availability of offering athletic scholarships, which consist of books, tuition, and fees. Many of the programs consistently finish in the final top 10 national rankings in their respective sports.

The men’s track and field team attained a national championship in 1997, 5 second place finishes, and numerous top 10 finishes. The men’s golf team has produced 10 top 10 national finishes including runner-up twice and also has spawned 10 professional golf tour players. The golf team will be the host school for the Junior College National Golf Tournament from 2008-2010. The co-ed cheerleading squad has won two national championship and has several top five finishes.

The athletic facilities at Southern State are some of the best junior college venues in the country. The coliseum seats 4,500 spectators for basketball and volleyball, and even more for various ceremonies such as graduation and concerts. The coliseum also plays host to the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) regional basketball tournament every spring and commonly draws capacity crowds at this week-long event. The baseball stadium has chair-back seating for 2,000 spectators, and the softball field can seat around 400 spectators. These stadiums contain their own locker rooms, batting cages, and coaches' offices, as well. The soccer field has been strategically placed adjacent to the Wellness Center so teams may use that facility for changing rooms.

The rubberized outdoor 400-meter track plays host to college and high school track meets throughout each spring. All athletic teams also have the availability of using the rubberized indoor track around the corridor of the coliseum. While this indoor track is not for competition, it does provide year-round training if desired. The Wellness Center's 7,000 square foot weight room provides the athletes with one of the best facilities for strength and conditioning in the ACCC.

In 2007, the men's basketball team broke the school record for number of victories and finished the season ranked fifth nationally. The baseball team's history has included five trips to the annual Junior College World Series tournament in Grand Junction, Colorado, and has consistently finished in the top 20 final rankings. The softball team finished seventh in the nation in 2007 and became the first ACCC team to win two games at the NJCAA World Series. The now defunct men's tennis team and women's tennis team both have a national championship to their credit.

Problem

During the academic school year 2006-2007, Southern State Community College had 63 academically underprepared sophomores on athletic teams. Of those 63, only 4 academically underprepared student athletes transferred to an NCAA Division I institution on athletic scholarship. Attrition rates among underprepared community college student athletes, along with newly established transfer guidelines, increase the importance of athletic academic advisors. Under the latest NCAA transfer guidelines, a student athlete entering the third year of full-time collegiate enrollment is required to have successfully completed at least 40% of a specific degree program (NCAA Transfer Guide, 2003). The accuracy and involvement of the athletic academic advisor are paramount to assure the access of community college student athletes continuing to progress at a four-year college or university. The involvement of the academic advisor is directly related to the successful transfer of the two-year college student athlete to a four-year school.

In order to transfer, the community college student athlete must not only meet the requirements of eligibility to play while at the community college, but they also must prepare for eligibility at the four-year college or university level.

Population

The academically underprepared first-year student athletes at Southern State were interviewed in the fall of 2008. The teams represented were men and women's basketball, men and women's cross country/track and field, baseball, co-ed cheerleading, softball, volleyball, men's soccer, and men's golf. For the purposes of this population, these student athletes were underprepared first-year community college students. These student athletes had two-year scholarships (renewable after the first year) to compete athletically at the two-year school level

with the option of continuing athletics at four-year institutions. Administrators, coaches, and school personnel pertinent to this study were interviewed in the spring and summer of 2008. The participants for the interviews were the first-year student athletes described as “academically underprepared.”

Table 1

Timeline for the Study

Method	Target population	Frequency	Total number	Timeline
Individual interviews	Student athletes	1x	30 students	August-December 2008
Individual interviews	Coaches, advisors, and administrators	1x	15 individuals	August-December 2008
Document analysis	NCAA Transfer Guidelines, Southern State eligibility rules, athletic department mission statement, introduction letter to Southern athletes, advising sheet for Southern athletes			August-December 2008

In this dissertation, I define the term “academically underprepared” student athletes as individuals who did not make the NCAA academic qualifying standards coming out of high school and thus continue their athletic and academic careers at a two-year college. Many incoming student athletes at community colleges fall into minority and low socioeconomic groups. This group generally scores lower on college entrance exams (Petrie & Russell, 1995).

Table 2

Student Athletes

Student athlete	Sport	Home state	Race
Meredith	Women's basketball	New York	White
Jessica	Softball	Alabama	White
Bridgett	Women's basketball	Mississippi	African-American
Tanika	Track	Florida	African-American
Chip	Track	Georgia	African-American
Morgan	Women's basketball	Georgia	White
Ricky	Men's basketball	Alabama	African-American
Jason	Soccer	Alabama	White
Sherri	Women's basketball	Alabama	African-American
Mike	Men's basketball	Alabama	White
Tootie	Volleyball	Alabama	White
Pablo	Baseball	Florida	Hispanic
Duke	Soccer	Alabama	White
Heather	Women's basketball	Arkansas	African-American
Lucas	Men's basketball	Alabama	African-American
Robert	Track	Virgin Islands	African-American
Denise	Cross-country	Florida	African-American

Table 3

Advisors for Student Athletes

Advisor	Title	Sport advised	Years as athletic advisor	# of advisees
Rita	Dept. Chair	Women's basketball	18	12-14
Janet	Faculty	Men's basketball	1	12-14
Cathy	Director of Transitional Learning	Baseball	12	20-24
Gina	Softball Coach/Faculty	Softball	10	20-24
Phil	Dept. Chair	Men's golf	7	6-8
Clara	Dept. Chair	Men's/women's track, men's/women's cross-country, men's soccer, volleyball	8	65-75

Table 4

Coaches

Coach	Sport	Years coached	# of State Championships
Steve	Track/Cross-country	12	12
Sam	Men's basketball	4	0
Dave	Men's golf	17	5
Louis	Women's basketball	18	4
Clint	Asst. baseball	10	6
Doc	Volleyball	2	0
Ronny	Head baseball	19	6
Benny	Soccer	2	0
Gina	Softball	10	6

Table 5

Administrators

Administrator	Title	Years in Athletic Department	Responsibilities
Dr. Sims	Dean of Students	3	Oversight of coaches, teams
Ronny	Athletic Director/Baseball coach	19	Coaching baseball, signing scholarships
Donna	Athletic Department assistant	3	Compliance, office management

Methods

Qualitative interviews for obtaining the information were conducted by the researcher on the campus of Southern State Community College in Alabama. The setting for the interviews was the offices of the researcher in the Health and Physical Education Department. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter and the qualitative researcher studies things in their natural setting. The questions for the interviews were developed by the researcher. The researcher had been employed by Southern State Community College for over 15 years as a

coach (5 years) and instructor in the Health and Physical Education Department. Additionally, documents related to the transferability of the student athletes were examined. These documents included information regarding student athlete orientation, plan of study, advising, and institutional policies regarding eligibility and graduation.

The findings from this study are especially important to college personnel working with transitioning underprepared first-year student athletes. First, college advisors/counselors should be aware of the continuing importance of college support relationships for first-year student athletes while attending school. Advisors/counselors can assist in these relationships by inviting students to openly talk and share information in an individual or group session.

Advisors can provide programs to incoming underprepared student athletes to help them understand academics and their transferability to four-year institutions. Advisors can also provide help with the importance of involvement within the college atmosphere and how family, friends, peers, and school personnel can help them adjust to the college environment. Individual counseling and small and large group workshops might include encouraging students to spend time with others and to indulge in activities that enable them to feel the importance of being academically and athletically successful.

The format of the interview guide was comprised of semistructured questions leading to broad unstructured (general open-ended) discussion. The intent of this approach was to allow the interviewer flexibility during the interview sessions in order to identify issues not covered by the predetermined questions.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used to collect potential participants. According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), there are two decisions a researcher needs to make when they choose to use purposive sampling. First, they must select who and what will help answer the basic research questions or assist in the purpose of the study (Erlandson et al., 1993). They then must also “choose who and what not to investigate; that is, there must be a process of elimination in order to narrow the pool of possible sources” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 83). For that reason, I decided to focus on the institution’s athletic teams. The reason I focused on the athletic teams was the realization that many of these student athletes were defined as “academically underprepared” individuals who did not make the NCAA’s academic qualifying standards coming out of high school and thus they were continuing their athletic and academic careers at a two-year college. Many incoming student athletes at community colleges fall into minority and low socioeconomic groups. This group generally scores lower on college entrance exams (Petrie & Russell, 1995).

I followed the data-gathering method in qualitative inquiry that focuses more on in-depth and relatively small samples that are selected purposefully (Patton, 2002). Erlandson et al. (1993) state that in qualitative research it is more about quality than quantity and more focused on information richness than volume.

Sampling Procedure

Currently, there are over 500 athletic teams within the National Junior College Athletic Association. This study was limited to Southern State Community College in Alabama. The Alabama Community College Conference consists of over 20 institutions with men’s and

women's teams participating in athletics. Personal contacts within the Health and Physical Education Department at Southern State allowed the opportunity for full cooperation among the coaches when interviewing the participants. The coaches, advisors, and administrators were sent letters to explain the study, followed up with an e-mail and phone calls. Each participant was given a cover letter explaining the intent of the interview process.

Design

This study is a qualitative case study. Qualitative research implies a direct concern with experience as it is lived or felt or undergone (Sherman & Webb, 1988). The benefits of qualitative research include the researcher's ability to process data immediately, clarify and summarize as the study evolves, and the ability to explore anomalous responses (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). According to Merriam (1988), the investigator in qualitative research spends a substantial amount of time in intense contact with participants. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998).

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. Case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system (Smith, 1978) such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community.

Wilson (1979), for example, conceptualizes the case study as a process "which tries to describe and analyze some entity in qualitative, complex and comprehensive terms not infrequently as it unfolds over a period of time" (p. 448). MacDonald and Walker's (1977)

definition of a case study as “the examination of an instance in action” (p. 181) is congruent with Guba and Lincoln’s (1981) statement that the purpose is “to reveal the properties of the class to which the instance being studied belongs” (p. 371). Becker (1968) defines the purposes of a case study as twofold, that is, “to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study” and “to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process” (p. 233).

Whereas some consider the “case” an object of study, Stake (1995) and others consider it a methodology (e.g., Merriam, 1988), a case study is an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied--a program, an event, an activity, or individuals.

The objective of the research was to examine the academic advising experiences of the academically underprepared first-year community college student athletes who intended to transfer to an NCAA Division I institution and compete athletically. A central feature in this research approach was to study the accumulating data and in the process induce some order of the uncategorized information. The transcribed interviews were read and coded for content, then further categorized into patterns. The transcribed interviews were reviewed through constant comparison for statements that suggested converging themes.

Data Analysis

In this dissertation, I focused on the experiences of academically underprepared community college student athletes with academic advising. I considered three research questions:

1. How is the impact of academic advising affecting community college student athletes who aspire to transfer to NCAA Division I institutions?

2. How is the student athlete educated on transferability to NCAA institutions?

3. How is the student athlete being assured that academic advisors are knowledgeable of transfer guidelines to NCAA Division I institutions?

Purposive sampling was used to collect potential participants. I followed the data-gathering method in qualitative inquiry that focuses more on in-depth and relatively small samples that are selected purposefully (Patton, 2002). Interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2008 for this case study.

A case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit. In case studies, communicating understanding is linked to the fact that data have usually been derived from interviews, field observations, and documents (Merriam, 1998). The researcher conducted over 50 interviews to collect data to saturate the categories.

Coding of the interview transcripts was done by using word designations, phrases, and combinations of both to identify information about the data and interpretive constructs related to the analysis. Data were compressed and linked together in a narrative that conveyed the meaning the researcher derived from studying the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Categories were devised through the purpose of the study, the investigator's knowledge, and the responses from the participants. The challenge was to construct categories or themes that captured some recurring pattern (Merriam, 1998). Units of data were sorted into different groupings that had something in common. A unit of data is any meaningful segment of data, which can be as small as a word a participant uses to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident (Merriam, 1998).

The participants were from four groups; the student athletes, the academic advisors, the coaches, and the administrators. Each group participant was interviewed individually and categories were established from each group. The next step was to compare the responses from each group to the other groups to produce overriding themes of the study. It is a fundamental purpose of language to tell us what is important by giving it a name and therefore separating it from other things with other names (Patton, 1990). The categories that emerged from the data were (a) goals and opportunities, (b) information dissemination, and (c) communication. Each group had goals that were sometimes the same and sometimes different. The dissemination of information was also the same in some instances and different in others. The lines of communication within each group and compared to other groups were similar in some cases but yet ambiguous on others.

Trustworthiness

Information was gathered in one-on-one interviews with the student athletes, coaches, academic advisors for athletes, and administrators associated with athletics at Southern State. Concurrent with the interviews was an observation and analysis of documents pertaining to the transfer guidelines for student athletes already in place. These documents included information regarding student athlete orientation, plan of study, advising, and institutional policies regarding eligibility and graduation. Combining these several sources of information achieved a form of triangulation that provided a greater degree of what Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe as “reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation” (p. 241).

Another method to enhance internal validity was the use of member checks. This method implored the researcher, as Merriam (1988) states, to “take data and tentative interpretations

back to the people from whom they were derived and ask them if the results are plausible” (p. 204).

Summary

This study will examine the experiences of academically underprepared first-year community college student athletes and their transferability to NCAA Division I athletic programs. An increased awareness of transferability rules by the academic advising staff and the student athletes will only enhance the educational experience and involvement for the students. Additionally, the increased awareness of the prospects of transferability to the NCAA Division I level will directly affect the graduation rates of the underprepared community college student athlete. The results of the qualitative interviews will also establish the possible impact of a more involved advising program on a community college campus for first-year student athletes, specifically student athletes at Southern State Community College in Alabama. An advising program with the familiarity of transferability rules could improve student involvement, graduation rates, and transferability to four-year institutions among student athletes at Southern State.

