

Evaluating Career Development Success in Student Athletes:
A Literature Review

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September 6, 2019

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Abstract

This literature review will examine student-athletes preparedness for career preparedness after they retire and graduate. After years of commitment, retirement from sport is expected, whether that is due to injury, personal reasons, or exhausted athletic eligibility. Utilizing career development programs where transferable skills are taught helps student-athletes' recognize their strengths and help prepare them for the next chapter in life are a key to the transition.

A comprehensive review of literature was organized based on the research question. The literature indicated that the transition experience is a process that requires support and programming provided to them from the athletic department to help them prepare for their career and life after sport. This literature review recognizes that success in student-athletes transition is based upon resources such as support, programs, and mentoring. It is important for institutions to provide career planning early and often for student-athletes in order to prepare them for life after college.

Recommendations to athletes include; taking advantage of mentoring programs to assure that they receive and use the valuable information to make the transition smooth. Another recommendation would be taking advantage of programs that are offered to student-athletes. The literature review concludes with some recommendations on how to engage student-athletes in the career development process and some suggestions for future research. Starting the transition early and formulating a contingency plan are necessary

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Introduction

Background

According to the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), there are about 460,000 student-athletes, 19,500 teams, three divisions, and one association (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2018). Every year the NCAA holds championships for men and women in at least 17 sports comprising of the nation's best collegiate athletes (Bailey and Bhattacharyya, 2012). In the world of collegiate athletics, students across the country use the opportunities provided to them to become the future professional athletes, teachers, coaches, and business leaders of our world. As Division I, II, and III institutions continue to provide scholarships and other benefits to these students, the issue of what resources are available for student-athletes and which ones do they utilize to acquire skills to aid in the transition out of athletics and into the job market.

Once student-athletes' eligibility ends, a small percentage of these student-athletes will move on to compete at the professional level in their given sport or fulfill their future career plan (Stout, 2018). As a student-athlete, sports require strong time-management skills and some thoughtful planning with academic advisors, professors and staff because not everyone makes it to the next level whether it is injury based or simply because they want to move on. The 90% of student-athletes whose athletic careers end when they walk across the commencement stage are forced to navigate transition out of their sport. This can be stressful; some may struggle with anxiety, low levels of confidence, or depression (Stout, 2018). The purpose of this literature review is to give student-athletes' insight on the importance of using the skills obtained while being a student athlete during college to make the transition after college less stressful and more successful.

Statement of the Problem

Many athletes are unaware of what skills are transferable to other areas of life (McKnight, 2007). To become mindful of those skills, athletes must proactively become more aware of the skills and strengths they have acquired through competitive sport, build greater value to their personal brand outside of sport, and learn how to utilize and market their transferable skills in a non-athletic career setting (Chalfin, Weight, Osborne, and Johnson 2015). Which will make it less difficult to deal with situations in non-athletic domains and delayed identity shifts because of a lack in non-athletic life experiences during their athletic careers (Park, Lavellee, and Tod, 2013).

To overcome their struggles many athletes are challenged throughout the transition process. There is a specific need in college athletics for student-athletes to become more aware of, to improve, and learn how to utilize transferable skills (Danish Petitpas, and Hale, 1993). Athletics support staff, family members, and coaches, are heavily involved in the amount of time and investment in student-athletes. The people within this type of support system must learn how they can serve as a resource in athletes' acquiring transferable skills and aid in the transition out of sport. (McKnight, 2007).

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the literature surrounding a student-athletes transition out of sport. The goal is to identify what resources are most useful and transferable for the athlete after transitioning from athletic career retirement to a non-athletic career setting.

Research Question

- 1) What resources are available to help student-athletes transition from athletic career retirement to a non-athletic career setting?

Significance of the Problem

This study adds to the awareness and familiarity of transferable skills among student-athletes, which one day will potentially positively influence those who make the transition from an athletic setting to a non-athletic career setting. Recognition of transferable skills during the transition process will likely help student-athletes identify and build upon their strengths (Danish, Petitpas, and Hale, 1993).

This review can help provide informative feedback for coaches, athletics administrators and support staff as they evaluate and structure athletics department programming around the holistic development of student-athletes. These findings can help connect a student-athletes' awareness and familiarity of transferable skills to the resources available to continuing developing such skills and aid in the transition out of sport into a non-athletic career setting.

Project objectives

The objective of this literature review was to evaluate programs that student-athletes have access to that would help them during their transition out of college into careers.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

This literature is guided by Chickering's Theory of Identity Development. Within Chickering's theory there are seven vectors that he theorized students must go through while

developing their identities (Chickering, 1969). Those vectors include; developing competence, managing emotions, movement through autonomy towards interdependence, development of mature interpersonal relationships, establishment of identity, developing purpose, and lastly the development of integrity (Goldberg, 2016). To better understand the identity formation and development of college students, Chickering introduced a framework for describing how identity develops through an educational lens (Chickering and Reisser, 1993). The sector that best fits the purpose of this study is the first vector, developing competence. There are three types of competence that college students develop: intellectual, manual skills, and interpersonal competences (Goldberg, 2016), and Chickering identifies all three types in his theory of identity development. The importance of competence is that student-athletes have to uphold not only the same developmental stressors that non-athlete students do, they must also uphold the demands of their athletic departments, coaches, teammates, and the NCAA (Kohlstedt, 2011).

