

# Transition Aid: A Must for NCAA Athletes

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### **Abstract**

This study explored the potential modifications that should be made to Virginia Tech track and field's process of receiving transfer student athletes through the NCAA Transfer Portal. The literature review investigates the current knowledge held on the profile of NCAA student athletes, the NCAA Transfer Portal, as well as transition periods for individuals. The Path Goal Theory was used as a reference to understand how the systems can be improved to best serve the transfer student athletes and the athletic department that is recruiting them. The interview participants included three Virginia Tech track and field student athletes, two Virginia Tech track and field coaches, and two Virginia Tech athletic academic administrators. Each group was interviewed using pre-selected, semi-structured interview questions unique to each group. After individuals were interviewed, the data was analyzed which produced codes that were grouped into broader categories then themes. After analyzing the results from the interviews, a few important difficulties and shortcomings were revealed by the various groups regarding the transfer process at Virginia Tech. These were followed by suggestions and recommendations for the prevalent issues to help Virginia Tech better understand where they may make improvements to their system. The Path-Goal Theory and guiding research question served as a framework to better understand the various themes and components in improving the system. This study may also be used by other universities to acquire new ideas of how to best serve their transfer student athletes so they may better focus on training and competition. Future considerations are included so that others interested in the topic may further explore the shortcomings of the transfer process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Have you ever changed jobs, moved to a new city, or found yourself in a confusing transition period? This is how most college athletes feel when transferring to new schools. They may be transferring for numerous reasons, but a common experience is the adjustment period that follows this transition. The NCAA has attempted to smooth out this process by introducing the “Transfer Portal” in 2019 which allows athletes to “publicly declare their intent to transfer and desire to speak to other schools” (Hosick, 2019). Yes, this has made a positive impact on the athletes’ process for getting in touch with coaches who are interested and finding a new school, but there still seems to be a disconnect in the transition process once the athlete decides which school he or she will attend.

Without any true written processes or procedures for recruiting these athletes and bringing them into the new programs, many are left to figure out the rest of the process on their own even when they may still be in competition season. As the athlete is navigating this complex transfer process, they could still be competing for their current university which entails great responsibility. “Student athletes, in addition to their academic responsibilities, must expend hours practicing, training, competing, and rehabilitating injuries in order to satisfy their athletics requirements. For many sports, this includes practicing at least three hours per day for five to six days a week during both the regular and off-season” (Rivera, 2004, p.56). In addition to finding their way in the process of transferring, the athletes also have a transition period to anticipate. Quite often, “student-athletes must...cope with issues, such as injury, deselection, and retirement, that either intensify or increase the dimensions associated with the typical demands of the developmental process” (Rivera, 2004, p.77).

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The goal in conducting this study is to help Virginia Tech athletic administration better understand how it can obtain and serve student-athletes in their transfer process. Each student-athlete can face a great amount of obstacles or hindrances in their journey of moving to a new university. In a 2018 study, researchers found that roughly 39% of undergraduate student-athletes transfer at least once from their four-year institution (NCAA, 2021). With this large number of transferring student-athletes, there seems to be an overwhelming number of students who struggle with making the change. Hearing the experiences from a select few and understanding the obstacles involved may assist the university in understanding the limitations that currently exist in the transfer process.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project was to determine the best practices in recruiting and aiding transfer athletes to Virginia Tech's track and field program. The intentions were to help improve the university's process in assisting the athletes so that it is smooth for them and allows them to place their focus on their competitions. Helping modify the process can allow the university to reflect on their limitations and make the needed changes for obtaining the athletes transferring from another university.

### **Definition of Terms**

ARMS – Recruiting and compliance software utilized by college athletics

Athletic Department – Group of administrators in charge of carrying out a college's every day athletic operations

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Customer Relationship Management (CRM) – process by which organizations and business track and maintain relationships; they utilize large amounts of data to efficiently keep track of clients or other relationships

Full Ride – Full scholarship for athlete to attend university; scholarships from ~80-100% are typically considered full rides; living stipend varies

NCAA – National Collegiate Athletic Association; non-profit organization that regulates student-athletes

SAASS – Student Athlete Academic Support Services

Transfer – The process of a student moving to a new school in order to complete their degree

Transfer Portal – “Compliance tool to systematically manage the transfer process from start to finish” (NCAA Champion Magazine, 2019)

Transition – The process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another

### **Limitations of the Project**

This project possesses a couple limitations in its nature. First, given that I am a transfer student-athlete seeking a master’s degree at Virginia Tech, there was the possibility for bias in my findings based on my own experiences. Being an interviewer, I may have geared questions toward different instances I may have run into during my transfer process.

Second, the topic of study was relatively new when compared to other projects that have been completed in the OMALS program. The NCAA Transfer Portal is less than a decade old and, therefore, does not have a great deal of research available that is related to it.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this project was to determine the best practices in recruiting and aiding transfer athletes to Virginia Tech's track and field program. The hope was to uncover the obstacles that were being encountered by these athletes and help create action steps for the athletic administration to follow to improve their processes for the athletes.

This literature review provides a collection of pieces to offer a greater understanding for the student-athlete transfer process as well as the transition process. The study's focus was on the NCAA student-athlete experience, the NCAA Transfer Portal, and athletes' transition period when moving to a new university. All are incredibly important to the end goal of this work.

### **The NCAA Student-Athlete**

When compared to the average student attending a university, the student-athlete leads a much different life. In addition to taking on a full course-load and being involved on campus, student-athletes must also, "expend hours practicing, training, competing, and rehabilitating injuries to satisfy their athletics requirements. For many sports, this includes practicing at least three hours per day for five to six days a week during both the regular and off-season" (Rivera, 2004, p. 56). As a result, many student-athletes have much less time and energy to tend to extracurricular responsibilities. Also, student-athletes live an uncharacteristic life in that they are prone to public scrutiny being that they are often covered to a great extent by the media (Rivera, 2004). Some claim that, "College athletes are simultaneously loved and hated, admired and despised. They are seen as heroes one day and villains the next. We see them as saviors of the university for the revenue they create and as pampered, spoiled brats for the benefits they

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receive” (Rivera, 2004, p. 43). This can create quite the disconnect when student-athletes attempt to lead a regular student life. Additionally, student-athletes are subject to university academic standards as well as the NCAA eligibility standards. Often, the NCAA’s (or the university team) standard may exceed the student’s university standard (Rivera, 2004). This applies additional pressure and responsibility on the student-athlete to perform, not only on the field, but also in the classroom. In conclusion, student-athletes are faced with many challenges that would be considered foreign to the regular student.

### **NCAA Transfer Portal**

Student-athlete can experience many changes within their organization or personal life that may cause them to seek other university options. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing body of collegiate athletics (Martin, 2008). They create legislation that directly impacts the student-athletes that compete for various universities. Years ago, many athletes were subjected to one year of inactivity (unable to compete) if they transferred to a new institution. Recently, the NCAA introduced the “Graduate Transfer Rule” which allowed graduate student-athletes with remaining eligibility to transfer to a new school and begin competition immediately (Martin, 2008). This proved to be very popular among student-athletes since they could make a decision that best fit their needs academically and athletically without facing punishment. Moving forward, the NCAA established the “Transfer Portal” in 2018. This new database, “identifies the names of all student-athletes who have notified their school of an intent to transfer. The transfer portal is accessible by all schools, and, as a result, individual programs can search out and contact possible candidates” (O’Brien, 2019).