At the time of the present study there were few studies emphasizing the impact of athletic advising programs at the community college level. Most research was dedicated to academic advising at the four-year school level. Many student athletes who attend community college may be academically underprepared and the need for intrusive advising to assure transferability for these at-risk student athletes may be welcomed.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to present an examination of support services for academically underprepared first-year community college student athletes who seek to transfer to four-year schools. Of primary concern in the study was the exploration of how each student athlete's academic and athletic career is affected by institutional actors. These individuals include, but are not limited to, the academic advisor, the respective coaches, and the school's athletic administrators. Student athletes attending and competing at a two-year community college often aspire to compete their last 2 years at a Division I (sometimes referred to as simply D-I) four-year college or university. The impact of advising community college athletes can influence their ability to transfer to a NCAA Division I institution. For example, the process of taking remedial courses and graduating from a community college combined with meeting the demands of the new NCAA transfer guidelines needs to actively involve the academic advisor. In this dissertation, I focused on the experiences of academically underprepared community college student athletes with academic advising. I considered three research questions:

1. How is the impact of academic advising affecting community college student athletes who aspire to transfer to NCAA Division I institutions?
2. How is the student athlete educated on transferability to such institutions?
3. How is the student athlete being assured that academic advisors are knowledgeable of transfer guidelines to NCAA Division I institutions?

The qualitative interview questions were formulated and posed to the academic advisors for student athletes, the academically underprepared student athletes, the school's coaching staff, and the athletic department personnel. Additionally, document analysis was conducted to evaluate the information available to the student athletes pertaining to their transferability.

Major Themes of the Study

I organized the data by four major themes that emerged through the analysis:

1. The opportunity for the academically underprepared student athlete to succeed is of importance to the coaches, staff, and administrators at Southern State, but is not reflected in the practices of the institution.
2. Many times the academically underprepared student athletes need remedial courses to graduate within 2 years, which does not support the timeline needed for transfer.
3. The academically underprepared student athlete needs to take more ownership of their educational and athletic goals.
4. A pervasive lack of knowledge of transferability rules persists on campus with no unified response for clarification.

The academically underprepared freshman student athlete that begins their college education at a two-year college may sometimes be faced with numerous obstacles, having never faced them prior to their initial semester of college. These issues range from a sense of belonging; being away from home for the first time; the pressure to seek playing time; and, for the first generation student, the added pressure of educational success. These obstacles may be mitigated by the two-year institution through purposive counseling, introduction of student

involvement activities, and especially an effective academic advising program for these academically underprepared student athletes.

Many of these student athletes (28 of 30) who participated in the study aspire to continue their athletics and education at the four-year school level with the highest level of interest being the NCAA Division I level (24 of 30). To reach the goal of Division I athletics, this group of student athletes must be carefully monitored and academically advised to keep them on track in order to qualify academically for the Division I level. Many of the academically underprepared student athletes will be placed in remedial coursework, based on low entrance scores, upon arrival at the two-year institution. With the goal of transferring to a four-year school, these student athletes must be academically scrutinized in order to graduate within the timeframe of the athletic scholarship (four semesters). Remedial courses will not transfer to four-year schools, and if the student athlete has to enroll in as few as one remedial class, the timeframe for graduation could be delayed. Therefore, the transferability of the academically underprepared student athlete must be discussed with the academic advisor during the initial contact with the advisor. The goal for most of these student athletes is to continue to play their sport preferably at the NCAA Division I level. Therefore, the importance of the academic advisors, the athletic administration, and the coaches to explain these transfer rules is of utmost importance in order to serve the student athlete both academically and athletically.

The Opportunity for the Academically Underprepared Student Athlete to Succeed

For most of the participants in this study, continuing their sport at the four-year level is their ultimate goal. The idea of playing at an NCAA Division I institution for these students seems to be an all-encompassing measuring stick of success for some and faint hope for others.

The 2 years at Southern State simply serve as a temporary stopover on their way to hopefully attaining a four-year degree and playing their favorite sport along the way. The paths taken by these student athletes weave in and out of the small towns across the South and on occasion dip into unfamiliar territory across state lines.

In all cases, the student athlete participants in this study have been given the opportunity to persist through college with the help of an athletic scholarship. For many of the participants, the athletic scholarship is the only means by which they can pursue a college degree. The opportunity to succeed requires the student athlete's persistence, adjustment to the college atmosphere, proper advising, and the knowledge of transferability rules.

For some of these student athletes, the reasons for landing at Southern State are simply motivated by proximity to their hometown while others have been led by their high school coaches, college coaches, or word of mouth. When asked how she chose Southern State, Meredith, a freshman basketball player, stated,

I'm from New York and I was going to go to a school close by my hometown but I had a friend that played baseball [at Southern State] and he mentioned this school to me and I did some research on it and decided to do something different so I came here. I was also being recruited by a four-year school in South Carolina but my grades weren't high enough so they suggested that I go to a junior college.

Jessica came to Southern State after her family had suffered financially for a couple of years. My parents had financial trouble and I was trying to get a scholarship and came up and tried out. [The softball coach] offered me a scholarship. I had a friend that told me about the program. It just so happened that a couple of girls dropped out so it opened up for me.

Bridgett explained, "My goals are to play basketball at a four-year school, doesn't matter where. So my goals are to be here for 2 years and graduate." She added,

I came from Mississippi and found out about [Southern State] from a girl that went here years ago and I came and tried out. I wanted to go somewhere different so it worked out. I would like to go Division I if I could.

Track athlete Tanika's opportunity for a college scholarship at the four-year level depends on her career at Southern State. She explained,

My grades weren't good in high school so I was either going to stay close to home and go to a junior college, or come here and run track on scholarship. If I do well, then I'll keep trying to run track and get another scholarship to a four-year school.

While choosing schools may seem easy for some it can be difficult for others. The unknown can be a scary proposition for a high school senior. In many cases these young student athletes are aided in the process by a high school coach, a friend, or perhaps a guidance counselor. The student athlete who has played up to the four-year college level athletically may fall short on the requirements to get in to a four-year school. At this point, the athlete may lean on advice on which junior college to attend from the prospective four-year school coaching staff that has been recruiting him. Hopefully, the four-year school will attempt to re-sign this athlete after their two-year stint in junior college. The trust developed between the four-year college coach and the prospective athlete will lead to an athlete attending a certain junior college recommended by the four-year college coach. This situation occurs numerous times for every sport and was the case for Chip, a member of the track team. He said,

My high school coach is a friend of the coach here and so I came here first and tried to get a D-I scholarship with more choices after 2 years. A four-year school in Kentucky was helping me get here too. They said go to Southern State and after 2 years I'll go back to their school.

Morgan, a member of the women's basketball team, echoed those sentiments as she stated,

I'm from Georgia and the coaches at the four-year school close to my house hooked me up with the coaches here. I came down for a tryout and decided to come here in order to go to a four-year school in 2 years.

The same situation occurred for Ricky, a men's basketball team member, as he professed his allegiance to the four-year school coaching staff: "I came here after being recruited by Division I

schools and they told me to go to junior college to get more experience and work on school so I'd be ready to go to their school in 2 years."

Convenience and opportunity to play soccer played a big part in the way that Jason chose Southern State. He declared,

I am from just up the road in Misty Mountain and wanted to play college soccer. A four-year school in Georgia wanted me to come there and play but I needed to go to a junior college first to work on my game and work on my grades and get stronger. I came here to get good grades and get started on my education degree. After that I want to play on scholarship at a four-year school or just concentrate on getting my degree.

Many times a local junior college is the only opportunity for an aspiring student to continue his or her sport. Being close to home and having a competitive soccer program was evident in Duke's response:

I'm from Walton, which is only an hour from here. The Southern State coach had seen me play before my senior year of high school. I came down for a visit and we talked about goals and to get my grades up to play at a higher level. If I could play in a top 10 team I would love to play D-I.

The same is true for Sherri, a basketball player, who explained, "I'm from Capitol City which is close by. I heard about tryouts from a friend and came down and tried out and they offered me a scholarship. I didn't have any other offers."

In Tootie's situation, her opportunity for a college scholarship came about from a coaching change. The new volleyball coach had a few scholarships leftover from the previous coaching staff and set forth to find local talent to fill his roster. She said,

I live close by the school and the coach just called up one day and asked me to come down for a tryout and he offered me a scholarship. This was my only offer for a scholarship so I took it.

Opportunities for out-of-state players to attend Southern State are somewhat rare. But some coaches venture to various all-star competitions to check out players who may have slipped

through the recruiting process unnoticed. Heather is from a small town in Arkansas. She explained,

The coach saw me play in a tournament in Arkansas and he offered me a scholarship. That was the only offer I had. About goals, my advisor talked about what classes I had to have but didn't talk about four-year schools. I don't know what I want to do in the future.

Pablo, a shortstop on the baseball team, stated why he chose Southern State thusly,

You [other baseball players] come here to go to a Division I school or go pro. [The coaches] know success and what it takes to get to Division I. I came here for academics and athletics. Southern has a good record of winning and getting players to Division I or to the pros.

Students attend Southern State for the opportunity to participate in an athletic program as well as continue their education. The opportunities for the academically underprepared student athlete, however, require the support and engagement of a range of institutional personnel. While some student athletes seek to play at the highest level of a four-year NCAA institution, it is the advisor's responsibility to qualify the academically underprepared student athlete to graduate in four semesters (as per the athletic scholarship). If the student athlete's wishes are to compete at the NCAA Division I level, the advisor should counsel the student athlete who is academically underprepared about the multiple options other than NCAA Division I. If the student athlete has to enroll in remedial (or developmental) classes, he or she will more than likely not be able to meet these athletic goals because of the inability to graduate in 2 years. Therefore, it is not only pertinent, but prudent, that the academic advisor for the academically underprepared student athlete counsel these students accordingly and re-establish academic and athletic goals if necessary.

Rita is the academic advisor for the women's basketball team. She has a strong track record for graduating her athletes. Her workload of student advisees is usually around 16 athletes. However, her athletes do not strive to get to the highest level of four-year competition.

Her athletes are mostly local women from rural areas who want to use the two-year scholarship for basic classes and continue at Southern State or attend a small local college after their athletic days at Southern have concluded. The graduation rate for her athletes is high because the athletes will continue at Southern until they get an Associate's degree, which in some cases will take an additional year or two depending on the degree. The local student athletes will usually pick up other forms of financial aid after the athletic scholarship is used in order to continue their studies and be close to home. Rita's maintains,

I advise them all to complete a degree. My goal is to get them a degree. First thing I ask them is "Have you thought about what your major will be? If not, do you have a general idea of a direction that you want to head toward? Health, Education, Science?"

The advisor serves a crucial role in the college experience for these athletes. According to Sam, the men's basketball coach,

In past years the advisor for men's basketball didn't care, but now she (Janet) is doing a great job. A lot of times I tell the four-year coaches to contact her about the player's academic situation and what it will have to take to get them in a four-year school. She keeps me up to date and comes to practice or the weight room to find out why one of them missed a class or missed a test. She stays on them because she is beginning to understand how important it is for them to be able to go play at a Division I school.

The work of an advisor is impacted by personal factors and individual relationships.

Cathy has been an advisor for athletes for 12 years. Her first duty was with the men's basketball team, but she recently switched to baseball. "I want to make sure the athlete has a chance to transfer" was her response to the question regarding her goals as an advisor. "I try not to put them in all academic classes, meaning I try to put them in some fun classes, some electives. I want them to have a little fun." Some advisors are overwhelmed in their duties, which may detract from the advisory duties to the academically underprepared student athletes. Since Clara teaches a full load of classes and advises around 80 athletes, she sometimes gets caught in a time

crunch between the summer semester and the arrival of her new advisees at the onset of the fall semester. She shared,

They usually start coming in the first week of registration when it's a madhouse which coincides with finals and the first week of registration happening at the same time. I would like to be able to sit down with them and talk about stuff but I don't have time to do that. Sometimes 15 minutes is fine but if it's one of those days when I'm giving a final it's basically scrambling.

Gina serves as the head softball coach and teaches a few classes, but most of her time is spent on the field. Her teams have garnered national attention athletically and academically, and she takes great pride in working long hours to secure those achievements. A taskmaster on the field, Gina's teams have risen in the national rankings almost every year since she has been the coach. In her 10 years at Southern State, her teams have finished as national champions once along with several top 10 finishes. She demands excellence on and off the field as evidenced by her team receiving the honor as having the highest team grade point average among all schools competing in the National Junior College Athletic Association this past season. To have the athletic and academic balance that her teams have is a testament to the special kind of influence a coach can have on young student athletes. Most, if not all, of her sophomores receive scholarships to four-year schools. The ones that do not sign a four-year scholarship do so by choice.

Gina also serves as the team's academic advisor, and feels that Southern State should do more to formally support the academically underprepared student athlete. She suggested,

We should give them summer school scholarships. I mean they're here in the fall and spring so why not summer? Sometimes they (administration) tell us that if an athlete needs a scholarship after their sophomore year then they will try to help them out, after the fact. I think it should be done the summer between the summer of their freshman and sophomore years and not at the end of their sophomore year. If they did that then the athlete can stay on track to graduate in 2 years, which opens up opportunities to go Division I. It would open up more opportunities.

Students arrive at Southern State with a variety of backgrounds, a fact that impacts their potential for transfer and success. Dave, the men's golf coach, believes the socioeconomic status of many of the student athletes is a concern. This concern particularly impacts the student's ability to afford a summer school session, which Dave believes should be covered by the athletic scholarship. He said,

Many of the athletes at this school come from a poor background and they really can't afford to pay summer tuition. My goal would be to award scholarships to athletes in the summers especially if they needed it to graduate in 4 semesters. . . . In my case, the golf team, my guys are usually on track to graduate. They can work part-time or play tournaments in the summers. Some athletes in some sports need summer school to catch up, like basketball and baseball. The school needs to be in a position to help those athletes to graduate on time. I want my golfers to be eligible to play at any school in the country upon leaving this school. Not necessarily D- II or NAIA or D- I, all schools included. I want them to be able to go Division I, which opens more doors for them.

Clint is the assistant baseball at Southern State and has other part-time duties on campus. He has worked at Southern for 11 years and has been a positive influence on his team, especially his highly successful pitching staff. Many of his pitchers get drafted to the professional ranks and most of the others will transfer to a four-year school. The baseball coaches are very competitive as evidenced by their seven state championships and four junior college World Series appearances. Clint has been known to travel all over the state and bordering states to evaluate potential talent. This firm-speaking coach spent several years playing professional baseball and presents an excellent opportunity for the junior college athlete to succeed.

Clint seemed downtrodden in his response about summer support and the overall possibility for success of this student population. He understands that his suggestions have also gone unattended. Clint explained:

The lack of summer school scholarships hurts our program. Other junior colleges in this state offer summer scholarships. We have asked for them for years and are always turned down. Most of the athletes need the summer school to graduate. If they had a summer scholarship at some time before their second year there would be more athletes signing

with Division I teams. . . . I definitely think that two summers would really help; even one summer would be beneficial. The athletes that have to pay for their summer courses will usually not take summer classes because they can't afford it. You really have to be a really good student to graduate in four semesters. Getting the hours plus unlimited practice times makes it tough to graduate.