Identity development theories help practitioners understand how students go about discovering their "abilities, aptitude and objectives" (Torres, Jones, and Renn, 2009). Learning communities and transition programs are becoming popular programs at colleges and universities to help all student-athletes find their identity (Rode, 2008). It is important to learn these skills because as a freshman everything is different from high school both athletically and academically. Athletic participation can enhance individuals' social identity, as participants become members of a valued social groups on campus (Buzzetta, Lenz, Kennelly, 2017). Chickering theorized that for students there are several stages of identity development that occur in college and that these stages can have a direct impact on career development" (p. 2).

Transition Out of Sport

Dealing with various transitions and constant changes is the nature of being a student-athlete (Harrison and Lawrence, 2204). Martin et al (2013) states, “most athletes see themselves as having a career in sports, but after participating and finding their identity, they go through the normal career transition processes whereby the individual engages in gradual alterations of behaviors and goals over time” (p. 3). Since most student-athletes do not play after college, they need to adjust goals they have for themselves. Athletes participate in college sports for approximately four or more years and after their sport career is over they have a difficult time transitioning out, which can cause them to question their identity and not know who they are. Transitioning from college sports to the real world can take a mental toll on athletes (Orchard, 2017). That is why it is just as important to commit to academics as it is to sports because playing after college is not always guaranteed nor does the feeling and passion for the sport last forever.

Student-athletes transition out of a lifestyle that consist of new and exciting adventures, to experiencing many different challenges (Orchard, 2017). However, some of the challenges and obstacles that may affect student athletes are unique because of their participation in sports (Gohn and Albin, 2006). Time management, inadequate academic preparation, fatigue, and low academic motivation may influence student athletes and affect their success inside the classroom and on the field (Sharpe and Sheilley, 2008). Student-athletes take pride in setting goals and accomplishing those goals that involves their sport, but they may not have that same energy towards their academic or career goals (Buzzetta, Lenz, and Kennelly, 2017). Which means an individual who has a strong commitment to their athletic identity places great importance on

athletics causing them to not focus on other aspects of being a student-athlete and thinking about life after sport (Wojciechowski, 2018).

Career development and the transitioning of athletes has been studied for over 50 years. A particular transition unique to student-athletes in comparison to other students is the end of their collegiate athletic eligibility (Henderson, 2013). Athletes have professionals working with them to help them with their career preparation and professional growth opportunities during their college career (Navarro and McCormick, 2017).

During student athletes later years of college, they have a better idea of their career ambitions and are more invested in their student role (Lally and Kerr, 2005). Being able to find that identity in their later years of college is crucial in the career development and transition out of sport. Studies have also found, successfully coping with transition both within and outside of sport allows greater opportunity for an athlete to live a long and successful life in sport as well as being able to adjust effectively to their life after sport (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, and Côté, 2009).

Career Planning Programs for Athletes

University athletic departments' involvement is primarily focused on career programs because pre-retirement planning is known to have the greatest influence on athletes' transition out of sport (Taylor and Ogilvie, 1994). Programming and advising helps student-athletes set goals for their future. In the college setting there are many programs for student-athletes to take part in. Some intervention services and programs have encouraged career preparation or development prior to the end of athletes' sport career because athletes who proactively develop life skills are more likely to avoid issues as they adjust to the next chapter in their lives (Taylor

and Ogilvie, 1994). These programs, which will be shared in this literature, are programs that will allow student-athletes to be more familiar with the skills they are able to transfer, upon the end of their athletic career. Programs of such indicate positive associations between athlete's support program involvement and their life skills development and the quality of career transition (Park, Lavalley, and Tod, 2013).

The NCAA established a Life Skills program to promote and ensure the holistic development of student-athletes among Division I, II, III levels. More recently and popularly known as NCAA Life Skills or at many institutions named Student-Athlete Development, the program focuses on multiple sides of the student-athlete experience: personal growth, leadership development, career and professional development, and community service (NCAA Life Skills, 2015). These type of programs help develop skills and prepare student-athletes with a variety of experiences that are useful throughout athlete's college experience on or beyond the sport. The Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes is another resource for athletes to partake in. According to Van Raalte, Cornelius, Brewer, Petitpas, and Andrews (n.d.), this workshop consists of a small group discussion about transferable skills developed through sport and the applicability of these skills in professional settings. Another program that was introduced in previous work was a program known as mentoring programs. This type of program pairs underclassmen with upperclassmen as well as upperclassmen with newly graduated alumni athletes. Pairing student-athletes with other athletes early on can give them insight regarding what is to be expected when their college athletic career come to an end (Poux and Fry, 2015). Connecting student-athletes with recent alumni who can attest to their post-graduation transition experience can help current student-athletes navigate their transition process (Bjornsen and Dinkel, 2017).