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In its first year, more than 15,000 athletes entered their names in the NCAA Transfer Portal and that number continues to grow (NCAA, 2021). As one can tell, the NCAA has been making improvements to their system that better suit athletes wants and needs. These changes are, overall, providing athletes with more freedom in their decisions.

Still in its early stages, the NCAA Transfer Portal has been created to further assist the student-athletes as well as the compliance officers. Its main purpose is to “organize a complicated process” (NCAA Champion Magazine, 2019). Many compliance officers claim that it has dramatically improved their job of assisting the athletes in their transfer processes. Dede Allen, associate director for compliance and academics Alaska Anchorage states that, “This is probably the best use of technology that I’ve seen in a long while...Everybody who needs access to the information can get it. When a student-athlete wants to transfer, you are trying to help them, and the last thing you want to do is impede the process” (NCAA Champion Magazine, 2019). Even with these positives that come with the utilizing the portal, there are still other downsides. One negative being that “[student-athletes’] current school can reduce or stop giving them athletics aid at the end of the term in which the request was made to enter the Transfer Portal” (NCAA Champion Magazine, 2019). This creates a major issue for athletes since they are further pressed to come up with an answer as to what school they will attend next. They must identify their new school in a timely manner or risk losing the financial aid that allows them to attend school in the first place. However, some claim this is a way to create a source of accountability for the student-athletes since a major amount of resources can be spent by the program on the recruiting process (NCAA Champion Magazine, 2019). Overall, even

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considering the negatives involved, the NCAA Transfer Portal has been perceived as a positive change to the transfer process for all involved.

As the NCAA continues to create more progressive rules in favor of its athletes, there are still many questions looming over the universities that are yet to be answered. In Claudine McCarthy's (2019) article "Educate Student-Athletes, Staff, Coaches About Proper Use of NCAA Transfer Portal," she claims that some school's processes vary when assisting the athletes entering the transfer portal. "Some schools require student-athletes to meet by phone or in person, while others ask but don't require student-athletes [to] if they've talked to their coach and then mark the date of the conversation on the form" (McCarthy, 2019).

### **Transition Periods**

"A transition can be said to occur if an event or nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior" (Lubker, 2007, p. 458). Just as most everyone finds themselves in a transition period at different points of their lives, student-athletes who decide to embark to their first or a new university face a major adjustment period. Many life changes are being made quite rapidly and can lead to many mental and psychological changes within the athlete. The student-athletes are also faced with the challenges of "leaving old support systems, making new attachments with others, and coping with the responsibilities of being a college student. The quality of an individual's developmental experiences depends on how successful these tasks are met" (Lubker, 2007, p. 459). As the athletes enter a new situation, they are forced to adapt fast to perform for their new school at a high level. Stowers explains that, "the life of a student-athlete can prove to

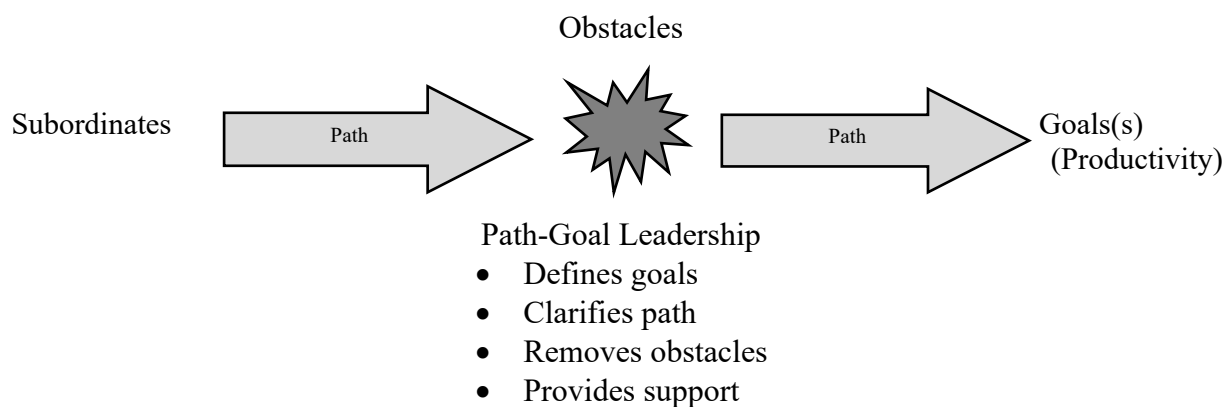
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be difficult as other responsibilities are weighing on them....student-athletes still appear vulnerable to college adjustment difficulties, despite recent data indicating that athlete graduation rates are generally higher than non-athletes. Dual roles are often assumed that make adjustment more difficult for student-athletes” (Stowers, 2018, p. 16-17). Just as any transition can prove to be difficult for the lay-person, student-athletes must strive to overcome many obstacles when moving to a new university.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory applied in this study and data collection was the “Path-Goal Theory” (Figure 1.1). The Path-Goal Theory “discusses how leaders motivate followers to accomplish designated goals...The stated goal of this theory is to enhance follower performance and follower satisfaction by focusing on follower motivation and the nature of the work tasks. At its inception, path-goal theory was incredibly innovative in the sense that it shifted attention to follower needs and motivations, and away from the predominant focus on tasks and relationships.” (Northouse, 2022, p. 132). The theory also explores the need to eliminate obstacles from the followers’ paths for them to fully be able to achieve the stated goal. In its design, the path-goal theory helps, “explain how leaders can help followers along the path to their goals by selecting specific behaviors that are best suited to followers’ needs and to the situation in which followers are working. By choosing the appropriate behaviors, leaders increase followers’ expectations for success and satisfaction” (Northouse, 2022, p. 133). The theory was first recognized in the 1970s in the findings of Evans (1970), House (1971), House and Dessler (1974), and House and Mitchell (1974) (Northouse, 2022).

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*Figure 1.1: The Basic Idea Behind Path-Goal Theory. Note. From “Leadership: Theory and Practice,” by P. G. Northouse, 2010, p. 126. Copyright 2010 by Sage Publications, Inc. Used under fair use guidelines, 2011.*

For this study, the Path-Goal Theory was related to the NCAA Transfer Portal and transfer process issue by assigning the students to the “follower” role and the university personnel to the “leader” role. The students’ objective is to have a smooth transfer and transition to the new university so they may compete to the best of their ability and bring success to the program of their choice. To do this, it is ideal to have the full support of their universities. By eliminating as many “obstacles” as possible from the student’s transfer and transition, they will be able to place further focus and attention on their training and competition rather than being impeded by the tasks involved in transitioning to a new university. In Figure 1.1 above, the illustration is explaining the general concept of the Path-Goal Theory. As subordinates, or followers, are provided a path to follow and are given defined goals, the leaders must work to clarify the path, work to remove obstacles that could hinder their success, and provide general support in achieving the defined goals.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this project was to determine the best practices in recruiting and aiding transfer athletes to Virginia Tech's track and field program. The goal was to gain a better understanding of the shortcomings in the process of recruiting and obtaining new athletes and help the university to create a more efficient procedure. Just as the Path-Goal Theory states that the, "goal of this theory is to enhance follower performance and follower satisfaction by focusing on follower motivation and the nature of the work tasks" (Northouse, 2022, p. 132). By helping to eliminate the obstacles in the way of a smooth transition process for the athletes, the university will enable the student-athlete to focus on what matters most: training and competition. The guiding research question for the project was:

- How can athletic staff and administration improve their processes and communication to further assist incoming Virginia Tech track and field student-athletes in the transfer process?