Clint's opinions about the importance of committing to summer funding were shared by several of the other coaches. Doc, who coaches volleyball, agreed:

I think summer school scholarships would help the most. We are able to offer scholarships during the summers but I've been told that they can't offer them to just athletes on my team without offering them to all athletes. Our problem is that our kids can get scholarships in the spring semesters from four-year schools, and if our athletes started this school during the summer semester it would put them on track to graduate in January instead of May of their second year, which would open up more opportunities for them to get more scholarship offers.

Not all personnel agreed on the issue of summer funding. Dr. Sims, the dean in charge of athletics at Southern State, had a different, and somewhat unclear, response about opportunities for the academically underprepared student athlete to graduate within the two-year scholarship window:

I'm not opposed to give summer scholarships after their freshman year but if we saw that those students went on and consistently graduated then I don't think that it would be so much of an issue if they were a sophomore or not. You know we might go to that. If we know it has gone toward graduation efforts to directly say it's made a difference in someone's life because they were able to graduate. I don't know how we can notate that difference. How do we know in their freshman year if that caused them to graduate or could they have caught up by one extra class in the fall and one in the spring and finish anyway?

You know I don't know how you would ever say that and I don't know why you would ever need to. Why would you have to have proof? What I told the coaches was that I would look at every opportunity to give summer scholarships because some very much feel like it's very important to their players to have in their freshman years and others argued that they want it in their sophomore years and some argue both years. They think they deserve it in the summers and they argue that other schools offer them during the summers and it's something that comes up at coach's meetings.

Ronny has been coaching baseball at Southern State for 19 years and has been so successful that he has already been elected to the National Junior College Athletic Association's

(NJCAA) Coaches Hall of Fame. Often Hall of Fame inductees are given that honor after they have finished their athletic career, but Ronny's ascent to 700 baseball victories propelled his career at an uncommon pace. Ronny has led Southern to seven state titles and four trips to the Junior College World Series. He also serves as the school's athletic director. Ronny's style is not for those who are looking for an easy way out. His drill sergeant discipline and rigorous training methods have produced many professional baseball players and even two Olympic baseball team members. The players will battle to the end for him and he expects excellence at each game. Presently the team plays in the nicest junior college baseball facility in the state, which has served as host site for the state tournament on numerous occasions.

Ronny, who also serves as athletic director, has disagreed with the administration on the issues surrounding the academically underprepared student athlete for years. He said,

I think the remedial student athletes should be on scholarship in the summers. We are supposed to be helping these kids continue their education and athletics at a four-year school. I think that they should be on scholarship. Some schools give their athletes summer scholarships and we've been fighting that battle for years here but they should be able to get summer school paid for. That is an institution rule, not a state rule.

The frustration that exists in regard to this issue seems to plague all interactions between administrators and coaches. Gina was also frustrated in her response about lost opportunities for the academically underprepared student athlete. With a confused look on her face, she stated,

When we have a meeting [with the administration], every time we ask about summer school opportunities. They ask us what we need and we tell them we need athletic scholarships for the summer but the administration doesn't help us and these athletes that are on scholarship have to pay for summer school on their own. We're asking the athletes to perform athletically and academically but they have to pay for summer school on their own.

Another statement by Dr. Sims reiterates the lost opportunities that Southern State could provide for the academically underprepared student athlete. The problem she responded to

addresses the graduation month of the student athlete and how it may affect their four-year college scholarship opportunities:

I do feel like they lose some opportunities by not finishing in the spring, because of recruiting. Recruiting probably happens ever before that spring ever ends. But it's really important that they know that they already been cleared before their four-year school starts. So what we've run into it in the past is that athletes take summer classes and don't finish before middle of August, but the four-year school that wants them starts earlier in August. So if the athlete is not free and clear before their school starts then they may not want you. So it is a disadvantage for those students because it is unfortunate that we don't help them earlier and that would make them free and clear in May. That's the argument of some of the coaches because I've seen it happen for instance in baseball. That the timeline issue for what they needed for the four-year school was different from our timeline here. That's difficult waiting until that last summer.

In summary, Southern State provides the academically underprepared student athletes the opportunities to establish themselves as student athletes in preparation for a successful transfer to a four-year institution. These opportunities, however, are diminished due to a lack of coordinated efforts and dedicated financial support. The responses from the student athletes, coaches, advisors, and administrators seemingly differ in the approach to fulfill the athletic and academic desires of the student athlete for transferability.

Academically Underprepared Student Athletes Often Need Remedial Courses to Graduate within 2 Years

Academically underprepared student athletes are frequently faced with the possibility of remedial or developmental classes during their first year of college. These classes will not transfer to four-year schools and therefore put the academically underprepared student behind in the allotted timeframe of the athletic scholarship at Southern State (four semesters). If the goal of the academically underprepared student athlete is to eventually attend an NCAA Division I institution, the two-year school has to let the student know the conditions of graduating and moving on to the higher level of four-year schools. A student athlete who graduates from a two-

year school can qualify to attend any NCAA Division I institution. However, some schools and conferences have different academic qualifications. Having graduated from a two-year college does not guarantee entry to every college or university.

Recruiting and coaching academically underprepared student athletes presents challenges for the coaches and the academic staff. These student athletes, having not qualified for a four-year institution coming out of high school, must be made aware of the academic requirements to graduate from the community college in their initial meeting with the recruiting coach and later the academic advisor. In most cases, the academically underprepared student athlete will be enrolled in remedial classes.

Having to complete a remedial curriculum frequently requires students to participate in summer semesters, which are not paid for by the athletic scholarship. Donna, the athletic department administrative assistant, declared,

Those student athletes in remediation should be given at least six hours of school [on athletic scholarship] for the summer semesters in order to stay on track and graduate in 2 years. However, as many summer school hours it takes for those kids to graduate is what the school should provide because it would increase the graduation rates and make those kids more successful. State board policy does not prohibit school from offering summer scholarships but it's up to the school to offer them or not.

The student athletes in this study seem uninformed of how their curricular choices will impact their athletic opportunities, a fact that is seen by the coaches and advisors. Cathy, the baseball advisor, said,

It would be great if we had more informational meetings. I'm not sure how much information [the student athletes] are getting from their coaches. They don't get anything about it at athletic orientation. There needs to be one person overseeing all of the athletics and transferability questions. Meeting with athletes more often or maybe meeting with them as a team.

Rita, the girl's basketball advisor, stated,

I ask [the student athletes] if they see themselves continuing to play at a four-year school. I ask them about their high school background. But when they have to take remedial courses I tell them that they won't graduate in 2 years unless they take summer classes.

Not all athletes fit the profile described here, of course. Rarely does Phil, the golf advisor, see a first-generation student athlete. He states his goal as an advisor is "to graduate all of them or at least have it so they can all transfer to a four-year school."

The significance of a college coach is of utmost importance at the two-year college level. A coach can not only enhance a student athlete's athletic ability but may also be influential in their education. If the coach emphasizes and demands excellence in the classroom as well as the field then the opportunities at four-year schools for the student athlete will increase. Gina's stance on academics is tough. Her team has to maintain a certain grade point average before they are able to participate in a game. She also has her student athletes sign a waiver so that she may contact the parents in situations involving academics. Of her initial meetings with her academically underprepared student athletes she curtly stated, "I tell them what they have to do graduate. They know that to graduate on time they will have to take a summer school."

Steve, the track coach and cross-country coach for both the men and women, has been in college coaching for more than 30 years. He has been both assistant coach and head coach at NCAA Division I schools and has had many of his athletes represent their countries in the Olympic Games. Steve came to Southern State 12 years ago and immediately turned the program into a national contender every year. The men's track team was crowned as National Champions in 1997 with one member of that team representing the United States in the 1998 Olympics and winning a gold medal. Many of his athletes went on to four-year schools and succeeded academically and athletically through the years. The track teams and cross-country teams use Clara as their advisor. Alone, these teams have about 40-50 student athletes for Clara to handle.

In response, Steve explained, “I think she’s covered up, advising four teams, teaching full-time, scholars bowl, and debate team. She’s overwhelmed. There should be one advisor per team.”

Because Clara is so busy, she often does not have the time to effectively counsel the academically underprepared student athlete on issues such as remedial coursework or transferability.

Even those students who needed a remedial course did not always find answers from their advisor. Lucas, a first generation African American men’s basketball player said of his initial visit with the team advisor,

She didn’t talk to me about what it took to transfer or graduate. She said if you take the basic college courses then you should be ok. She said in next semester we will talk about transfer rules. I think we should have talked about transferring more because it doesn’t make any sense to take classes that won’t transfer.

Robert, an international athlete who moved to the United States to run track, seemed unaware about advising as a whole when he responded, “I didn’t have an advisor. I made my own schedule. I came in real close to school starting.” Another track athlete, Denise, simply shrugged off the advising that she received as something that was not too important by saying, “Don’t remember who advised me. I was supposed to meet with an advisor but couldn’t get one because it was day before school started.” Lucas, a basketball player, expressed his initial conversation with his advisor thusly,

My goal coming out of high school was to go D-I but my grades weren’t good enough. My advisor talked about what were my goals in life and in education. I wasn’t sure at the time so she just put me in some courses and we’re supposed to get back together around the end of the semester and we’ll talk about what to take next semester. When I’m finished here I want to go D-I.

Mike, another student athlete and local product with hopes of continuing his dream of playing at the Division I level, said of his advisor meeting,

I didn't really get to sit with her to talk about what I needed. She wasn't really hands on. She wrote out a schedule and said here it is. She didn't say anything about NCAA rules and or transferring to D-I.

Tootie, the local student playing on the volleyball team, summed up her initial visit with her advisor this way:

We didn't discuss athletic goals with her. I wasn't given anything pertaining to graduating and transferring to a four-year school. She gave me some web sites to go to about what classes to transfer. I don't know difference in D-1 or other four-year schools. My advisor was strictly academic. I haven't talked about athletically going to a four-year school with her.

Meredith said of her initial advisor contact, "We didn't really talk about four-year schools and said we'd figure it out later."

The coaches interviewed for this study expressed support for student transferability, even for those students who may require remedial coursework. These coaches emphasized the importance of information and communication among students. Sam, the men's basketball coach, is a disciplinarian when it comes to off-the-court behavior and on-the-court effort.

My goals are to get everyone to go D-I if they are good enough to play at that level. However, some kids who know they won't or don't have the ability to graduate are willing to do the work it takes to get to a lower division of a four-year school and still succeed academically.

Dave, the men's golf coach, would like to see all student athletes graduate from Southern State and be eligible to play at any NCAA level. He is concerned about increasing the transferability of student athletes:

[Transferability issues] have been brought up but it seems to be a roadblock. I guess the president makes the decision. It doesn't apply so much to the golf team. The remedial students are the ones we need to be helping. I wish from a recruiting standpoint we could offer a summer school scholarship. We want to see them be successful.

The women's basketball teams are not populated with NCAA Division I talent, but the student athletes are good enough to play at other levels of four-year schools. The head coach, Louis, explained:

I've had very few not to graduate or transfer. Sometimes a kid going to Division II won't bother graduating because they know they can't pay for the summer semester needed to make them Division I eligible and actually graduate from this school.

Speaking of his student athletes, Clint, the assistant baseball coach, said,

All of them want to go play at a Division I school. We have a good track record of our guys signing with Division I schools. It also depends on academics and athletics. If you're not eligible coming out of high school to go to a D-I school then they have to graduate from here before they move to a D-I school. It's very difficult for them to graduate in 2 years. Not going to say it's impossible. If they come in taking remedial classes they most likely won't graduate in 2 years. We get the classes set up for them to have classes in the mornings so they can practice in the afternoons and many will take a class at night.

Ronny, the head baseball coach, expressed his feelings toward remedial classes that have to be taken by the academically underprepared student athlete:

I don't believe remedial classes should be required. If they feel like they can make it through English 101 then they should have the chance to take it. That's one of the things that I disagree with in junior college system, at least in this state. They know going in that they get no credit for taking remedial classes and that they don't transfer. I feel like they shouldn't be required. It seems like the school is trying to make money from remedial classes.

Gina's advocacy for academically underprepared student athletes is possibly the strongest among the coaches. She absolutely wants all of her kids to graduate:

They are treating athletes differently but their expectations are a lot higher. They have to perform in classroom and on the field. We always help students in need with their work schedules or extended hours to help other students but the teams are their jobs. You can't call in sick to ball games. I think the athletes are treated unfairly. Everybody thinks we're trying to get more for our kids. But I think we're trying to get them to be treated equally and trying to get them graduated on time, not a semester late. Because if they don't graduate on time they think they're dumb.

The Dean of Students, Dr. Sims, has overseen athletics for 3 years. Prior to her current position, she spent most of her 20 plus years on this campus as a math instructor with virtually no administrative experience or athletic experience. She has become more involved in athletics and is trying to learn as much as possible about each sport on top of her other duties. She occasionally shows up at games and sends out e-mails across campus internet to post scores and other highlights such as recognition of players or perhaps updated national rankings of the respective teams and athletes.

Dr. Sims understands the plight of the academically underprepared student athlete, but she did not offer any remedies about graduating those student athletes in the allotted four-semester athletic scholarship timeframe during the interview:

Obviously the student that comes in taking all developmental course work then it's going to be a very different road for them to finish in four semesters. If they needed just one developmental class then they could probably get it done by taking 18 hours of coursework for one semester but I don't think that's a real expectation that they would have to take 18 hours each semester and stay on track if they're testing at a developmental level. That's probably too difficult for them so the expectation then would be that they would have to take something in the summer.

In comparison, the Athletic Director's response toward helping the academically underprepared student athletes is based on his daily interactions with students on his team. He sees disappointment and frustration because he feels that Southern State could be doing more to graduate the academically underprepared student athlete:

In some cases it does hurt, it puts them a semester behind. The remedial classes are there to prepare them for taking higher level classes that will transfer. Some have to go during the summer to catch up. If they are serious about school they can graduate in four semester but they have to "double up" in those cases.