Programs are effective in assisting athletes with their transition out of sport as they include pre-retirement planning services and thus, help athletes develop non-sport goals and interest for post-sport professional opportunities (Lavellee, 2005). A study by Navarro and McCormick (2017) confirmed that Student-Athletes Development professionals are one of the main resources responsible within departments for facilitating career preparation and professional growth opportunities for student-athletes during their college career. Programs provide self-assessments and athletes who are willing to engage in self-assessments see themselves as more than “just athletes,” making them more aware of the importance of life after sport (Lavallee, 2005).

Universities Successes

In the field of education; teachers, professors, and other academic leaders are always in pursuit of better ways to promote and improve education for their students. According to Nghe, Janecek, and Haddawy, (2007) “identifying outstanding students for scholarships is an essential part of the admissions process in undergraduate and postgraduate institutions, and identifying weak students who are likely to fail is also important for allocating limited tutoring resources” (p.1). This becomes more evident in schools, where educators attempt to find ways to make their students excel as individuals. However, students that choose to participate in intercollegiate athletics, may have a hard time focusing on the major aspects of their lives and balancing them equally. Simons and Rheenen (2000) discuss that “when individuals are expected to fill multiple roles, they can experience role strain in which commitment to one role detracts from the commitment to another.” Then it is up to the educators, leaders, academic advisors, coaches, and administrators to predict and provide ideas for improvement in academic performances.

Universities success comes in when their institution follows the NCAA Life Skills mission which provide student-athletes with avenues for professional networking, internship placement, career counseling, and opportunities for community service (NCAA, 2015). The University of Florida and Georgia Institute of Technology were the first schools to implement personal and career counseling specific to student athletes (Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, and Waters, 1981). More universities are increasing their attention on the personal and professional development of student athletes. The innovation of all the different programs not only help mature student-athletes, but it can help them gain transferable skills to be ready for retirement. Another success that athletic departments have had that has help them a great deal with developing their student-athletes' is making it more than just a sport. Coakley (2015) noted that sport is connected to career success when it increases opportunities to complete certain aspects of college or develop job-related skills, increases support for growth and development not limited to athletic development and progression, and expands experiences, identities, and abilities unrelated to sport. This success also coincides with the NCAA Life skills program which can be a great success to athletic departments in helping with student-athletes transition out of sport.

Summary of Outcomes, Discussions, and Recommendations

Several procedures were followed to ensure a high quality review of the literature on student-athletes career development as they transitioned out of sports. First, a comprehensive search of peer-reviewed journals were completed based on a wide range of key words including career development, athletes transition, retired student athletes, success, identity development, academic success, student-athlete challenges, athletic participation, and life after sport. Four databases were searched including EBSCOhost, ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Second, the reference section for each article found was searched in order to find additional articles. Third,

key educational journals were searched independently and included the following publications: College Student Journal, International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, Journal of College Student Development, Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, Journal of Applied Sport Management, and Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics. The search process uncovered 31 peer-reviewed articles published between the year 1981 and 2018. It was somewhat difficult finding publications, research and studies conducted specifically on student-athletes transitioning from a student-athlete into the workforce because the process is not brought up or talked about enough amongst those connected or those who have had a hard time with their transition.

Discussion of Literature Review

The literature review revealed that improvements from administrators, coaches, and advisors to make the transition for those who do not continue playing after college less stressful. There needs to be a more effective demand for student-athletes to participate in career development programs. The literature review presented the resources available and the factors related to the quality of career transition. It also confirms that life skills and career/personal development are crucial in the process. Out of all the reviewed studies, being able to handle the many challenges of being a student-athlete, and being more serious about learning transferable skills in order to obtain different skills other than sport is an influential resource that aid in the transition out of sport (Park, Lavalley, Tod, 2013). With all factors considered in terms of transitioning out of sport, it is evident there is great value for athletes and their support system to understand the stress, pressure, and process of transitioning to a non-athletic career setting.

Recommendations for Future Research

One suggestion for future research is employing diverse methods, case studies, and including focus groups. Specifically evaluating student-athletes who participated in different divisions and did not have the opportunity to play after college or did not have any more passion for the sport after their collegiate career came to an end. The intensity, demands, and political power of certain schools and conferences may play a factor in the awareness of student-athletes' transferable skills. Another research suggestion could be to conduct more research comparing Division I, II, and III athletes. This research might reveal differences across divisional levels of college athletics and possibly show the difference in the athletic department's programs for student-athletes. It could also give other athletic departments the idea to get on board with programs that will help their student-athletes. Overall, much of the research regarding the transition experience of student-athletes that was found on the topic was somewhat outdated. Therefore, further up to date research would be more useful for universities athletic departments exploring this topic.

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