#### **Designing and Planning Interviews**

For this study, interviews were the lifeblood of the project. An interview, in this aspect, is defined as, "a social interaction based on a conversation...knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 163-164). This form of collecting qualitative data allowed for observation of the many themes and nuances involved in the transfer process of student-athletes. The interviews allowed facts to be collected, experiences to be studied, and behaviors to be observed (Rowley, 2012). Pre-selected, semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A) were utilized to open the conversation to further

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discussion beyond the written and numbered questions provided for the interviewees (Rowley, 2012). The pre-selected interview questions were designed to answer the research question and were also reviewed and revised by university experts. The interviews were scheduled for 30-minute periods, however, all were under the duration of the allotted time. Many believe any longer of an interview may cause fatigue or distraction and can, therefore, affect the quality of the data being collected (Bolderston, 2012).

The individuals who were notified and requested to conduct an interview were transfer track and field student-athletes at Virginia Tech, Virginia Tech track and field coaching staff, and various Virginia Tech athletic department administration. This combination of interviewees allowed for the observation and understanding of each perspective in the recruiting process. It is recommended that the researcher, “Collect data from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon by using in-depth and multiple interviews...[they] recommend that researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79).

### **Choosing Participants**

Before the participants were contacted for permission to interview, a Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted (Appendix B). From here, emails were sent to receive a “yes” to complete an interview with everyone (Appendix C). The interviewees consisted of a combination of transfer track and field student-athletes from Virginia Tech, Virginia Tech track and field coaching staff, and various Virginia Tech athletic department administration. By interviewing this sample, each transfer athletes’ unique experience in

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transferring to their new university, the current process and practices used by the Virginia Tech track and field coaching staff when recruiting, and the aid offered by the Virginia Tech athletic department administration were all explored and understood.

### **Conducting Interviews**

All interviews were conducted via Zoom video calls. When a Zoom call was utilized, the record function on the Zoom application was used to capture the interview. From here, the interview recordings were uploaded into “Otter.ai” to create a transcript for the questions and answers. In addition to the recordings, Handwritten notes were taken to capture the general themes and topics of the conversation as well as on the interviewees demeanor. The interviewees were notified that handwritten notes would be taken along with the interview being recorded. During the introductory stages of the interaction, the general purpose of the interview was explained and some rapport building questions were asked. As stated above, pre-selected, semi-structured interview questions were utilized to welcome further conversation beyond the singular questions that were offered to the participants.

### **Analyzing the Data**

At the conclusion of all interviews, each piece of data was reviewed to ensure they had been transcribed efficiently and accurately. From here, each participants’ names were changed to protect identity and preserve anonymity. Each transcription was transferred from “Otter.ai” to “Google Docs” to be coded and categorized to identify overarching themes. Coding is defined as,

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“a data aggregating and meaning-making process described as ‘doing analysis and denoting concepts to stand for data’” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 85).

### **Reflexivity Statement**

As I progressed in my study relating to the NCAA Transfer Portal, I found more and more ambiguity from my sources. The portal is a very new tool collegiate coaches, athletes, and administration have been faced with in previous years. Many claim it has been a “life saver” of sorts and others have not been too impressed. In the end, I believe it will come down to how each university utilizes the software in order to use it to its full potential.

As I investigated, I found that there was no one set way a school utilizes the transfer portal to recruit and obtain its transfer athletes. There seemed to be many moving parts in this realm and no one way of bringing them all together. If each university put real time into developing these processes for obtaining transfer student-athletes, the success rate of recruiting could be greatly increased. As a student-athlete transferring, there are already many questions that need to be answered and you need as much work to be taken off of your plate as possible. As these changes are being made rapidly within the NCAA, it is time for the universities to progress and manage their systems to better serve the student-athletes.

As discussed earlier, the “Path-Goal Theory” states that a leader’s followers will, inevitably, encounter obstacles on their path that they are following. They must break past these obstacles to reach the goal(s) (productivity) of the leader. To improve the process, the leader may define goals, clarify the path, remove obstacles, and provide support (Northouse, 2022). As this relates to the transfer portal, the administration poses as the “leaders” and the “athletes” as the

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followers. If the leaders aim their focuses on eliminating these obstacles to student-athletes, they may better follow their own paths to productivity within the sport at their chosen university.

### **Chapter 4: Findings**

The purpose of this project was to determine the best practices in recruiting and aiding transfer athletes to Virginia Tech's track and field program. Student athletes, coaches, and athletic administration were all interviewed separately in order to provide varying points of view in regard to the NCAA Transfer Portal and the general transition process for track and field athletes at Virginia Tech. The different groups were offered different sets of pre-selected questions since their roles and positions varied. Even though the questions were unique to the group, some themes overlapped between groups. The six themes that emerged from the interviews are as follows:

1. Background & Experience
2. Scholarship
3. Athlete Transfer Process
4. Coach/Administration Role in Transfer Process
5. Difficulties & Shortcomings
6. Suggestions

The interviews followed a semi-structured layout with pre-selected questions. The interviewees were permitted to deviate from the formatted questions as long as time permitted. Interviewees attention and focus was held by engaging in thoughtful conversation as well as limiting the duration of the interview to right at or under the allotted thirty minutes. Below, Table 1-1 displays the name (pseudonym) and role/occupation of each person who was interviewed for the project.

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Table 1.1 *Names & Position*

<b>Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Role/Position</b>
Mary	Track & Field Academic Advisor
Grace	Director/Compliance, Admissions, Housing
Sherlock	Track and Field Associate Head Coach
Abraham	Track and Field Assistant Coach
Tom	Student Athlete
Emily	Student Athlete
Amelia	Student Athlete

**Theme 1: Background & Experience**

In the early stages of the interviews, coaches and administration were asked to share some of their background and experience. This allowed for understanding their past experiences and competencies before coming into their day-to-day role at Virginia Tech.

Mary, track and field's academic advisor, described her background and work experiences at Bowling Green, Iowa, and James Madison University before arriving at Virginia Tech. She claimed to have multiple responsibilities within these departments:

“I studied sport management in undergrad at Bowling Green State University...I went to the University of Iowa...and worked in their student athlete academic support...And then my first full time job was at James Madison University...You wear a lot of different hats...we were the academic advisors, but we were also a little learning specialist. We

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were also getting them set up with counseling and helping with housing and, you know, kind of doing everything.”

Grace, athletics’ director/compliance, admissions, and housing, shared how she was promoted to a new role and how her responsibilities further expanded at Virginia Tech. These responsibilities extend to all 22 sports at Virginia Tech:

“I started as a compliance administrator working in the office...there was another individual that handled our transfers. She left Virginia Tech and I was asked to step into the role to do the eligibility and transfer aspect for all of our sports here at Virginia Tech...That role has now expanded to where I do cover all 22 sports at Virginia Tech, in terms of all transfers into Virginia Tech will be evaluated through my office and processed by me for eligibility and certification with our registrar's office.”

Sherlock, track and field associate head coach, described his previous experience at the University of Iowa and his interview process at Virginia Tech:

“I was coaching at the University of Iowa prior to here. This position [at Virginia Tech] became available and I got a phone call from [the head coach] on a Wednesday. We talked for about an hour and a half, almost two hours, and I got on a plane Thursday, interviewed Friday, and went home Friday night with an offer.”