Donna, the administrative assistant with virtually no background in athletics, has been chastised by some of the coaches as someone who does not know anything about sports much less the academically underprepared student athlete. She has been accused of "buck-passing" and

losing vital paperwork at important times. Donna seems quite overwhelmed with athletic concerns. She did not seek her position, but rather was appointed to the role about 5 years ago. Donna seems overwhelmed with her responsibilities; she recently attended a national conference to learn more about her job, an effort that was favorably received by the coaches. Still, much work in that area remains. She seldom shows up at sporting events and, according to the coaches, just does not understand athletics as much as they would like for someone in her position.

Once again, the coaches' concern with someone in her position is the lack of knowledge of athletics as a whole and the lack of knowledge of understanding the plight of the academically underprepared student athlete. One positive aspect of Donna is the fact that she can see what the college is not doing to help this student population within the timeframe of the athletic scholarship. Unfortunately, her ideas are not well received and her comments are all but muted. She argued,

We should offer them summer scholarships even if they weren't full scholarships. But it's unfair to bring those kids in here and tell them that we can graduate them in 2 years and not deliver what we tell them. It's almost impossible to graduate in 2 years with taking remedial classes.

The same scenario was posed to the athletic director/baseball coach, Ronny, who seemed more curt and to the point about assigning blame. Ronny sees nothing but benefits in offering summer school aid to the academically underprepared student athlete:

They [the student athletes] should be on scholarships every summer. But it comes back to what the administration won't allow to happen. I disagree with it but that's what we have to live with. I think it would help them. It would get more division I schools in here to offer for some of the athletes. If the student athlete is on track to graduate after their freshman year then more division I scholarships would be offered. When division I coaches recruit our athletes, which is always, they want to know if the athlete is on track to graduate within 2 years. They want to look at transcripts. If some of those athletes have to take remedial classes then it's going to take some extra hours to catch up. It's harder for them to catch up. We have a young man right now that is being recruited by division I schools but the coaches are concerned that he won't graduate in 2 years.

Rita, the women's basketball advisor, agreed that the school should change some rules limiting summer school scholarships. "It's hard to encourage them to take summer school classes when they can't pay for it," she said.

It's also hard for us to demand them to take a mini-term class during the regular term because when they need a mini-term course they don't need to be pressed for time in that class with the academic background they have.

The advising relationship was identified as one that could be strengthened by other components, including tutoring and academic support services. Clara, the advisor for multiple teams offered some ideas that could possibly help the academically underprepared student athlete. She said:

One is that that they don't have enough tutors in the tutoring lab, and the tutoring lab closes at 4:00 every afternoon and I'm not sure it's even open on Fridays. I try to get the athletes more involved with campus activities but the practice hours interfere with their ability to become more involved.

Students experience a continual challenge in balancing their academic and athletic commitments.

I mean they practice all afternoon and there is no time for extra stuff going on around campus and no time to use the tutoring lab because of practice. This would also help with the faculty because most of them think that athletes are going to be terrible students. Another reason is that the athletes have to repeat remedial classes too many times which tells me we're not doing a good job of keeping up with their grades.

The lack of coordination, specifically for those students who need remedial courses, can cause difficulty related to transferability. Phil, the golf team advisor, has been working with student athletes for 17 years at Southern State and has seen his share of disappointed athletes not being able to graduate on time. He offered,

The school doesn't do enough for the remedial athletes. We should at least give them a summer school scholarship to stay on track to graduate to give them a chance at a Division I scholarship. You know they all want to go to a Division I school but if we don't give them a chance to graduate in 2 years then we're not meeting their academic goals. Two remedial classes throw them off track, so if you give a kid one summer school then they can be on track.

Janet, the men's basketball advisor, believes the academically underprepared student athletes need more help from the school relative to graduating athletes:

First of all the school needs to pay for summer school if they want them to graduate on time. I don't think that's fair. I mean they travel and practice and the school should pay for summer school. There also needs to be more education on the transfer rules for all advisors. I'm trying to get the administration to combine two remedial math classes into one semester to keep the athletes on track to graduate on time.

Coach Steve, the track coach, has had more academically underprepared student athletes than any of the other sports teams on campus. There are very few junior college track teams in the Southeast region of the United States, which creates an influx of track athletes attending Southern State. The track team's allotment of scholarships are about 20 total for both men and women's teams, but another 20 to 30 student athletes attend Southern State to run track by means of other financial aid assistance.

Steve, who has previously coached Olympic athletes, believes,

Summer school is the answer. Our school has the ability to send more athletes to summer school under athletic scholarships but they usually don't award them. They need to take remedial courses which dictate they go an extra semester. I encourage all incoming freshmen to take some classes during the summer either here or at home so they will be ready to go to Division I. It's tougher here because we don't help with summer school help. Some of our competitors pay for summer school. Athletes choose to go to other schools because they know we won't pay for summer school here but can at other schools.

Sam has been the men's basketball coach for 3 years now. He has been successful at every coaching position at every school to this point in his career. His whole family has worked in coaching positions ranging from major college to high school. His father was even a successful college coach. Sam is on track to improve his coaching resume and hopes to move on to the four-year school level. He is young, energetic, and very successful. Last year's team at Southern State finished the regular season ranked number one in the nation. Sam agreed with Steve's remarks. He added,

The remedy is to offer summer school scholarships for the athletes that are on scholarship. You've got to. They say just to load them up and make them take 18-19 hours but how many people can do that much less how many people can do that with being a scholar-shipped athlete with practice and games. Can these kids handle that? We have some now taking 20 hours.

Louis is very opinionated in his stance on equality of women's athletics and the plight of the two-year college student athlete. About half of his roster is filled with women that simply chose Southern State as an avenue to get a two-year degree and perhaps attend a third year in order to get an allied health degree. The other half is women who want to continue their basketball careers and hopefully get another scholarship to a four-year school.

Louis seemed aggravated that his suggestions toward helping the academically underprepared student athlete have fallen on deaf ears during his tenure at Southern State. He said in frustration,

One of the problems is that if the student is placed in remedial classes then they will have to attend at least one summer school to make up to graduate within 2 years. They would have to go to summer school with ample opportunity to graduate within 2 years but just not four semesters covered by scholarship. That wouldn't be possible. You can't hold someone back just because of where they had to start. We've had athletes that have had to take two remedial classes and the school should be obligated to pay for the summer semesters. To me that's what community college means, to serve the remedial student.

Benny is in his second year as the men's soccer coach at Southern State. He came to Southern after a highly successful career previously as a Division I women's coach and a high school soccer coach. He feels the opportunities with the facilities provided by Southern are an advantage when it comes to recruiting. He has been known to travel throughout the Southeast scouring high school soccer tournaments for potential recruits. Benny wants to win the national championships and is highly motivated in that quest. The soccer team's record has improved along with the talent level at Southern during his short tenure. New additions to the soccer facility and more scholarships have put him on track to having a perennial nationally ranked

team. Benny was terse and to the point in his response indicating that there is a simple philosophy for the academically underprepared student athlete to succeed: “I think summer scholarships should be available. If we want kids to graduate we would need to offer summer scholarships.”

When asked about the possibility of offering academically underprepared student athletes scholarships during their first summer, Dr. Sims responded,

We don't commit to early [freshmen summer scholarships] because we want to make sure they are on track to be eligible and on track, and they will come back,” she explained. “They've given us 2 years, be productive--of course they've gotten for free but it's our way of saying for all of you who have done that we are going to help you out and help you finish out and go do whatever you need to do. It's our way of saying for all of you who've done that this is our way of helping you out. We appreciate what you've done for us.

One interpretation of Dr. Sims' comments is this: Southern will not issue summer school scholarships after the freshman year because the administration does not trust the athlete to return in the fall.

Having a centralized location or support system for students was identified as an opportunity to better serve the student athlete. Clara stated,

It would be nice to have a centralized area to advise athletes and it may eliminate some of the problems that athletes have and then we also need to get them more involved with campus life. We don't have a true athletic department that athletes can go to for questions. Getting kids to know about transfer rules should come down to what the athletic coordinator does. What does she do? I guess she keeps up with eligibility and travel requests. But we really do need a centralized athletic office.

Janet, the men's basketball advisor, added,

The athletes tell me that they want to play Division I basketball and I introduce them to what it takes academically. I tell them that they will have to go to summer school to graduate on time but they rarely have the money to do it. Some athletes show up right before the semester starts and most of the classes are full so they end up just taking classes to stay eligible.

The Academically Underprepared Student Athlete Needs to Take More Ownership of Their Educational and Athletic Goals

Numerous obstacles await incoming college freshmen students including being away from home for the first time, a sense of belonging, and for the first-generation student, the added pressure of educational success. For the academically underprepared student athlete, these problems can be compounded by the pressures of playing at a higher level than ever before, using available free time wisely, and successfully transferring to a four-year institution perhaps via an athletic scholarship. As indicated in the interviews with the academically underprepared student athletes, most (24 of 30) want to continue to play at the highest level of four-year school competition.

While some athletes long to play at the Division I level, others just want to continue going to college or would be satisfied playing at any level if they could obtain a scholarship. For these academically underprepared student athletes, the advisor session is simply a meeting to make sure that they are taking general classes and not necessarily a discussion of Division I athletics. This was evidenced by Duke when he discussed his future with his team advisor:

I told her that I wanted to be a physical therapist and play soccer at a higher level. Really my goal is to graduate but if somebody came in with a good offer from a lower level four-year school then I would consider taking it.

The same can be said of Jason when he responded accordingly, “She asked me my goals and I told her that I would take a scholarship offer from a four-year school if the opportunity came up even if it happened before I graduated from here.”

As an incoming freshman, Sherri, a member of the women’s basketball team, had no idea about different levels of four-year institutions, but felt someone should tell students of their options. “I don’t know the differences between D-I and D-II or any of the different levels. I think one of them gets more exposure and they’re big-time. They didn’t explain any differences. The

advisor should be able to know,” she said. Sherri’s frustrations extended to the structure and accessibility of the curriculum at Southern:

The school should help us with summer school. The coach said if the class is needed then it might be paid for but if it’s not needed then they wouldn’t pay for it. If they gave us a summer scholarship after our freshman year it would put us on track to graduate and open up more doors for scholarships. A career center and athlete tutoring lab would help. Have it all together with transfer stuff.

The coaches and administrators at Southern State felt part of their responsibility to the academically underprepared student athlete was to provide a general support system. Steve, the track coach, feels that athletic orientation should also educate the student athlete on what it means to reach this stage of life and the consequences involved:

Well at any school people need to be made to understand they represent the school and their families and if they do anything detrimental that it will affect more than them, including the team, family. It should be made very clear to these athletes academic structure in greater detail and in conduct and eligibility issues need to be discussed in greater detail--behavior and educational issues are most important.

He explained,

Also, if you can get to them early and make them understand they have to do a better job in college than they did in high school, which is one reason that you are here at a junior college. We have to be more attuned to what you do and how you go about doing it. If you start thinking about it early on, you just about have to hammer it in to them. People share a common trait and wait to the eleventh hour to figure [graduation] out.

On academics Doc, the volleyball coach, stated,

My goals and the girl’s goals are the same as most coaches at Southern . . . they all want to graduate. I only recruit the players that are interested in graduating from this school. I stress academics first to make sure they can be successful in life and athletics. Athletically, we all want to win the state championship and also want to show that we are good students and good people. It’s not just about athletics.

Students identified the advisor as a key individual in regard to their experiences at Southern State. The advisor role needs to be one of educating the academically underprepared student athlete of the nuances associated with being at college for the first time and not only

enrolling them in classes. More importantly for the advisor is for these student athletes to listen and gather knowledge about the responsibilities of the student athlete. An informal discussion of career and athletic goals may be bandied about to get a feel for the true goals of the academically underprepared student athlete.

Cathy, the baseball advisor, offered a glimmer of hope, but realizes that some of the student athletes need much more assistance than they are currently getting. She concluded,

If we would have mini-terms, like letting them take two remedial classes in one semester to keep them on track to get out in 2 years. Most of the athletes are lazy and won't take those classes to move through school faster. A lot of these athletes that do not test into the college level courses come from schools that pass them through and they're not ready for college.

About the process of getting the athletes to come to Southern and get acclimated to the academics, Clint stated,

We recruit them, they visit and we set up a meeting with their advisor and they meet with the advisor. We'll set it up for them to visit with the advisor and with their parents. Cathy [the team academic advisor] will explain about academics and find out what their interests are at the time. She'll go over what they need to take the first year. We basically set it up for them that if they follow what she maps out for them then they should be able to graduate in 2 years if they do what she says, unless they have to take remedial classes.

How to best support this student population, however, was not clear, and students did not feel empowered to proactively seek support. Student athlete Jessica spoke of her advising and transferability,

I think [the school staff] should get in touch with us sooner. I'm not sure what classes to take; I get stressed out about what to take; like I don't really know what classes to take before getting into nursing, because coach does our schedule. I couldn't do nursing program because it would interfere with softball. I don't think it's fair because I don't want to change what I want to do in life just for what I am going to do for 4 years or softball.

William, from the basketball team, summed up what it takes to succeed at a community college when he stated, "I'd said it just like any junior college. If you go and do your work then you will

succeed. I registered on time and got all my classes I need. I took one remedial class and I will be finished with that.”

The advisor’s role for the academically underprepared student is of great importance. Often this person is the first person who discusses academics to the student athlete. For many of the academically underprepared student athletes, the academic advisor serves as a mentor as well as academic counselor. Many of the advisors for the athletic teams have been in that position for several years while some are new at advising athletes. Rita’s concern was about the level of communication with the people in charge of athletics as she said,

We’ve had one meeting since the Dean took over athletics but that was it. It was within the past year or so. We kind of got together through e-mails and phone class about what PE classes to put the athletes in the first semester. There’s always room for improvement. I don’t think all schools have advisors for their athletes. The administration doesn’t say you have to graduate 70% of your sophomore athletes.

Phil’s response somewhat echoed Rita’s concern about the lack of cohesiveness between the advisors and the athletic administration: “We’ve had a meeting with the athletic department in the past 2 years. We’ve met once in the past 2 years. But it’s not about student athletes but about students in general. No mention of graduation rates.”

Janet, the men’s basketball advisor, has a big heart and has been known to deliver homemade cookies to the locker room after the games. She sees the hardships that some of these kids have to overcome just to get through school. “You have to play the part of a mentor. Some of these kids can’t even afford the graduation fee. One kid’s family has never seen him play because they don’t have transportation to get here and they’re only 50 miles away,” she shared. Janet also understands the adjustment of an African American athlete moving into a mostly all White rural community, as she attempts to introduce them into the community.