Abraham, track and field assistant coach, shared his experience at East Carolina before coming to Virginia Tech and his interview process. Before arriving to Virginia Tech, the coach was a professor for six years at the institution:

“I went to grad school at East Carolina University, to get my degree in biomechanics...then ended up staying on full time as a professor for six years teaching in

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the Exercise Sports Science Department, and kept coaching as a volunteer, thankfully...The opportunity came available at Virginia Tech and my boss at ECU, knew [the VT head coach] really well and gave me a good recommendation which got me the interview. I did my interview over the phone, interview in person, and I got the job.”

### **Theme 2: Scholarship**

During their interviews, athletes were asked to disclose their scholarship amount from their previous schools as well as at Virginia Tech. The answers were further probed by asking if this played a role in their transferring.

Tom shared his experience with scholarships as well as the role it played in transferring. He was transparent with the scholarship percentages, his financial situation, and how important the money was for him. Tom even took the time to make his own calculations on if he would be able to live on the scholarship money Virginia Tech offered to him:

“At the previous school...I wasn't on a full ride...it was technically 93%...when I wanted to live off campus, they decided to cut that scholarship and make it 85%, which was one of the reasons I decided to transfer because that was not enough...And now at Virginia Tech on a full ride. I am not sure the exact percentage might be 93%...It definitely did in terms of financially. Because as an international student, I don't get help, especially being from Tunisia. My family can't send me money, because it's against the law. So I am here by myself and I can't get any support. So the money was an important part for me. And when I did my calculations for Virginia Tech, I was going to get more money. And I was not going to spend as much. So it was perfect for me to decide.”

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Emily shared her experience and concerns regarding scholarships and the role it played in transferring to Virginia Tech from Michigan State. She stated that she only considered schools that would offer her a full ride scholarship. She was very transparent with the numbers as well:

“I’m on a full ride now for this year and next year...at Michigan State I was on 0%...And then halfway through junior year...they came back and offered me a full for just that semester...then they bumped me down, because I didn't make nationals, to 50% my beginning of my senior year. And I was 50 and then they put me on 100% after I went to Nationals the end of my senior year...Scholarship wise? Yeah, huge role...I wasn't considering any place that didn't offer me a full.”

Amelia shared her experience with her previous school, scholarship amounts when deciding to transfer to Virginia Tech, and the role the scholarship played in her transferring. She was very concerned with the amount of scholarship she would be receiving since she did not want to decrease from her current amount:

“I was told...if I go on the transfer portal for X amount of days, my scholarship at the University of Georgia would be taken away...So I had full ride scholarship, plus stipend at Georgia, and I have the same thing here. So financially, it's the same situation...Of course, I wasn't going to go down in scholarship...that wouldn't be acceptable for me.”

### **Theme 3: Athlete Transfer Process**

During athlete interviews, the individuals were asked to share their experiences and processes when utilizing the NCAA Transfer Portal.

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Tom shared his experience when entering the NCAA Transfer Portal as well as being contacted by various universities. These universities acted quick to recruit Tom to their schools and utilized the portal to do so:

“[The transfer portal] was a big role...my transfer process was easy and was quick...I got on the portal...in three days, maybe two days, had to fill out something, and I got a lot of emails in the first few hours. So that really tells you how important the transfer portal is to get out there for coaches to see you.”

Amelia reflected on her lack of experience within the portal when she decided to leave her previous university. She did not want to be overwhelmed by coaches contacting her and recruiting her. She had conducted her own research and understood what she wanted in a future institution:

“I'd say I didn't really spend much time on the portal...I think I requested the option that said ‘don't receive calls from people or not to receive messages from people,’ because I didn't want...a bunch of coaches calling me...I pretty much reached out to the people that I wanted to, aka [the VT pole vault coach]. So I wasn't bombarded with a bunch of messages and having to say no to a bunch of people, I just didn't want that.”

Emily shared that the transfer portal played a large role in her transferring and that she was opened to many new opportunities. She even claimed that she did not know of Virginia Tech prior to being contacted by the coaches. She claimed that the NCAA Transfer Portal proved to be a great “marketing tool” for her as a transferring athlete:

“A huge role. I had written down the top 10 schools I wanted to go to but when I put my name into the portal...some schools reached out to me that I hadn't heard of. I had never

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even heard of Virginia Tech before [Sherlock] reached out to me on Instagram...without the transfer portal, I think I would have been a little lost and having to find my own way where the transfer portal did a lot of the marketing for me.”

Tom shared how his new coach assisted him in his transition after he committed to Virginia Tech. He claimed the coach was very responsive and even assisted him in various tasks that needed to be handled prior to arriving on campus:

“He called me multiple times, he sent me the links, he sent me the steps and what to do, how to register, and apply for everything. He was there and he did help me. And if he couldn't, he would just say, ‘Okay, wait a second here. Let me reach out to somebody and come back to you.’”

Emily shared the importance of meeting with her academic advisor. She even wanted to make it known that she may not have chosen Virginia Tech if she did not have this meeting:

“When I came on my visit, I had an hour meeting with [the academic advisor]...And it was the best thing ever... my advisor...was influential. I think without [him], there's a chance I would not be here.”

Amelia reflected on the importance of her coach and advisor during her transfer process. She claimed that they were the most helpful sources she had. She also compared this experience to her time at the University of Georgia:

“He sent me things to fill out and he would answer any questions that I had. I don't think we had any hiccups or areas where we didn't know what to do, or I didn't know what to do...[Mary] is awesome...She is the most helpful advisor I've ever had...my advisor at Georgia...it was not great. I didn't really know where I was academically...we didn't

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have a real path. For academics here at Virginia Tech. I know exactly where I stand, I know exactly what classes I need to take. And I feel so much more secure.”

### **Theme 4: Coach/Administration Role in Transfer Process**

During the interviews with coaches and athletic administration, the topic of their role in the transfer process was explored. The responsibilities varied among positions.

Grace explored and explained her main responsibilities with transfer student athletes’ academics. She claimed that her role consists of communicating athletes’ status with coaches, checking for eligible credit transfers, assisting students with the application process, working with admissions, making sure students receive their scholarship offers, and assisting in enrollment:

“I work with the coaches to identify where students are going to come out, what transfer exception they're going to meet, or if they're going to be eligible to transfer to Virginia Tech based on the information that I have...I will then start working with that student to get them through the admissions process. I'm a liaison with the admissions office as well...I help through that process, and ensure that the student can get into the major that they desire, make sure that their offer gets in, make sure they've accepted their offer, and get them ready to actually enroll at Virginia Tech.”

Grace also shared what the process should look like for students in regards to communication with the coach and advisors. She explained how important the academic advisor can be in this transfer and transition process:

“Their SAASS advisor is going to be in communication with the coach and the coach is going to have the SAASS advisor in communication with that student early on...to

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discuss what their academic path is going to look like in terms of...here's the major that you want, here's the path that you're going to need to take to stay eligible in terms of meeting your benchmarks that you need to. So from my perspective, I think the SAASS advisor is invaluable in that process.”

Mary spoke on the written process that is provided to administration for assisting transfer student athletes. She stated that there is a step-by-step of what to do and how to handle these transfer athletes, but she also stated that each situation is so unique:

“[Grace] has a handout...that walks through step-by-step what to do...So if a coach is interested in somebody, they'll upload a form to ARMS on...What their current school is, what year they are, how many full time semesters they've done. Kind of that general background information and then upload a copy of a transcript. But that's kind of it for written processes...each situation is so unique.”

Abraham described the coaches' main roles in assisting the athletes in the transition process. He claimed that he will have them communicate with the academic advisor, bring them in for a campus visit, and have them fill out all necessary paperwork. He also explained the importance of helping the transfer athletes secure housing in their new college town:

“During that whole recruiting process, we'll...put them in touch with the academic advisors and, ideally, there's time for a visit, so they have a chance to come and check everything out...Once the application is finished, then it just comes down to making sure we have all the proper paperwork...usually the biggest thing is trying to find them housing. And then once that's all done, it's...making sure they get settled in, get their ID, get acquainted with the flow of campus a little bit.”

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Abraham also elaborated on the frequency of communication that is needed with transfer student athletes. He stated that he tries to be reasonable with the amount of times he is reaching out. He claimed that he wants to build relationships but does not want to overwhelm the athletes since he will not be doing that during their time at Virginia Tech:

“You're talking to the student athlete as often as is reasonable. I'm not one that's going to call you two or three times a week, I'm more once a week, every other week kind of person because I just don't want to inundate you...I'm not doing that when you're here, I'm not doing that in the recruiting process either. So it's just building the relationship with the with the student athlete and getting acquainted with each other...and if you feel like it's a good fit for the program, then go from there. Just keep talking and keep the communication lines open until it's decision making time.”

Abraham commented on the importance of communicating the program vision to the athlete during the transition process. He claimed that it can be a great way to get an athlete involved in the overarching vision for the program they have chosen:

“I think it makes the transfer student athlete feel part of the program when they really feel what the vision of the program is. We don't compete for four months after they show up on campus so we're just training and training and training. There's nothing tied to the overall vision of the program other than the training process. So I think getting involved in the recruiting and looking at what the future looks like right away, starts to build that connection a little bit more and they buy into: ‘Oh, this is what we're doing. This is what we're going to try to accomplish this year.’”

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### **Theme 5: Difficulties & Shortcomings**

During all interviews, difficulties and shortcomings regarding the NCAA Transfer Portal and transfer process were identified.

Tom shared his experience in communicating with the coaches when trying to choose his desired program. He explained that he did not meet with any advisors prior to arriving on campus and that he was not able to enroll in his desired program:

“I did not meet with the with any advisors. I didn't come for a visit...the only person that I was in contact with was the coach...he's the one that did everything for me. I thought I was going to do computer science, because that's what he promised. And then he just, I guess, I couldn't do computer science. And they informed him, but he didn't tell me that. So I was talking to the advisor, a week before I come here, I was asking her about computer science. She said, ‘You're not doing computer science. You can't do that.’”

Amelia shared that finding housing was one of her main challenges when entering her new university. She claimed that finding affordable housing and roommates to live with proved to be very difficult:

“Housing was the most stressful part. Because I signed in July when I like decided to come here. And I had to get off of my Georgia lease...find someone to replace my spot, but then also find affordable housing and find roommates that I didn't know. That was something that was very difficult for me.”

Mary explored the difficulties involved in assisting athletes in finding the right academic program at the new university. The process involves informing student athletes they will not be accepted into their desired programs, working in conjunction with the coaches to receive their

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information, and making a quick judgement on whether their credits will transfer to Virginia

Tech:

“What's tough about Virginia Tech is there's not really anywhere to hide academically, both for graduate and undergraduate. Sometimes it's helping people understand that the program you want to get into, it's not attainable, given your grades...And sometimes I'm the one to let coaches know, actually, that program, they're not accepting applications, we know we can't get somebody in because they're athletes. Sometimes it's working with the coaches sometimes working with the student with undergrad transfers...so the coach would get the transcript, they'll send me a copy and I usually do just a quick glance, to get a sense of how many credits they might be transferring in.”

Mary also shared another struggle for their department regarding the students' transfer timeline.

Many times, the athletes are pressured to make a quick decision of where to transfer to. She claimed that the department lacks the needed amount of employees to fulfill these processes in a timely manner:

“I think where we fall short is how long our transfer process and transfer evaluation takes. For example, right now I'm working with a coach who's in a time crunch, the student wants to make a decision and the student wants to come here only if he can get into a specific major. And we're still waiting to see what his credits will come back as so the students ready to go and the student will walk if we can't get him an answer soon enough, but it's out of our hands at this point.”

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Grace shared some similar concerns with the length of the process and its inefficiencies. She stated how difficult it can be dealing with the various departments at Virginia Tech when attempting to grant credits to a prospect student athlete:

“With the wide variety of institutions that we have transfers coming from, they oftentimes are not coming in from the same institutions...So obviously, a lot of schools out west are not in our database, because that's not a regular transfer...that's why we're having to obtain so many syllabi and get departments in for review...You can have one faculty member review a syllabus and come to one conclusion and another faculty member, perhaps would review it and have a different opinion. So to me having something that's pretty standardized, would be very helpful in terms of awarding credit, awarding specific credit and kind of evaluate what that process is in general on the on the university campus side.”

Abraham commented on the coaches' main concerns with the implementation and evolution of the transfer portal. He stated how the portal, in the future, may resemble “free agency” in professional sports due to its ease of use. He also stated his concerns regarding various rules being overlooked or broken:

“In the long term, I think this turns into free agency...Where you come in, you could not get the playing time you want year one and you're just jumping in and getting out of there real fast...And it just it promotes the back channel deals a little bit more. I said your top level talent is going to have people chirping in their ear and tell them, ‘Well, they need to do this, you need to go here.’ And you have a high school coach call a college coach, which we're not supposed to talk about those things with anybody associated with the

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student athlete, but it always ends up happening more often than not. So that's where it fails, it gives you opportunity to break rules when no one sees it.”

### **Theme 6: Suggestions**

As the interviews came to a close, the participants shared their suggestions that they thought would help them in their roles or in the transfer process in general:

Tom stated that his main concern was with student athlete’s meeting with their advisors. He claimed that he was simply listening to his coach and felt as though everything was handled:

“Make the meeting with an advisor something that is mandatory that you have to do. Because someone like me, I didn't make the effort. I trusted the coach.”

Emily talked of the ambiguity around deadlines and requirements for transferring student athletes. She wished that there was more clarity and the important information was more readily available:

“The timelines are confusing. There was one point where I thought I had to be in [the portal] by May 1st and turn in a written notice. So I wrote on a piece of paper that I was transferring and I was about to give it to my coach as written notice, because I didn't want to lose a year of eligibility. And then I realized it wasn't May 1st...even this year, I don't know what the deadlines are. The transfer portal website could be a little more clear.”

Sherlock explored the idea of creating a document for exiting student athletes to know what to look out for when transferring. He claimed that the athletes have never experienced the transfer process and are, therefore, not educated on the various things to look out for when exiting:

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“I think it would be good if their initial school that they're leaving, gives them a sheet that says, ‘Okay, here's the things you have to do.’ I think that was certainly be helpful. Or, ‘here's,’ maybe, ‘some bullet points of things to look out for, or things you might want to consider when transferring.’ Because...a lot of times these athletes aren’t educated on, what is the next step...and more times than not, unfortunately, they might leave an opportunity, thinking that they have a better opportunity, and then they get stuck in limbo, and they don't find a better opportunity.”