We got the team into a Kiwanis Club luncheon last year after having such a great season and the Rotary Club too. I try to let the players meet as many people as they can. I take

some of them to church and the church sometimes sponsors a meal for them to eat after a game. You know some of these kids come from a bad background and don't get any tips on college from their parents, if they even have parents.

Clara has been advising student athletes for 8 years while serving as a department head. She currently advises five sports teams and carries a caseload of advisees of over 100 students. Close to 75 of those 100 advisees are student athletes. She seems a bit overwhelmed, but enjoys what she can do for the athletes. She also is in charge of the Scholars Bowl, in which local high schools compete, and leads the school debate team. She shares,

I ask them if they want to play at a Division I school and then this is what you're going to have to do to complete a degree. Sometimes they come in here all big on themselves and tell me how they're going to go here or there after 2 years and I simply sit them down and I explain how it works. I ask them if they are interested in a technical program then they won't be able to transfer to a four-year school. They don't pay attention. Even the ones that I've advised for a year still ask me why they have a certain class.

Phil has been advising student athletes for 7 years. He is also a department head, which entails advising other students as well as the student athletes. His number of advisees totals around 70 students of which around 30 of those are student athletes.

Most, if not all, of mine are already qualified for Division I out of high school, so I just make sure they don't drop any classes that could delay their graduation. They have an advising sheet that they follow. Most of my advisees are bright and they know what they want to be. I just got to make sure that they don't mess up.

Phil's responses about his advisees' academics are directly related to the sport that he advises, that being golf. Most, if not all, of the golf team members come from upper middle-class families and have been coached at home about the importance of education.

Gina, the softball coach, states,

I tell them of the opportunities at a four-year school the first day they arrive. Everyday our players compete with themselves academically; they challenge each other in the classroom. I'm their coach and advisor so by me being their advisor it is more effective because of the amount of contact that I have with the team. This partnership allows me to talk about what it takes to get to Division I on a regular basis; I drill it into their heads all the time.

Despite their well-meaning intentions, the advisors did not always provide the information that students felt they needed. Bridgett from the basketball team echoed the thoughts of others when she responded to being advised for transferability by saying, “She didn’t go over differences between D-1 and D-2. She didn’t tell me and I don’t know the difference. There should be some sort of area or a career center for athletes to help us transfer.”

Part of this deficiency is the inexperience of athletic advisors. Janet is new to advising athletes. She has been teaching math for over 20 years and just recently got in to advising student athletes after befriending the new basketball coach through church. She has really educated herself on transferability rules and is learning a tremendous amount of information from four-year school coaches who contact her about some of the Southern State players. Her overall sports knowledge is limited; sometimes Janet does not seem to grasp the idea of an athlete getting a Division I scholarship and the prestige it represents. Janet mentioned,

I haven’t been on the job long and started in January so the coaches are educating me on the importance of getting kids to Division I school. I guess it brings more prestige. It will make the school look better for four-year schools to send athletes here that don’t qualify at their school. The academically weak athletes sometimes come in late and can’t get transferable classes so they already start out behind. Some of these kids have just been passed through high school and our school and advisors need to step up and get these kids to understand the opportunities. The advisors really need to be their mentors too. It’s always good when they can see the sophomores signing scholarships in the spring, that usually opens their eyes a little and makes them work harder in the classroom.

But coaches rely on advisors to fulfill this crucial role. Dave had been coaching men’s golf at Southern State for 21 years, and his teams have finished nationally ranked in the top 10 about 80% of the time. His program has produced several professional players. Dave stresses academics more than athletics. He explained,

In my recruiting process, my goal is to sign players that want to get a college degree. I really don’t want kids that don’t want a college degree. So the kids that I’m after pretty much are making good grades in high with good parental support. We discuss getting a college degree when the athlete and parents come for a recruiting visit. Once I sign them

we have an academic advisor that takes over and we are on the same page and he also pushes the student athlete toward graduating from this school. He lays a plan for the student athlete to graduate from here.

Clara's concern was for the athlete. She noted that the school should inform the academically underprepared student athlete of the dilemma they face when having to take remedial classes and therefore start out behind in their pursuit of graduating in 2 years. Clara concluded,

We really need a filter to come in for the advisors to determine here's the type of diploma they have, this is what he made on his placement test, and these are the classes that he's been placed in and then the advisor can determine how long it's going to take him or her to graduate.

Dr. Sims, the Dean who supervises the athletics programs, has heard the battles about offering summer school scholarships for almost 3 years. However, she does not have a positive outlook on the abilities of the student athletes to graduate if given some extra help in the form of a summer scholarship. Dr. Sims stated,

Yes, I think it would be great for students to further their education. The other side of the coin is that do we expect them to only take about 12 hours or so [during the fall and spring semesters] and just barely squeak by when they're in school and supposed to be here and then wait until the summer and make up the stuff?

Louis, the women's basketball coach, contended,

My goal is to have all of my athletes be eligible to attend a Division I school but the only thing holding them back would be their athletic ability. If they're eligible to attend a D-I school that means they have done what is necessary academically to succeed at this school and open more doors for them. My first goal is their education.

Louis stresses this responsibility to students and their families:

I tell parents that I have an obligation to them to have the athletes get it done academically. If basketball becomes a problem then we'll put basketball on the side to have them catch up in the classroom. I put them in study halls and tutoring labs when they are having trouble academically. It's amazing what results you can get when you take their sport away from them for an hour a day to catch up academically. They usually respond very positively and get back on the court as soon as possible. It enhances their study habits.

Doc is in his first year at Southern State coaching volleyball after successful high school stints in the surrounding area. He is still learning the ropes of junior college athletics including recruiting and compliance:

We put them in the classes that will keep them on track to graduate. I'm big on academics. Our team goals are for each team member to have a 3.75 grade point average. If they maintain that GPA, then I know they are doing something right, which usually translates into being successful on the court. Our kids come in to take their placement tests and are placed in care of our team advisor. We try to get everything done during the summer because we start practice August the first. The advisor puts them in the right classes. We are always striving for graduation. We make sure they are taking the correct classes. Our advisor does a great job with them.

Ronny battles for recruits in the 16-team league and occasionally with colleges in the surrounding states. He strongly believes in getting an education and preparing his kids for a chance at a Division I scholarship. He also understands the plight of the academically underprepared student athlete. He summarized,

A lot of people look at junior college as just an easy way out. It's not an easy way out. Everybody should be given a chance at an education. If it starts out at a junior college then they should be able to move on to a four-year school and get a degree.

Some coaches were able to provide support for their athletes, and to empower them related to transferability. Pablo, a shortstop on the baseball team, explained,

Coach doesn't say much about going to a Division I school but we know he's pushing us in that direction. Some guys come here for a year to try to play pro ball. Coach tells us to make our own goals. Like if you want to play Division I then make that your goal. He makes sure we're academically ready for Division I.

Some advisors shared this approach. Gina, the softball coach, also doubles as the team academic advisor.

I do the advising and I tell them what they have to do to graduate. A lot of them come in during the summer before they start their freshman year and take sometimes 18 or 19 hours to make sure that they will have enough credits to graduate. They know that to graduate on time they will have to take summer school. They also take the placement and tests and some have to take remedial classes.

Donna, the administrative assistant for the athletic department, is also an advocate for the academically underprepared student athlete and believes the school could do more to help these students:

We should at least get them [the students] 6 hours of summer school if not more to catch up and stay on track,” Two summers would be best. When they sign the scholarship it could say on it “fall/spring” and “summer,” but the school just types in “fall and spring” and leaves out “summer.” The national office allows summer scholarships. They put the athletes in an “honors” program for the summer, which puts them in the pool with all of the other students who want to attend summer school. So who is to know if they will be given a scholarship or not over the summer?

But the advisor’s lack of knowledge also impacted the student experience. Steve, the track coach, was concerned about the general knowledge of the student athlete in regard to knowing exactly what they have to do in order to graduate on time:

The coaches need to tell them, the academic advisors need to tell them, the athletic department needs to tell them, and they need to see it on a checklist, on a board. I think maybe a checklist will be the best way to make them understand; something that they can carry with them.

Sam, the young energetic men’s basketball coach, added,

The kids here want to get a scholarship to a Division I school, at least my kids do, so you have to tell them exactly what to do in order for them to get ready for transferring to Division I. They want to play on television one day because that’s the only reason they’re here is to get that chance. They should hear that information from the athletic director, the coach, the vice-president--but the athletic director and the coach will have a better feel for their situation, hitting home with them about what you got to get done while you’re here.

Louis has been coaching women’s basketball at Southern State for 22 years and will be retiring soon with four state championships to his credit. This cowboy boot-wearing coach is tough on his athletes on and off the court. His foot-stomping, yelling tirades are legendary throughout the league, but he puts it all aside after the game and grudgingly accepts his few defeats with class. The girls seem to have a love/hate relationship with him. They complain of tough practices and senseless punishment drills for sloppy play but they will absolutely run

through the proverbial wall for him. They know he demands their best effort on and off the court as evidenced by a very successful graduation rate. Louis builds his team mostly from the seven-county service area sometimes dotted with students from the bordering states. His hard-nosed approach is perfect for the caliber of athlete from this rural area.

Louis believes athletic orientation is a time to educate the student athlete on what it takes to graduate and teach the student athletes transfer guidelines since many attend Southern State with a goal to eventually transfer. He explained:

If we had a booklet of some sort explaining what it takes to transfer to Division I, Division II, and so on. By having a booklet it would remove some of the liability of what the coach said and what the athletes heard, it would have the rules clearly in front of them if they had a booklet for them to constantly look at. There should be more said at athletic orientation about what is expected of a student athlete and what it takes for them to move on.

A Pervasive Lack of Knowledge of Transferability Rules Persist on Campus with no Unified Response for Clarification

The academically underprepared student athlete faces a plethora of obstacles when attending college for the first time. The subject of educating these student athletes on their transferability and graduation requirements would seemingly be at the forefront upon their arrival.

Lucas, from the basketball team, stated,

We need a lot more education on that actually. Sometimes I'm not sure what I need or what classes to take. It needs to be more organized for sure. Coach just says "go to class and do your work, talk to your teachers and we'll help you get a scholarship." The advisor should know the D-I rules. You don't want them to lead you down the wrong road toward transferring classes.

Ricky, also a men's basketball player, concluded,

There should be some seminars. One person ought to sit down and talk to us about transferring and stuff. It is hard coming in as a freshman coming in academically, coming

in on your own and stuff without anyone helping you . . . talk about what going on, seeing all this new stuff. Kind of have to learn on your own or sometimes from teammates who have been here for a year.

Steve, the track coach, has hopes for his student athletes to attend four-year schools and many do go on to four-year schools, but he feels that more education for the academically underprepared student athletes is needed:

I think it needs to be made crystal clear to them the differences between Division I and Division II, and most don't understand the timeline and just because they are taking classes they think they are making progress. JUCO athletes are here for a reason and some would have already been to Division I if they had had a real clear explanation, and I mean repeatedly, put before them. It's just like here, some athletes are taking remedial English and all is fine, "I'll be outta here in 2 years headed to D-1." And they won't be if they don't take enough hours.

Sam, the men's basketball coach, wants the best players he can find that have the ability to move on and play at the next level. "If they don't have the potential to play at the Division I level then we can't win here." The men's basketball advisor is Janet, who is somewhat new to advising athletes. In Sam's words, "Our advisor is learning from me and four-year coaches about transferability." Benny, the soccer coach, is also an advocate for completing a four-year degree but is not caught up in graduation rates for his players. He explained:

I've had numerous people transfer to a four-year school that are successful transfers. They want the numbers to reflect graduation, to show that they graduated. Kids can leave and still be a successful transfer. I don't think high GPA's as successful. I think transfer rates should be looked at more. High GPAs can be misleading.

Cathy, the baseball advisor, opined,

There should be a push to get this information to the athletes. If I were the athletic director I would do something about it and have some goals. There has never been that kind of structure and I don't know why there never has been. I give my card to all the parents of the athletes in case they have any questions.

Jason, from the soccer team, seemed amazed at the lack of education on transferability and graduation that he has gotten from the school when he said, "There should be some

education on what it takes to get to D-I or D-II. I don't know crap about what it takes to graduate." Sophie, the shortstop on the softball team added, "Somebody should tell us what it takes to graduate. Maybe they should put us in smaller groups at orientation with the athletes. I wouldn't have asked a question because there were so many people there."

Trudy, also from the softball team, believes that several people should be educated on teaching them the nuances of transferability and graduation as she answered,

The coaches and advisors and players should at least have an idea on where to find out about transferring. If I had to find out some detailed rules on transferring I'd go to my advisor. Some kind of support center for athletes would be great, anything to help us graduate.

Janet, who serves as the men's basketball advisor, is focused on the level of education about transfer guidelines that each advisor needs to be aware of. She stated,

Not really anything. I've been learning the most about athletes transferring from the assistant coach and the head coach. We need to address what it takes to transfer or graduate early on, on their first visit to the advisor. We need more education on transfer rules. All advisors need transfer rules information.

Mike, the lanky pitcher with aspirations of playing in the professional ranks one day, stated, "We need to have transfer information and a support center for athletes that have all the transferring information. That would help." Volleyball player Tootie endorses the athletic department as the mouthpiece to get the word out about transferability and graduation. "There should be someone in the athletic department that knows this stuff. I don't even know where the athletic department is."

Tanika from the women's track team explained, "There should be some sort of area or a career center for athletes to help us transfer." Robert, a member of the men's track team responded, "The athletic director should tell us about transferring or someone who has gone to school here and transferred and already gone through the process."

Clara said of her concerns about Southern State getting the transfer information in the hands of the advisors:

As far getting something from the school? We don't really get anything about transfer guidelines. If you have a good [academically] sophomore, then they kind of become a mentor to the other guys on the team. They really listen to their peers. So if you have a good sophomore class that's making good grades the freshman class will turn out the same way.

Phil said,

They've never really brought up graduation rates or transfer information. The athletic department never emphasizes graduating. They only talk about classes for the freshmen. The Dean should meet with the academic advisors more often. There could be more involvement but they could screw it up because of the lack of knowledge. I've never heard anything from the athletic department about increasing graduation rates. The Dean wants better grad rates but the administration is not helping. It's just lip service.