Abraham described the importance of having a tool for the coaches to keep up with their recruits. He claimed that when recruiting multiple athletes at a time, you may lose track of the various required tasks needed to bring in the transfer athlete:

“I think there can be some value in having...some sort of guideline or check sheet or whatever you want to call it, that the coach has...to kind of make sure that all the big highlight points are getting addressed with in the recruiting process and making sure that all the information is being distributed properly...if you've got 4 or 5, 6, 7, 8 kids that you're recruiting, you kind of lose track sometimes of what you send to who, and who knows what once you receive from who and all those kinds of things.”

Abraham also stated the need for a better way for students to find housing. He explained that the housing shortage and means of finding housing are issues for the athletes he has recruited:

“I think that's difficult for kids transferring because typically is a little later in the year, it happens sometime in the spring semester, and most places are already signed and leased out for the following year by that point. So I think there’s value in having some sort of

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database with a system to help an incoming transfer, find housing and find affordable housing.”

Mary stated her concerns in needing extra help within their department. She claimed that there is a lot of time-sensitive work to be completed within their department. She also explored the value in having someone assist the athletes in transitioning to their new university:

“A full-time eligibility specialist I think would be huge. Say a transcript comes through, they're working with the departments to get it evaluated. And then they're coming to the advisor like, ‘Hey, here are three or four majors that this student could get into,’ Instead of us having to kind of go through and put the puzzle pieces together having one person who that's their job, I think it can make it a lot faster, and just a lot smoother...And somebody who's like...not only are they doing eligibility, but they are helping athletes to transition. They're working hand in hand with the advisor.”

Grace’s concerns were with awarding credit and the software that checks on eligible credit transfers. She claimed that the biggest challenge is obtaining and reviewing multiple syllabi from previous universities with various departments at Virginia Tech. She also stated how it would be beneficial to have someone in the registrar’s office who may award credit to incoming transfer students:

“For us, I think the biggest hurdle is having to obtain the syllabi and having the departments have the final say, on awarding of credit. I completely understand that. That's how Virginia Tech is structured and it will take a much higher level conversation to change what that procedure is here at Virginia Tech. Having the ability to have someone in the registrar's office that can award credit, more so than what we have would

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be I think very valuable not only to student athletes, but to Virginia Tech in general so that they are aware of fraud of what their credits look like. And the university is trying to help with a new database to help other transfers that want to come into Virginia type general population transfer, they can then go in themselves, upload their transcript and see what their portions are going to come in as, whereas in the past, they've not had that ability. So there is progress with that.”

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this project was to determine the best practices in recruiting and aiding transfer athletes to Virginia Tech's track and field program. The varying individuals were chosen to provide a wide range of views related to the NCAA Transfer Portal and the transfer process. Six themes were identified while analyzing the qualitative data from the interviews. Those themes include background and experience, scholarship, athlete transfer process, coach/administration role in transfer process, difficulties and shortcomings, and suggestions. Each theme used in this project contained key elements of the Path-Goal theory. Theme one examined the competency and effectiveness of the leaders, theme two identified scholarship as an obstacle athletes face, theme three shows athletes seeking a clarified path from their leaders when transferring, theme four displayed how the leaders provide support to the followers, theme five further identified various obstacles faced by the followers, and theme six gave personal suggestions of how to eliminate the obstacles the followers face in the path to the goal.

Theme one investigated the backgrounds and experiences were explored among coaches and administrators. By assessing the various backgrounds and experiences, one may determine individuals' efficiency as a leader within the Path-Goal Theory (Northouse, 2022). Further, the theory allows leaders to better understand their style in motivating and assisting the followers (EPM, 2019). The competency and styles of the leaders matters a great deal when considering how they may help define the path, remove obstacles and provide support to the followers. Some possessed a heavy academic background which can serve as a strength when assisting student athletes in the academic transition. This includes identifying the desired program, application

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process, transferring credits, etc. Other individuals have many years of experience within athletic academic departments.

Theme two placed great focus on the athlete's experience with scholarship in the transfer process. Scholarship can be stated as an obstacle here within the Path-Goal Theory. Students look to their universities to grant them scholarships so they may solely focus on athletics rather than have an extra financial burden (Northouse, 2022). Some reported great stress in leaving their previous school since their scholarship could be withdrawn a certain amount of days after entering the Transfer Portal. Others claimed that one of their main motivations to leave their previous school was the lack of scholarship they were receiving. Every athlete interviewed reported that the scholarship offered by prospective schools played a great role in choosing their desired school in the end. Scholarship proved to be a leading factor in reason for transfer among the student athletes. The athletes wanted to ensure security in order to focus on their competitive goals and aspirations.

Theme three explored the athlete transfer process and what this experience truly entails. As it relates to the Path-Goal Theory, athletes are seeking a clarified path from their leaders so they understand the steps to take when transferring (Northouse, 2022). In many cases, followers may want to feel that the leader has control when assisting them in achieving the identified goals (EPM, 2019). One athlete claimed that entering the transfer portal proved to be a rapid and smooth process. In their experience, their compliance personnel were a great help in filling out the essential paperwork and, eventually, placing their name on the transfer portal. Another claimed that the portal served as a great "marketing" tool in that she was contacted by schools that she was not previously aware of. She claimed that it opened her up to many opportunities

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that she, otherwise, would not have even considered if it was not for the transfer portal.

Conversely, one athlete utilized the “Do Not Contact” feature when entering the portal, which prevents college coaches from reaching out to the transferring athlete. She preferred doing the research on her own and contacting the coaches at the schools she found great interest in. She claimed this allowed her to feel less overwhelmed. The athletes, later, described their transition to Virginia Tech. All claimed that the coach was paramount in answering their questions, sending them relevant information, helping them with housing, etc. Two athletes shared their valuable experiences in meeting with their academic advisors and how helpful they were in their transition to the new university.

Theme four, the administration and coaches share their roles in the athletes’ transfer processes. This can be identified as the leaders providing support to the followers within the Path-Goal Theory. Without their assistance, the followers may not be able to find the knowledge and instructions needed to fulfill the desired goal (Northouse, 2022). The administration shared that their main purpose in assisting transfer student athletes is in identifying their credits that will transfer, helping choose the right program, and exploring their pathway and requirements for their desired degree. The administrators also report directly to the coaching staff regarding the student’s eligibility for certain programs. Coaches find themselves in a facilitator role for the student athletes. They become a main source of information and assistance for the student athletes in transition to the new university. They provide answers to topics such as degrees available, housing, training plans, schedules, application process, etc. Further, one coach claimed that it was one of their responsibilities to make the athletes feel welcomed once they arrive on

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campus. A great way of doing this, he claimed, is by communicating the team goals and visions to the athletes in order to spark meaning, purpose, and excitement.

Theme five focused on the difficulties and shortcomings involved with using the transfer portal as well as the transition process. These difficulties and shortcomings are defined as obstacles for the followers within the Path-Goal Theory. Obstacles existed on both sides for the leaders and the followers, which provides further difficulty in achieving the defined goal (Northouse, 2022). One athlete shares his struggle in that he never met with his academic advisor prior to arriving on campus. This led to him not being able to pursue his degree of choice since many of his credits did not transfer from his previous university. Another athlete claimed that finding housing on such short notice was a great struggle for her. Not only finding housing that was available, but also housing that was affordable based on the amount of her living stipend she receives each month. As for the administrators, the main difficulty and shortcoming was the process in which they identify credits that will transfer for student athletes. In this process, the administrators must work directly with admissions and various departments in order to understand where each athlete stands. At times, they must review multiple syllabi from the transfer student athlete's previous university in order to determine if the credits will be accepted by Virginia Tech. Since there are limited staff working to fulfill these tasks, the process can be quite slow and, at times, becomes backed up. Pertaining to the coaches, the main concern was that the NCAA Transfer Portal becomes somewhat of a "free agency" tool. The concern here was that students may leave their current institutions for another opportunity based on promises the other school is making, only to find themselves in a less favorable situation. The ease of use and

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opportunity to break communication rules becomes the issue when discussing something as important as a college education.

Theme six discusses the various suggestions student athletes, athletic administrators, and coaches had for improving the transfer process for student athletes into Virginia Tech. Looking to the Path-Goal Theory, these suggestions attempt to eliminate the obstacles in the way of achieving the goal and improving the means of providing support to the followers (Northouse, 2022). One student claimed that meeting with the academic advisor must be mandatory before arriving to campus in order to take a deep dive into what programs they may be eligible for. Another student wanted clarity on the deadlines associated with the transfer portal (i.e. cutoff date to entering the portal before a new semester). This was important to her since she did not want to risk losing her scholarship or forfeit other opportunities available to her. One coach claimed that it would be very valuable for the athlete if their exiting schools compliance office provided them with a print out that offers a checklist of steps to take when transferring as well as some nuances to look out for in the process. Another coach suggested creating a booklet or system that allowed each coach to efficiently keep up with the athletes that they are recruiting. The booklet or system would show steps to take when receiving the transfer athlete and the coach would better be able to keep up with what step each athlete is currently on. This coach also suggested creating a more centralized way for students to access available housing when entering the new university. An administrator spoke of the potential value of creating a new position within the athletic academic department that was strictly an eligibility specialist in order to assist her and others in speeding up the process of verifying eligibility. This position could also assist athletes in transition to their new home once they arrive on campus. The other administrator

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suggested placing someone in Virginia Tech's registrar office (rather than within each department separately) that has the ability to award credit to transfer athletes. She also suggested making improvements to the database that allows students to upload transcripts to check for eligible credit transfers.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this project was to determine the best practices in recruiting and aiding transfer athletes to Virginia Tech's track and field program. These varying individuals were chosen in order to provide a wide range of views related to the NCAA Transfer Portal and the transfer process. After examining the findings after the interviews, the transfer process was described at length, coaches and administrators shared their roles, and some difficulties and shortcomings were uncovered which later led to various suggestions from the individuals being interviewed.

The Path Goal Theory, "discusses how leaders motivate followers to accomplish designated goals... The stated goal of this theory is to enhance follower performance and follower satisfaction by focusing on follower motivation and the nature of the work tasks. At its inception, path-goal theory was incredibly innovative in the sense that it shifted attention to follower needs and motivations, and away from the predominant focus on tasks and relationships." (Northouse, 2022). This concept also focuses on how leaders may eliminate the obstacles in the way of the followers accomplishing the goals in order to promote efficiency. In this project, the coaches and administrators are the leaders, the student athletes are the followers,

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and the goal working to be accomplished is a smooth transfer and transition process to solely focus on competition.

The guiding research question for this project was:

- How can athletic staff and administration improve their processes and communication to further assist incoming Virginia Tech track and field student-athletes in the transfer process?

After gathering qualitative data and analyzing the contents for this project, the findings are accurate and sufficient in answering the research question. In theme one, the backgrounds and experiences of the administration were reviewed in order to gauge the competency of the leaders challenged with assisting the athletes in the transfer process. In theme two, athletes explain one of the main drivers or obstacles in their transferring: scholarships. This played a significant role in each athlete's transferring to the new university. In theme three, the athlete's shared their personal experiences with the transfer process as well as communications with the university staff and administration. This allowed for an inside look into the personal experiences of each athlete that was interviewed. In theme four, coaches and administration described their roles in the athletes' transfer processes. They described, at length, what recruiting and transitioning new athletes within their role entails. Theme five provides the personal shortcomings and difficulties that the athletes, athletic staff, and athletic administration experience in the transfer and recruiting process. This provided great perspective on the challenges that exist in this process of recruiting, transferring, and transitioning. In theme six, each interviewee provided their own suggestions on improving the transfer and transition process at Virginia Tech. By collecting the

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qualitative data from each interviewee, insights were given on what could be implemented to, overall, improve Virginia Tech's process when recruiting transfer track and field athletes.

### **Practitioner Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this project, there are six recommendations that could greatly improve Virginia Tech's process for receiving transfer student athletes. First, a simple improvement to make would be requiring each transfer student athlete to meet with their athletic academic advisor prior to arriving to campus. By making this meeting mandatory, each student will understand where they stand with their current academic situation as well as understand the various academic opportunities that lie ahead of them. These meetings may be conducted in person while on a campus visit, over the phone, or over a Zoom call. As the athletes fulfill this required meeting, there can be much less ambiguity when arriving at their new chosen university, which will allow them to further focus on their training and competition. This benefits the athlete and their future after athletics as well as the athletic team since there will be more focus available for training and competition from the athlete.

The second recommendation is to create a checklist/information sheet for compliance to provide exiting student athletes with as they decide to leave the university. This recommendation seems counter-intuitive since universities want to retain their student athletes, however, these athletes are still people with unique needs and external motivators. As the athlete approaches their compliance officers about entering the transfer portal, they can provide the exiting athlete with a handout that makes specific deadlines related to the NCAA Transfer Portal clear, gives a step-by-step process of how to communicate with prospective universities, gives a step-by-step

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process on how to enter a new university, and gives a general bulleted list of the minutiae to look out for when transferring. If Virginia Tech implements this practice, it can be shared with the rest of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and then be further implemented among other conferences as time moves on. Again, this will simply allow for less vagueness in the transfer process and let the athletes focus on what really matters to them and their team.

The third recommendation is to create a booklet/CRM system for coaches to actively track their prospective recruits. A booklet would allow the coaches to write in their prospect's name and contact information as well as keep notes on them and the steps needed to take for them to enter the new university. This will allow for the coaches to stay organized with their processes as well as benefit the athletes since they understand their coaches are tracking their progress. Further, the booklet would have a set checklist for required steps to take for the athlete to enter the university. The coaches would simply need to input the athletes name and information, and begin checking off steps in the transfer process. There are existing systems, like traditional CRM systems, for coaches and universities that may greatly improve the recruitment and transfer processes. Virginia Tech's current compliance software, ARMS, provides coaches with a system for recruiting and tracking databases, compliance solutions, admissions communication, etc. Virginia Tech's track and field coaching staff could greatly benefit from using ARMS recruiting database consistently. They may use it to track recruits' transfer and transition statuses and the many other tasks and paperwork that are required for them as well.

The fourth recommendation is to create a new, entry-level position within the athletic academic department that serves as an eligibility specialist as well as transition aid to the transfer student athletes. This could be an incredibly impactful implementation since the current

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administrators at Virginia Tech experience great difficulty in verifying student athletes' transfer credits as well as examining their eligibility for desired programs. The administrators who were interviewed reported that prospective athletes may have turned away from considering Virginia Tech since their process was so slow. Another important fact to consider is that most transfer student athletes are subject to the knowledge and available time of their new coaches to assist them in the transfer process. They are typically the principal point of contact for the prospective transfers when they have questions about the process. This creates varying experience among new transfers rather than each experience being uniform where universities can control it. This entry-level position could take this task off the coaches' agendas and they could be the point of contact for all of the athletes' transition questions and concerns. As they progress in their role, they will continuously acquire the knowledge needed to speed the transfer credit check process, answer all questions and concerns for transfer student athletes, and even share information regarding transitioning to a new college town.