The softball coach and team advisor, Gina, was concerned about the lack of communication and departmental goals set forth by the administration regarding the well-being of the student athletes.

Since I'm their advisor I really don't know what, if any, information is given them by the school. I never get any information from the college to give to any of my students per se, like do this or do that. I think we're supposed to have advisor meetings but we don't.

Dave, the golf coach, is concerned about the lack of people on campus that the athlete can go to about transfer information and guidelines. "The team advisor helps but as far as someone on campus knowing about the transferability of athletes, I don't know of anybody that can help them. I think it would great if all the student athletes knew the rules."

Clint, the laid back assistant baseball coach, is also concerned about the availability of transfer information meted out to the student athletes:

When a coach calls to express interest in one of our athletes, then the only information they (student athlete) will get is from that particular school. But as far as getting any information from our school, there are no information forms, booklet, sheets, nothing academically. Hopefully the advisor will help them out. Our advisor will look at the information that has been sent to the player from a four-year school and the advisor may

add something to the schedule to get him ready to transfer to that school. Our advisor should give them transfer rules.

Doc, the women's volleyball coach, was very concerned in his response and somewhat taken aback by the lack of information coming from the athletic department regarding transfer guidelines:

No, I've never gotten any kind of information related to that. It would be helpful if we did have some sort of handbook that would address the transfer guidelines. I think it would help a lot. I think we should get some information, maybe have an area for supporting the athletes. Like maybe an athletic center for supporting athletes, maybe with a tutoring lab or some information about what it takes for athletes to transfer to four-year schools . . . have some brochures from schools so the athletes can look at them. I think that would be a good idea.

Ronny, the Junior College Hall of Fame inductee and baseball coach for 20 years, has concerns similar to the other coaches: the lack of a comprehensive education program about transfer guidelines and graduation guidelines:

It usually comes from me or our advisor any information that our athletes get. If we had a handbook of some sort I could just give to the athletes, they could study it themselves. I don't want an athlete coming to me in their last semester and wondering why they're not going to graduate and asking me about something they heard from me. By having a handbook or some guidelines for them they would have to take some responsibility for their transferability. I usually take care of the athletic side of transferring athletes and our advisor handles the academic side.

Gina, the highly successful softball coach, echoed the sentiments of the other coaches in her response while giving thoughts on a remedy to this issue:

The athletic department assistant keeps us up to date on eligibility issues but as far as keeping them in line to graduate, we don't. Transfer rules should be done early, earlier than athletic orientation. All athletes should be on campus sooner. That way everyone will get a competitive schedule. Not getting here sooner is coaches' faults.

Benny, the men's soccer coach in only his third year, agreed with the other coaches and also believes there should be materials available for transfer and graduation guidelines offered to the student athletes as he responded, "We should be educated on it; there should be a document."

The downside of the academically underprepared student athlete is the possibility that they enter college having to take remedial or developmental classes. These classes will not transfer to four-year schools and thus put the academically underprepared student behind in the allotted timeframe of the athletic scholarship at Southern State, which is four semesters.

The following statements were taken from interviews from the three people responsible for athletic oversight at Southern State: Dr. Sims, overseer of athletics, Ronny, the athletic director/baseball coach, and Donna, the athletic department assistant. This line of questioning dealt with the idea of issuing summer scholarships (waivers) to the academically underprepared student athletes in order to keep them on track to graduate in May of their sophomore year. By graduating in May, the opportunities for four-year scholarships would increase because some institutions will not want to dedicate a scholarship to a student athlete who has to attend summer school at the risk of them not completing their coursework.

Dr. Sims, the Dean of Students who oversees athletics, responded to this line of questioning thusly,

You really don't have any guarantee that they're going to come back the next fall if we give them summer scholarships after their freshmen year. So you're investing in someone that might take the scholarship and transfer away. The other way is to invest in them is they might stay if they need the three classes to graduate and that is what they would get if they stay their sophomore year. I guess it's the unknown. I mean it's got two sides to the coin.

Ronny, the athletic director/baseball coach, seemed aggravated and tired in his answer when he responded this way:

It's aggravating. We should help them sooner. If we're in the business to help these students then we should help them all the time not some of the time. It's what we do; it's what education is all about, helping the kids succeed. They should be given every opportunity to succeed. They're putting their future in our hands so we should be able to help them from day one, and if they are on scholarship then they should be on scholarship the whole time.

Donna, the athletic department coordinator, believes in helping those athletes who want to be helped as she explained:

I think we should help them either year or both years. I think we're glad to have them graduate at the end of the summer of their sophomore year rather than to not have them at all, maybe that's not the time to do it. But we should help them after their freshman year. But after their freshman year and they figure out that they can't graduate on time then someone should be on top of that to help them out in the summers. You have to make sure the kid is trying in the classroom and they're doing everything they can to make it and maybe just getting by making it with a "C" average then we should help them. But the kids that aren't trying and making bad grades in the fall and spring then they don't deserve a summer scholarship. The school ought to want to help them finish their degree before their sophomore year.

The ideal opportunity to deal with graduation and transferability guidelines would be during athletic orientation. At Southern State, athletic orientation takes place during the first day or week of the fall semester.

Lucas, a basketball player, did not learn much from athletic orientation. When asked what he received from the experience, he replied, "Nothing really. They didn't really say anything about academics much. They had somebody up there that said 'don't drink.' They should at least know why we're there and where we are headed and not go into school blind." Mike, another men's basketball player, responded about athletic orientation thusly: "I didn't get anything out of it academically or athletically. I was half asleep. It looked like a pep rally. We got to see all the girl athletes but it was boring." Jason, of the soccer team, almost laughed when he said what he learned from athletic orientation: "The only thing I got was don't do drugs." Duke, a fellow soccer player, echoed Jason's sentiments as he responded, "They just said 'don't do drugs' and 'keep your grades up.'"

Morgan, a student athlete, believes that athletic orientation should be easier to understand what exactly the message is that the school is trying to send to the student athletes. She stated,

It was a lot of info at one time. I think a lot times if you have a question you will figure out where to go to get answers . . . a lot of stuff thrown at us at once. It was ok. I didn't really pay attention because it was the first day.

Meredith from the women's basketball team shrugged as she answered, "They didn't tell us anything about going to four-year schools and transfers." Heather believes more organization would help the athletes to understand the information. She said, "The school should suggest something about coming by someone's office later to find out more. Maybe if they talked to us one on one would be better. Most of my teammates want to go to a four-year school."

Sherri seemed disheartened about athletic orientation and the opportunity that Southern State has to educate the athlete on transferability and graduation while having all the athletes in one room. "There was nothing about transferring to different levels . . . just a lot of paperwork. Everybody talked about the same things." Bridget thought the whole athletic orientation was a joke and she got nothing from the session: "There was a lot of people in there talking, too many people. I wish we could go over that information in smaller groups."

Tootie's response was about the same as the others and was somewhat skeptical about asking a question in the midst of such a large group of people in her first day at college: "There should have been smaller groups to discuss transferring . . . might help motivate people to do good in class. I wasn't about to raise my hand and ask a question in that big of a group." Tanika said,

I got nothing, really. I said to myself 'Why am I here?' If someone is just up there talking about nothing then it's boring. It would be easier to understand in a smaller group. In big groups no one will ask questions about anything, they don't want to look stupid.

Chip didn't know anything about athletic orientation as he stated, "I missed athletic orientation." Robert from the track team got some information out of athletic orientation but left the door open for improvement in the future:

I learned about this being our second chance, be a student before an athlete and try to beat your opponent. We should have learned about what it takes to graduate because some teams don't know. They should have told us about transferring to four-year schools. I don't know anything now about the differences.

Denise from the women's track team remembers, "They just told us to go to class. They could have told us about how to transfer to four-year schools." Tanika remembered the session differently from Denise: "They didn't say anything about transferring." Tootie summed up the majority when she simply replied, "I don't even remember what they said."

Cathy, who works as the baseball team advisor, said,

It would be great if we had more informational meetings. I'm not sure how much information they're getting from their coaches. They don't get anything about it at athletic orientation. There needs to be one person overseeing all of the athletics and transferability questions. Meeting with athletes more often or maybe meeting with them as a team.

Rita, an advisor, stated,

They possibly could give information about transferring at an athletic orientation but not in one big group like they do now but possibly breaking down into smaller groups would be best. They don't get much from athletic orientation as it is now. I think small groups would be better. Have the athletes rotate, set up stations. They could get one-on-one or say in groups of 20 and we could talk about what it takes to get into division I schools, or NCAA transfer rules, what it takes to graduate, things like that. They just don't know where to ask these kinds of questions. It's usually just word of mouth.

Phil, the advisor for the golf team, shook his head during his response to this line of questioning:

The athletic orientation that we have in place now doesn't make sense. It's not conducted at the right time. It's the day before classes start. They don't say much about graduating and they don't say anything about transferring. The athletes don't get anything on transferring guidelines. They should break out the freshmen athletes for more orientation so they can get some things explained to them instead of having them in a group of about 150. Nobody will raise their hand and ask a question in a group that big, especially a freshman on the first day of college.

Gina, the softball coach and advisor, chimed in with her thoughts thusly,

Someone needs to be telling these athletes “this is what you have to do to go to an NAIA school, or you have to have this to go to a Division II school, or this to go to a Division I school.” Let them know what their options are and what we’re going to do to help get them there. That’s never discussed unless it comes from me.

Sam seemed numb in his statement about athletic orientation when he stated, “At this past athletic orientation they got nothing. I think they mentioned what you had to do to stay eligible.” Dave mentioned, “I was there but I don’t remember anything about that. It was mostly telling them [the student athletes] how happy they were to have them here.”

Clint, the assistant baseball coach, responded curtly about what information was given to the student athletes about transfer and graduation guidelines:

Nothing. . . . They just say stuff like “go to class.” Transferring should be addressed with someone showing a power point to show some stats on transfers to four-year year schools, and D-I schools. I don’t think the kids understand transferability. I think most of the kids think that they’re here and they’re looked down on academically.

Doc answered the same as Clint did when asked about the information received by the student athletes concerning transfer and graduation information, “Nothing. . . . They didn’t mention anything about what it takes to transfer to a four-year school. I don’t think they talked about academics at all. At least I don’t remember if they did.” Ronny said,

There isn’t anything given to them. There should and we should meet with athletes as a group and all athletes should meet with advisors and coaches. I think a tutoring lab for athletes would be good. If the coaches do their part they emphasize the academics.

Gina’s expressionless look about athletic orientation summed up her response before she even responded to the missed opportunities of having all the athletes in the same room for perhaps the only time while at Southern State:

There was nothing said about academics or graduation or that we want you to graduate from this school. They say that we have all these offices on campus that you can go to for assistance like financial aid and admissions. They did say there was a tutoring lab. They never said we will give you opportunities to go to summer school or we’ll help you get where you need to be when choosing a four-year school. Nothing was ever said during athletic orientation.

Benny's response to what information was communicated to the student athletes about transfer and graduation information was about the same as the other coaches:

Nothing. . . . I think those issues should be addressed, the whole orientation process should be revamped. Now it's just an overview of our school as a whole. They flash up on a screen of names of people that work here but would be more effective if the athletes were separated into small groups so it would sink in, be more productive, and then you talk about graduation rates.

Summary

This study engaged student athletes, academic advisors, coaches, and administrators for the benefit of understanding different attitudes and concerns about the plight of the academically underprepared student athlete at the community college. The responses were both honest and forthright simply because this issue has never been properly addressed at Southern State Community College. All participants felt a need to get some of their concerns and comments "off their chest" to hopefully use this information as a learning tool one day. The school personnel all have concerns for the academically underprepared student athlete and would do everything in their power to help their cause. They realize the awkwardness of being a college freshman, but they are now in a position to assist these freshmen and mold them into successful adults. The biggest concerns were the different opinions of the school personnel attempting to better prepare the academically underprepared student athlete. These differences were the main factors of the interview responses. The differences of the responses of the student athletes, the academic advisors, the coaches, and the administrators about transferability and graduation of the academically underprepared student athlete are what need to be addressed as a unit and not four different entities.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the experiences of academically underprepared first-year community college student athletes as well as their experiences related to transferability and NCAA Division I athletic programs. An increased awareness of transferability rules by the academic advising staff and the student athletes will only enhance the educational experience and involvement for the students. Additionally, the increased awareness of the prospects of transferability to the NCAA Division I level will directly impact the graduation rates of the underprepared community college student athlete. The results of the qualitative interviews also established the possible impact of a more involved advising program on a community college campus for first-year student athletes, specifically student athletes at Southern State Community College. An advising program with the familiarity of transferability rules could improve student involvement, graduation rates, and transferability to four-year institutions among the student athletes at Southern State.

Currently there are few studies emphasizing the impact of athletic advising programs at the community college level. Most research is dedicated to academic advising at the four-year institution. Many student athletes who attend community college may be academically underprepared and the need for intensive advising to assure transferability for these academically at-risk student athletes may be welcomed. The most important aspect of this study is the first-year community college student athlete. The student athlete carries the burden of producing “on

and off the court,” which entails not only being attentive to coursework, but also athletically successful. This burden is a difficult one.

Students who intend to continue their athletic career after high school fall into one of two categories: qualifiers and non-qualifiers. Non-qualifiers can enroll in a community college with the hope of meeting NCAA criteria to transfer and compete by completing 48 transferable units with an associate’s degree as well as a minimum of a 2.0 grade point average in a two-year period. Many of these student athletes enter community college unprepared for the rigors of higher education and, of particular importance to academic advisors in community colleges, are students who are deemed to be of “academically underprepared” status. In this dissertation, I define the term “academically underprepared” student athletes as individuals who did not make the NCAA academic qualifying standards leaving high school and thusly are continuing their athletic and academic careers at a two-year college.

The community college student athlete now faces new transfer rules mandated by the NCAA in regard to transferring and should be educated on the qualifications for a successful transfer during the initial contact with academic advisors. The accuracy and involvement of the athletic academic advisor are paramount to assure the access of community college student athletes to continuing progress at a four-year college or university, particularly when the student desires to continue their athletic career. My dissertation also examines the academic advising in relation to student athlete retention, persistence, and knowledge of transfer guidelines while attending the two-year community college.

Student athletes attending and competing at a two-year community college often aspire to compete their last 2 years at a Division I four-year college or university. The impact of advising community college athletes can influence their ability to transfer to an NCAA Division I

institution. For example, the process of taking remedial courses and graduating from a community college combined with meeting the demands of the new NCAA transfer guidelines needs to actively involve the academic advisor. In this dissertation, I focused on the experiences of academically underprepared community college student athletes with academic advising. I considered three research questions:

1. What is the impact of academic advising on community college student athletes who aspire to transfer to NCAA Division I institutions?

2. How is the student athlete educated in regard to transferability to NCAA Division I institutions?

3. How is the student athlete being assured that academic advisors are knowledgeable of transfer guidelines to NCAA Division I institutions?

In this study, the academically underprepared first-year student athletes at Southern State were interviewed at the beginning of the fall 2008 semester. I began the study by making initial contact with their team's academic advisor. Also interviewed were the athletic team coaches, academic advisors for the student athletes, and the administrative personnel who served as the athletic department. The range of responses of the student athletes seem to indicate a dissonance between the academically underprepared student athlete's pursuit of a four-year school athletic scholarship and clarity (or lack of) of academic advising for these athletes.

In this chapter, I respond to each of the research questions that guided this study. I also provide conclusions based on my findings as well as suggested implications for Southern State and other community colleges. I conclude with areas of future research related to community college athletes and transferability to NCAA Division I institutions.

What Is the Impact of Academic Advising on Community College Student Athletes Who Aspire to Transfer to NCAA Division I Institutions?

The academically underprepared freshman student athlete that begins his or her college education at a two-year college may sometimes be faced with numerous, unfamiliar obstacles. These obstacles are unique to the transition to postsecondary education; combined with the challenge of achieving success as the athlete, the student must also negotiate success in the classroom. These issues range from a sense of belonging, being away from home for the first time, the pressure to seek playing time, and for the first-generation student, the added pressure of educational success. These obstacles may be mitigated by the two-year institution through effective counseling, introduction of student involvement activities, and, especially, an effective academic advising program for these academically underprepared student athletes. Attrition rates among student athletes, along with newly established transfer guidelines by the NCAA, increase the importance of athletic academic advisors.

Many of the academically underprepared student athletes in this study (24 of 30) are the first persons in their families to arrive at college directly after high school as full-time students. With these percentages of first-generation students, the significant role of academic advising is paramount to achieving their goals of graduating and continuing at a four-year institution on athletic scholarships. One problem that was exposed during the interviews was the lack of uniformity of academic advising at Southern State relating to graduation and successful transfer to NCAA Division I institutions. Seemingly, the academic advisors for the student athletes act independently of any institutional or NCAA guidelines in regard to scheduling incoming freshmen student athletes for coursework, or for advising them related to professional goals.

In some cases, these student athletes decide on coming to a two-year college after exhausting all efforts to be eligible for an NCAA Division I program. In these situations, the

student athlete will sometimes arrive on the first day of classes, and therefore his or her schedule may be reduced to one that will not put him or her on track to graduate within the four-semester athletic scholarship. Due to the late arrival, most often the classes that are needed for graduation are full, and therefore the student athlete may have to take classes that will not count toward transfer to a four-year school or not be part of the requirements for his or her major. Often these same community college student athletes are required to take remedial courses in English, reading, mathematics, or a combination of all three.

The athletic scholarship is good for one academic year (9 months) and does not include summer school. At Southern State Community College, the athletic scholarship is renewed for the second year at the total discretion of the coach of the respective sport. Many of the academic advisors for the athletes, according to their responses, felt that they were put in awkward positions by having to tell the academically underprepared student athlete that a summer school session would be needed for him or her to graduate within the timeframe of the athletic scholarship. To reiterate, most of the student athletes interviewed want to play at the NCAA Division I level and must graduate from a NJCAA two-year institution to be eligible for the NCAA Division I school. By not catering to the needs and goals of the academically underprepared student athlete, the institution must be accountable.

These advisors realize that most of the athletes want to attend NCAA Division I institutions, and many of these advisors expressed their concerns and differences between what Southern State is not doing for these student athletes relative to fulfilling the goals of the academically underprepared student athletes. All advisors agreed that Southern State lacked in transfer education for themselves and the student athletes. The advisors also agreed that the academically underprepared student athletes were sometimes misled about the availability of

summer school scholarships. At this time, the summer school scholarships are arbitrarily meted to few, if any, student athletes after their sophomore year. For the benefit of the student athletes, the advisors do not understand why athletes are not on scholarship during summer school. The advisors believed that the more education that they could receive about transferability guidelines, the better. Currently, the advisors feel as if they are explaining how academics and graduation exist to the student athletes, and the coaches should be the ones to explain this to the student athletes.

The advisors strongly believed that, if Southern State is concerned about graduation rates and fulfilling the goals of the student athletes (eligibility for an NCAA Division I institution), then the athlete should be given the ability to graduate in May of any year. By graduating in May, the four-year athletic scholarship opportunities increase because the four-year institution knows that the student athlete will be eligible to participate in their sport immediately in the fall. By delaying graduation through the summer, many four-year institutions will not take the chance of signing an athlete to a scholarship based on whether they will pass all the summer coursework.

How Is the Student Athlete Educated in Regard to Transferability to NCAA Division I Institutions?

The importance of the academic advisor for the student athlete takes on somewhat of a different aspect when the student athlete expresses interest in eventually attending an NCAA Division I level institution upon leaving the two-year college. In this instance, the academic advisor has to closely monitor the academically underprepared student athlete to make sure that every class will count toward transferring to the division I level. The student athlete cannot afford to take classes that will not transfer due to the fact that Southern State will not allow

student athletes to attend summer school on scholarship. The academic advisors, through their responses, believe that the institution should educate the student athlete on the transfer guidelines for four-year institutions. This responsibility was not solely perceived to be the advisors, but rather was attributed to the “institution.” A few of the advisors expressed concern that the scholarships are 1-year renewable scholarships, and the athletes sometimes are not invited back for their sophomore year based solely on athletic ability. The advisors feel that a student athlete in good academic standing should be asked back for his or her sophomore year. According to the advisors, the practice of releasing student athletes after 1 year reeks of a “win-at-all-costs” mentality, which makes the school look academically unfavorable.

Of the 30 academically underprepared student athletes interviewed, none were educated on transferability guidelines for NCAA Division I scholarships during their initial meeting with their advisors. Three student athletes registered for classes without having seen an advisor. When asked about their knowledge of transferring to an NCAA Division I institution, all 30 academically underprepared student athletes similarly responded about having no knowledge of such guidelines. This lack of response by the group of student athlete participants would indicate a lack of an overall institutional format for educating the academically underprepared student athlete about transferability.

The student athletes also expressed a concern about the lack of a centralized athletic department. When asked if they knew where to go to get transfer information, all 30 student athletes responded by stating that they did not know. A vast majority neither knew who the athletic director was nor the athletic director’s assistant. The students expressed a deep concern about where they would get transfer information in the future and seemed disappointed that

Southern State had not educated them more on transferability as soon as they met with their academic advisors.

A majority of the advisors were concerned that the student athletes were not educated on the circumstances of having to take remedial classes, which could delay their graduation date. The advisors feel that the coaches may not be explaining in detail to the student athletes the situation that can arise by delaying graduation dates and the availability of summer school scholarships to keep the athletes on track to graduate on time. The advisors did not want the responsibility of educating the student athletes on the possibility of not graduating on time, or at least within the timeframe of the Southern State athletic scholarship (four semesters), when it could be explained by the recruiting coach. Faced with multiple responsibilities across the institution, the advisors felt that some issues should be addressed by the student's coach. The academic advisor should discuss options on the issue of graduating within the timeframe of 2 years because student athletes should know all options at the beginning of their academic careers at Southern State. The student athletes are rarely, if ever, educated on the lack of athletic scholarship availability for the summers.

The coaches also responded to questions regarding the lack of education about the transfer process for student athletes. These coaches realize that most of the athletes want to attend NCAA Division I schools, and many of these coaches expressed their concerns and differences between what the institution is not doing for these student athletes relative to fulfilling the goals of the academically underprepared student athletes. All of the coaches want the availability of summer scholarships but are told by the administration that they are not readily available. According to the coaches, this Southern State policy damages their recruiting efforts when other schools in the system can offer summer school scholarships. The coaches ask

for explanations about summer scholarships at their meetings with the administration but are never really given an answer.

All of the coaches expressed a deep desire to have all of their athletes eligible for Division I scholarships but are puzzled by the lack of summer school scholarships for their athletes, which could increase the graduation rates among athletes. The coaches also hear from the administration that they need to increase graduation rates, yet they are not being helped due to the lack of summer school scholarships. As part of their recruiting speeches, the coaches tell the athletes that if they work hard, they can graduate, but usually the topic of transferring to a four-year school is discussed during their sophomore year. The problem for the academically underprepared student athletes is that by the time their sophomore year arrives, they realize that they will have to attend a summer school session. The coaches have witnessed the disappointment in scores of athletes through the years when finding out they are not graduating on time. Based on these instances, the researcher concludes that some coaches are not fully educating the academically underprepared student athletes on the pitfalls of having to take remedial courses and not having summer scholarships available for them to stay on course to graduate in the spring semester.

The researcher also found that if the student athlete's wishes are to compete at the NCAA Division I level, the advisors were not counseling the academically underprepared student athlete about options other than NCAA Division I. If a student athlete has to enroll in remedial (or developmental) classes, then he or she will more than likely not be able to meet his or her athletic goals because of the inability to graduate in 2 years. Therefore, it is not only pertinent but prudent that the academic institution put forth every effort and all available information for the academically underprepared student athlete to become acquainted with the rules and

guidelines concerning transferring and graduation. Two of the advisors were told by coaches to just keep the athletes academically eligible and not worry about graduation. One advisor had over 80 athletes to advise and wished she had more time to fully explain transfer guidelines but was simply overwhelmed.

Also a matter of concern for the academically underprepared community college student athlete is the transfer process that the student athlete must complete in order to continue to participate in their sport at a four-year institution. In order to transfer, the community college student athlete must not only meet the requirements of eligibility to play while at the community college, but they also must prepare for eligibility at the four-year college or university. Since a community college student athlete is only eligible to participate for two seasons of competition, the courses he or she takes during the first year are crucial in determining an eligibility status upon transfer.

How Is the Student Athlete Being Assured that Academic Advisors are Knowledgeable of Transfer Guidelines to NCAA Division I Institutions?

At the time of this study, Southern State has never had an established protocol focused on educating student athletes and academic advisors on transferability guidelines for four-year institutions. In the past, just as the present, the student athlete has simply learned about transferability either through their coach on campus or through a coach recruiting them from a four-year school.

The academically underprepared freshman student athlete should be educated on transferability by their respective coach or by the athletic department personnel upon arriving at Southern State. Currently, according to the responses of the student athletes, academic advisors,

coaches, and athletic department personnel, there is not a standardized agenda for educating the student athletes or the academic advisors for student athletes on transfer guidelines.

Perhaps the most detrimental aspect of this line of questioning posed to the academically underprepared student athlete was the loss of trustworthiness between the student athlete and Southern State. This cohort of student athletes arrived at college for the first time and did not know how to seek answers to their questions, according to their responses in the study. These student athletes have put their trust in a few Southern State personnel and coaches to explain to them the nuances of college academics and the requirements they must fulfill in order to graduate. According to the student athletes, they are not told about graduation requirements, much less about transferability requirements upon arrival at Southern State. None of the student athletes interviewed had a checklist of sorts concerning transfer rules even after expressing their desire to attend an NCAA Division I institution during the recruiting process. Some of the athletes did mention that they were given a checklist about graduation requirements, but only one or two of the athletes could actually remember what they had done with that paper. This lack of concern by Southern State is an indication that there is a need for an athletic department policy to address first-year student athletes concerning graduation and transfer requirements.

The athletic administration should be the foundation for the total success of the athletic programs at the two-year college level. Southern State has the largest number of athletic teams in the ACCC (Alabama Community College Conference), and the facilities, by far, outshine any others within the state member institutions. Therefore, with the obvious importance placed on athletics, the school itself should carry the banner for graduation rates and sending athletes to the NCAA Division I level or at least getting them qualified for the Division I level.

The coaches have also expressed a desire for those involved in the athletic department to be more knowledgeable of each team's sport, which would make for easier communications for some of the requests made from each coach. In their opinion, the athletic department would run more smoothly if perhaps each person involved had a better understanding of each sport so as to understand the nuances of each team's needs. At this time, the baseball coach/athletic director is the only person in the athletic administration knowledgeable of the sports teams collectively. In the past at Southern State, there has never been one person who has assumed leadership of the athletic department. With the current situation and different locations of the athletic department staff, it can be easy to deflect answers to one of the other staff members and thusly begin the complex labyrinth of finding "who makes the decisions."

Within the context of this dissertation, the "Administration" consists of the Dean of Students, who oversees athletics, the Athletic Director (also the baseball coach), and the administrative assistant to the athletic department (who also has duties with the on-campus advising lab). Each of these administrative positions has duties, in addition to athletics, which has led to some animosity by the coaches who want quick answers for various questions ranging from eligibility, compliance, travel, scheduling, and budgetary. However, none of the athletic department administrators or personnel address the issue of graduation and transferability to NCAA Division I schools to the student athletes, the coaches, or the academic advisors.

The academic advisors, according to their responses, usually try to educate themselves about transferability issues. They responded in the interviews about calling coaches at four-year schools and looking up information via the internet concerning transfer rules. The advisors have never had a meeting with school administrators or athletic department personnel concerning

transferability issues or guidelines. All of the advisors agreed that there should be some education on transferability.

Every advisor also mentioned that they are not given any goal to set for graduating athletes. According to the advisors, the advising process is strictly up to them concerning scheduling athletes. When asked if they ever receive any feedback from the administration about graduating athletes, they all responded with a resounding “no.” The advisors all take their roles as academic advisors very seriously, but they also responded by saying that they get no feedback on graduation rates of athletes. Neither the advisors nor the Dean overseeing athletics knew the graduation rates of the athletes. The researcher found that one year prior to this study the graduation rate of athletes was around 25%. The coaches and advisors found the situation odd that more emphasis is not placed on graduating athletes. The coaches stated that they are told they need to improve graduation rates, but nothing is ever done about the situation. At Southern State, it is simply the hard work by the academic advisors and coaches to prepare the academically underprepared athletes to graduate.