The fifth recommendation is targeted to Virginia Tech as a university, but would be beneficial for the Virginia Tech athletic department as well. The recommendation is to create a more centralized database in which students may search for affordable housing in Blacksburg. This could be accomplished by making updates and expanding the current website of [offcampus.vt.edu](http://offcampus.vt.edu). The student affairs department currently partners with [Apartments.com](http://Apartments.com)<sup>TM</sup> to provide students with available options. However, they will be able to reach more students as well as landlords and property managers by increasing marketing expenditures for awareness about the site. They may also consider acquiring more partnerships with other rental websites to provide more available property options to students.

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The last recommendation is to expand the database for the software Virginia Tech currently utilizes for syllabi upload. This is used by students to check for eligible transfer credits from their previous university. An administrator reported in an interview during the data collection process that the software is quite limited when considering the vast amount of universities and their courses offered in the United States. Expanding the database could be a useful area to improve when working to smooth the process for transfer student athletes.

### **Researcher Recommendations**

Three future areas of study have been identified for those wishing to improve the transfer and transition process for transfer student athletes. First, a deep exploration and comparison of how coaches from varying athletic teams recruit and assist athletes could yield some useful information. This could provide the athletic department with multiple, detailed processes of how each team operates when recruiting. Best practices could be determined and derived to present to each team's coaching staff.

The second area is to further explore how athletic scholarship affects collegiate athletes' decisions when choosing a university, how it may affect performance, and the affect it may have on academic performance. Scholarship was a strong factor in the student athletes transferring in this project, so a deeper dive into the topic may provide the athletic department ways to support the athletes so that they may perform at the best of their ability.

The final identified area of study is to concentrate on one of the three groups interviewed for this project: athletes, coaches, or athletic administration. By doing so, the researchers will be able to build a comprehensive understanding of the responsibilities of the chosen party, the

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difficulties they may experience, and what improvements may be made to improve the transfer or recruiting process. The needs of these groups differ greatly from one another, so further investigation of what unique problems can be solved for each could prove to be very impactful.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Questions

#### Project Question

- How can athletic staff and administration improve their processes and communication in order to further assist incoming Virginia Tech track and field student-athletes in the transfer process?

#### Pre-Interview

\*Receive verbal consent from participants\*

#### Athlete Interview

1. Please tell me about yourself and your transferring to Virginia Tech from your previous university.
2. If you don't mind disclosing, how much scholarship were you receiving at your previous school, and how much are you receiving at Virginia Tech?
  - a. Did this play a big role in your transferring?
3. How would you describe the team culture at your previous school?
  - a. How about at Virginia Tech?
4. How big of a role did the NCAA Transfer Portal play in your transfer process to Virginia Tech?
5. Before actually entering the transfer process, what did you imagine your process would look like in the transfer portal?
  - a. How did your university you were transferring from assist you in the process?
6. How would you describe your experience within the transfer portal?
  - a. Are there any positives or negatives that stick out to you?
7. How would you describe the communication during this process and why?
  - a. Who was in charge of your transfer process?
8. How would you describe your transition during this process regarding these categories:
  - a. Meeting with advisors?
  - b. Receiving your scholarship offers?
  - c. Receiving information about your desired degree?
  - d. Receiving examples of training plans or practice schedules?

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- e. Assistance with the application process?
  - f. Other aid with various required forms and processes?
9. If you could, what would you change about the transfer process at Virginia Tech? Is there anything you would add or remove from the process?

**Administration Interview**

1. Please tell me about how you came into the role you are currently working within.
2. Could you describe your role in the student-athlete transfer process?
3. How versed are we as a school, would you say, in utilizing the NCAA Transfer Portal?
4. What are the current written processes for athletes transitioning to Virginia Tech through the transfer portal?
5. How often would you say these processes are adhered to?
6. What are some additional resources Virginia Tech provides to transferring athletes?
7. If you could, what would you change about our current transfer process at Virginia Tech? Is there anything you would be open to developing that would make your job and the athlete's transition easier?

**Coaches Interview**

1. Please tell me how you became a coach at Virginia Tech.
2. How often do you utilize the NCAA Transfer Portal in order to gain new talent?
3. How would you describe the transfer portal based on "value added" to your recruiting process?
4. What does the process for you, as a Virginia Tech coach, typically look like when recruiting new talent for your team?
5. Can you describe the process in which you assist athletes in the transition to your school?
6. Do you think you or the athletes would benefit from a written process to follow to assist them in the transition process?
  - a. Why?

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7. If you could, what would you change about the current process for receiving transfer student-athletes? Are there any additional resources you wish would be available to these athletes?

### **Post-Interview**

1. Any closing thoughts or ideas you would like to share?

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**Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter**

**Division of Scholarly Integrity and  
Research Compliance**  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-3732  
irb@vt.edu  
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** April 5, 2022  
**TO:** Richard James Rateau  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** The Need for Transition Aid in Transfer Student-Athletes  
**IRB NUMBER:** 22-344

Based on the submitted project description and items listed in the Special Instructions section found on Page 2, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by HHS and FDA regulations.

Further review and approval by the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) is not required because this is not human research. This determination applies only to the activities described in the submitted project description and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately submit an Amendment to the HRPP for a new determination. Your amendment must include a description of the changes and you must upload all revised documents. At that time, the HRPP will review the submission activities to confirm the original "Not Research" decision or to advise if a new application must be made.

If there are additional undisclosed components that you feel merit a change in this initial determination, please contact our office for a consultation.

Please be aware that receiving a "Not Research" Determination is not the same as IRB review and approval of the activity. You are NOT to use IRB consent forms or templates for these activities. If you have any questions, please contact the Virginia Tech HRPP office at 540-231-3732 or [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu).

**PROTOCOL INFORMATION:**

Determined As: **Not Research**  
Protocol Determination Date: **April 5, 2022**

**ASSOCIATED FUNDING:**

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

**Appendix C: Verbal Script for Recruitment**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_, my name is Jacob Spotswood and I am a graduate student here at Virginia Tech.

I am currently working towards completing my master's degree in Leadership Studies and also plan on conducting a project involving the Virginia Tech athletic department as well as Virginia Tech student-athletes. My project will explore the best practices in obtaining new athletes to Virginia Tech's track and field program. My intentions are to help create a process that is smooth for the athletes and allows them to place their focus on their competitions. As for the university, I want to help create a process that allows them to have to think less and stick to the plan when obtaining an athlete that is transferring from another university. I am currently contacting Virginia Tech student-athletes, coaches, and athletic administration to participate in a brief, recorded interview in order to gather data for my final project.

Since you fit the parameters of the desired participants, would you be willing to participate in a 30-minute interview based on this topic? All answers that are collected will be kept private and you will not be identified by name or role in the final project.

Your participation in the interview is voluntary and you are not obligated to contribute to the study. If you do plan to participate, you will not be compensated for assisting.

Please respond to me via email ([jaspotswood@vt.edu](mailto:jaspotswood@vt.edu)) to confirm your interest to participate and help further my study.

Thank you!