Clearly the coaches, advisors, and student athletes are in support of a true “athletic department” situated in a centralized location. They all believe that a centralized athletic department would be beneficial as a place to go for questions concerning transferability and graduation. At this time, the athletic department personnel are in three different areas, with the athletic director spending most of his time on the field with his team. The athletic department oversees coaches and teams representing baseball, softball, soccer, volleyball, men’s golf, men’s and women’s track, men’s and women’s cross-country, and men’s and women’s basketball.

Perhaps the most frequent question raised by the coaching staff was about the lack of availability of summer scholarships for the student athletes. Not only would this help graduation

rates of student athletes, but these summer scholarships could also provide a better opportunity for the academically underprepared student athlete to complete graduation requirements while becoming academically eligible to compete at the NCAA Division I level. According to the coaches, this elusive subject has never been clarified for the coaches' benefit and thusly leaves the academically underprepared student athlete unable to graduate within the timeframe of the athletic scholarship and all but closes the door on their dreams of competing at the NCAA Division I level. This scenario was posed to the athletic department personnel and was met with differing answers, once again reinforcing uncertainty of leadership within the athletic department.

During the interviews, all of the student athletes responded positively about the opportunity for summer scholarships. The academically underprepared student athlete knows that a summer scholarship will keep them on track to graduate in May of their sophomore year. By graduating in May of their sophomore year, the student athletes' chances of receiving a scholarship offer from an NCAA Division I school will increase. The line of thinking is that a Division I coach will offer a scholarship to a graduating sophomore in May and thereby remove any academic obstacles that would delay enrollment at their respective four-year institution if the student athlete would have to attend summer school after their sophomore year.

In summary, Southern State Community College has a group of very hard working coaches who issue scholarships to athletes in order to make their teams better, but more importantly to give young adults a chance to graduate from college. If not for the athletic scholarship, some of the student athletes in this study would not have had the chance at a college education. The conscientious work done by the academic advisors proved to be the backbone of the college. These advisors, in some cases, are taking upon themselves the duty to graduate these

academically underprepared student athletes without any relief of the classroom workload. At Southern State, the academic advising is done by volunteers--those instructors who want to go the extra mile to change someone's life. Some are overwhelmed, but yet they seem to always find time for a kind word or a pat on the back for these student athletes and sometimes that makes a positive impact. The enthusiasm of all of the participants is what will make Southern State thrive and persevere for years to come.

Recommendations for Southern State

The athletic orientation for student athletes at Southern State has been somewhat of an ill-conceived summit for the student athletes with the goal of providing information on the nuances of life at Southern State. First, the athletic orientation takes place on the first day of classes. This in and of itself is self-defeating because the information needing to be conveyed to the student athlete has already been answered: what classes do I take, where do I live, how do I navigate the campus, etc. The student athletes and coaches are all herded into a 500-seat auditorium with little understanding of what will take place. After a series of introductions of coaches and advisors, the orientation turns into a 45-minute montage of pictures of people and buildings on the projection screen that seems more appropriate for a normal student orientation that would occur months or weeks before the beginning of classes and not the very first day of classes.

Second, athletic orientation should be about discussing the guidelines for graduating and information related to NCAA transfer rules since about 90% of the student athletes want to attend a four-year school after their time at Southern State. Contrary to this belief, the athletic orientation for student athletes at Southern State has become nothing more than a slide show projected to a big screen, which identifies the pictures of Southern State employees who may at

some time render their assistance to the student athletes, if needed. Most, if not all, questions that the student athlete has probably have been answered at this juncture.

The importance of an effective athletic experience and fulfilling the requirements to be eligible for transfer should be communicated to this captive audience of student athletes by reaching out to them about information regarding graduation requirements and transfer guidelines. The athletic orientation should not be a quick glimpse of school employees that the student athlete may never see again and much less remember the names. This is where Southern State falls short in establishing trustworthiness between school administrators and the student athlete. This is the opportunity to remove any questions or concerns for the student athlete relative to transferring to four-year schools and graduation requirements.

Most, if not all, of the academic advisors for athletes attended this past athletic orientation; those who did not attend felt that orientation for the student athlete is redundant and serves no purpose. All of the advisors also believed that the athletic orientation should be of utmost importance, which would enable school representatives to educate the student athletes on the pitfalls of non-compliance, academic discipline, usage of spare time to concentrate on studies, and the importance of attaining goals. The system that is currently in place at Southern State is seemingly ineffective, based on response from the student athletes, coaches, and advisors in attendance.

The athletic scholarship is good for one academic year (9 months) and does not include summer school. At Southern State Community College, the athletic scholarship is renewed for the second year at the total discretion of the coach of the respective sport. No explanation is required for not renewing athletic scholarships. Therefore, if the academically underprepared student athlete has as few as one remedial level course they may not be able to graduate within

the timeframe of the two-year scholarship (four semesters) without an additional semester.

Southern State hopefully will see the need for more summer scholarships for the academically underprepared student athlete and prepare them for graduation. By not catering to the needs and goals of the academically underprepared student athlete, the institution must be accountable.

The response by the Dean in charge of athletics, about issuance of summer scholarships to assist the academically underprepared student athlete to graduate on time, was somewhat confusing. The response was that she was not opposed to issuing summer scholarships if they helped the academically underprepared student athlete to graduate. The problem is that coaches and student athletes at Southern State need to establish a pattern of success even though the current administration does not offer summer scholarships to the student athletes.

Graduation rates may indeed increase if there were a summer scholarship allotment. Additionally, the Dean also stated in her response that if a summer scholarship were to be made available, it would be for deserving student athletes after their 2 years of eligibility. Seemingly, to keep the academically underprepared student athlete's graduation date on schedule, Southern State would issue summer scholarships for deserving student athletes after their freshman year. By issuing summer scholarships after the freshman year, the school could also see an influx of graduates among the pool of student athletes because the athletes would be more academically motivated knowing that they are on pace to graduate in May of their sophomore year.

Additionally, Southern State should establish an athletic department protocol for addressing the needs of the academically underprepared student athlete. These needs include more education for the academic advisors for athletes as well as more education for the student athletes. The coaches and athletic administration should also communicate about the goals of the student athlete so that Southern State may assist in the academic success of the athletes. The

researcher, through the interview process, learned that at the time of the present study there was not any form of worksheet or information pamphlet concerning transfer guidelines to four-year schools for student athletes. A booklet with transfer information and graduation requirements would seem to be a perfect fit for Southern State Community College athletics.

An establishment of a centralized athletic department seemed to be a popular response among all of the participants of the study. Currently, the athletic department personnel and coaches are located in different areas of the campus and the student athletes have nowhere to find out information concerning transfer guidelines.

A centralized athletic department would provide a leadership element that has been absent at Southern State. Without an athletic department in one office, the student athletes are without an information center providing assistance on issues such as eligibility, transferability, and academics. By having the Dean in charge of athletics, the athletic director, and the athletic department assistant in the same office area, the importance of athletics would at once become a more prominent entity for the student athletes and coaches alike. The student athletes would have a department that could process their paperwork and keep them abreast of any athletic department issues which may affect them. A centralized athletic department would also eliminate many of the organizational issues that have seemingly plagued the staff, students, and coaches for years. The dissemination of information to the coaches and student athletes would now come from one office as opposed to the current system of having to go through three different offices in different locations on campus. A centralized athletic department would simplify lines of communication that currently have coaches and student athletes scrambling for information pertaining to a plethora of issues including scheduled mandatory physicals, drug screenings, scheduling of classes, practice times, travel times, and counseling.

The athletic department at Southern State, in essence, needs a structural change and a cultural change. A strong athletic department should seek the academic and athletic goals of the student athletes and plot a course that will provide the student athletes with all of the resources available to make them successful. The academic and athletic goals of the academically underprepared student athletes currently are not met by Southern State. The athletic department leadership should take a more prominent role of leadership and fulfilling the goals of the underprepared student athletes if the academic goals of the underprepared should athletes are not being met. The academically underprepared student athlete needs more intrusive advising and career counseling than what is currently in place to make each athlete successful. A strong leader in the athletic department should provide a more goal-oriented student athlete and coaching staff that can become a strong unit both academically and athletically. Currently the only goal for coaches is to win games, while the goals for the athletes are unclear. The coaches want all of their athletes to be academically qualified for NCAA Division I schools; however, without some Southern State policy changes, the academically underprepared athlete will not attain his or her goal of meeting those qualifications. These changes must come from the administration and filter down through the coaching staff to the student athletes as a message that Southern State will provide the resources for the academically underprepared student athlete to succeed academically and athletically.

Athletics at Southern State has a lengthy and proud history of giving young people a chance at success. Through the years, Southern has produced professional athletes, Olympic medalists, Hall of Fame coaches, and National Championships, but the most important by-product of Southern State is the student. For those students who are able to participate in athletics, life lessons can be applied to each and every game or practice. For student athletes, life

lessons can be applied from many aspects of games or practices. Student athletes learn that it is not just about winning or losing but about positive forces and the formation of life-long friends and memories.

Limitations

This study was dedicated to the academically underprepared student athletes, the athletic team coaches, the academic advisors for student athletes, and the administrative personnel responsible for athletics at Southern State Community College. Southern State is but one of over 20 similar two-year institutions within this particular two-year college system. The student athletes who participated in this study were freshman student athletes considered to be “academically underprepared.” The term “academically underprepared” was defined by the researcher in an effort to narrow the field of participants to those student athletes who were enrolled in developmental or remedial classes or did not qualify for NCAA Division I institutions upon high school graduation. By having to take developmental or remedial classes, these student athletes would be unable to graduate within the timeframe of the Southern State athletic scholarship (4 semesters) because of additional class workload. Therefore, not all freshman student athletes were interviewed.

The researcher took the approach of open-ended questions for the participants to fully and adequately portray their truest feelings on a sensitive subject. Ordinarily the topic of this study would not be discussed openly perhaps inferring a level of distrust and anticipated trivial repercussions by “sounding off.” In the manner in which the interviews were conducted, all participants were protected of their privacy, but yet felt compelled to give their opinions in hopes of helping this student population. A survey could have been used to simplify the study;

however, the researcher felt the true story was from between the different groups of participants (student athletes, coaches, advisors, and administrators) and the level of knowledge pertinent to the subject at hand. A simple survey in this situation would have limited the responses and the study would not have had the depth of effectiveness I wanted. The open-ended questions will possibly lead to a complete evaluation of the process to assist the academically underprepared student athletes and their quest of one day participating at the Division I level.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further studies on the topic of advising and academically underprepared student athletes could be widespread using different cohorts. This same study could be used on sophomores at a particular institution to gain information about the successes or failures of academic advising of first-year athletes. Perhaps another study could be conducted at four-year institutions by interviewing or surveying junior college transfers who also participate in athletics at the NCAA Division I, II, III, or NAIA level.

Future research could also be more exclusive for the academic advisors and their plight in advising the academically underprepared student athletes at the two-year or four-year institutional level. Researching athletic administrators and their concerns of trying to increase graduation rates of academically underprepared student athletes could be an interesting study. The perspective of community college coaches and the pressures involved with keeping and graduating academically underprepared student athletes for 2 years would be insightful for those researchers interested in athletics.

Future research could include a study of how organizational, structural, and cultural change can affect student athletes. While not all athletic departments need all of the

aforementioned changes, it would be a worthwhile study to ascertain how it affects the academically underprepared athletes for the departments in need of any of these changes. Additionally, a nationwide study of how community colleges are providing for the academically underprepared student athlete and the graduation rates of these underprepared athletes should be of interest to any student in the field of sports management. Comparing graduation rates of student athletes who begin at community college and eventually graduate from NCAA Division I schools could also be of interest to researchers in the field of athletic administration.

Currently there is very little information about community student athletes and even less research on the academically underprepared student athletes at community colleges. The transferability issue of academically underprepared student athletes at community colleges and their successful transfer to an NCAA Division I institution would be an issue that all athletic directors at the community college level would take interest. A researcher could also study what community college athletic conferences produce the most transfers to NCAA Division I institutions and why some are more successful than others. One could surmise that if one community college conference produces more Division I prospects than others then they should be studied as to what makes them more successful. The success of producing transfers could be based on the overall philosophy of an athletic department. Perhaps changing cultural, structural, or academic philosophy of athletic departments has provided more resources at some community colleges that produce more NCAA Division I student athlete transfers.

Research has shown that student athletes in general need adequate academic and career counseling to be successful. A survey of what types of career counseling and academic advising are provided to the academically underprepared first-year community college student athletes would be an excellent study in understanding why some schools and conferences are producing

more NCAA student athlete transfers. Another study at issue could be the athletic scholarships structure of some community college conference members compared to other conferences and members. Further study could also provide insight into how the percentage of student athletes that transfer to Division I institutions could differ between the conferences with full scholarships that are offered student athletes for 12 months and those that offer only half scholarships and do not provide scholarships for 12 months.

Conclusion

The primary objectives of this study were to establish what knowledge the academically underprepared community college student athletes have of transferability to four-year institutions. In addition to the student athletes, the study also established the knowledge of transferability guidelines pertaining to academic advisors for athletes, coaches, and administrators. An overwhelming number of the student athletes interviewed want to continue their athletic careers at an NCAA Division I institution but are somewhat handicapped by the lack of general knowledge of transfer guidelines by the academic advisors, coaches, and administrators as a whole unit.

The academically underprepared student athlete beginning his or her academic career at a community college needs to be academically advised thoroughly about transferability issues at the onset of the first semester of college. The lack of communication and clarification of transferability information are at issue at Southern State as evidenced by the responses of the academically underprepared student athletes participating in this study. The majority of the student athletes interviewed never received verbal or written communication related to transferability issues and guidelines from the academic advisors or athletic department personnel.

Without this information, many of the academically underprepared will not graduate within the timeframe of the athletic scholarship and thusly miss the opportunity to be academically eligible for an NCAA Division I institution.

The biggest hurdle for the academically under prepared student athlete at Southern State is the inability to avoid remedial or developmental classes that do not transfer to four-year schools. To alleviate this problem, Southern State would need to allot summer school scholarships to these remedial students to keep them on track to graduate within the two-year period at Southern State. Presently, these scholarships are not given out to help these academically underprepared students graduate in a timely fashion.

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