

Virginia Tech Student-Athletes' Involvement with Student-Athlete Development and
Their Future Success after College

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M.S. Online Master of Agriculture and Life Sciences

November 30, 2021

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Key Words: Careers, football, future, student-athlete, student-athlete development
(SAD), success

Acknowledgements

My time in the OMALS program has been a very long one, but it has been one that I would not change for anything and am very appreciative for those who have gotten me to this point. Throughout this long process, there have been many people who have helped me grow as a man but also allowed me to grow academically, more specifically with this project.

First, I would like to give much credit and thanks to my graduate advisory committee members. Dr. Rateau, Dr. Drape, and Dr. Potter gave me all of their attention and guided me to graduate with my second master's degree. The guidance they offered, on top of the endless information and knowledge they gave me, has put me in a position to be very happy with the final project I am presenting. I am also extremely grateful for their time, flexibility, and patience with me throughout this journey. I know that it has not been easy but they have always answered every question and helped me get to the final stages of where I am today. Thank you all for your continued guidance and grace.

Next, I would like to thank Josh Bost, Carrie Lynne Wolford, Alise Svihla, and Felicia Jefferson for their support during my academic career. There were so many times when I was having a rough day or did not think I could get through, but their positivity and "sticktoitiveness" as we say in football, was just the push that I needed to help me complete this project and program.

Lastly, I would like to thank my former teammates and project participants for taking the time to answer my interview questions to help me gather the data and information needed for this project. I know that you are all in different geographical

states and places of your lives, but you all took the time to help me with this final piece of my academic career, and I am forever grateful. Whether you know it or not, you gave me more than just data for a final project; you each left me with another life lesson.

My hope is that Student-Athlete Development can take this information and feedback for future Virginia Tech football players and continue to keep them engaged in all of the benefits and offerings that are available during their time here at Virginia Tech. Student-athletes may not know at the time how important it is to network or update a resume, but it is something that will help during their next phase once the life as a student-athlete has finished.

Thank you to everyone that has supported me in any and every way during this process. I am thankful for all of your guidance to help make me the best student, athlete, and man that I am today.

Abstract

This project determines the ways in which the office of Student–Athlete Development (SAD) helped Virginia Tech (VT) football players to be successful in life after college athletics and allows for a better understanding of football student-athletes' involvement within the (SAD) department. SAD is a resource provided to student-athletes that assists athletes in their career choices and develops a plan for life after college. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was the theoretical framework used during the study. During the research, qualitative interviews were conducted with former VT football players. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and coded which helped to establish common themes. Four themes emerged including: time difficulties/opportunities missed: participation in SAD/lack of attention to SAD: knowing the role of SAD: and participants' recommendations. The results showed that the SCCT was an effective theoretical framework to support the research purpose provided. Recommendations for SAD involving student-athletes include improving communication, mandating events, and improving partnership with the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). The limitations include personal bias, only using one university and sport, small response rate, and invalid responses.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this project is to determine the ways in which the office of Student-Athlete Development (SAD) helped Virginia Tech football players to be successful in life after college athletics. The job search process can be very time consuming and stressful, especially when athletes are committed to their sport like a full time job (Mahoney, 2011). Student-athletes spend an average of 20+ hours per week doing just sports related activities (Ayers, Pazmino-Cevallos, & Dobose, 2012). Time management is a very important part of being a successful college student, but especially for student-athletes. Twenty hours does not seem like much when compared to the 168 hours that are in a week total. In fact, that averages to about 12% of the week's hours. What that does not include is the hours spent on school work, study sessions, meetings and tutor sessions, and many other hours that relate to the student-athlete life (Simiyu, 2010). College is a very stressful time for all students, but stressors could be higher when adding an extra 20+ hours of mandatory labor (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). College years are vital when it comes to the development of student-athletes. These years are a time for students to shape and emerge into young adults and begin to make important life decisions (Wendling & Sagas, 2020). Commitment to being a student-athlete is a choice and an honorable part of someone's college career, but many times that sport is not the student-athletes entire future (Miller & Buttell, 2018). There are very few college athletes that can continue with their sport as a profession, although there are many more that believe they can. In fact, only about 1.6% of student-athletes make it into the professional ranks (Rutledge, 2019). Life is very expensive, and having a financial plan and path is a key part of being successful in adulthood.

Student-athletes need help and guidance to be more successful after college. This is where Student-Athlete Development comes into play.

Student Athlete Development (SAD) is a department at Virginia Tech (VT) that is in place to help decrease the stress for student-athletes by introducing them to the different aspects of leadership, connections, and career choices while at VT. This department helps to create connections for athletes that will hopefully be beneficial to their careers and lives once their time at VT is over. The purpose of this project is to observe the involvement between SAD and football players to see if the program does translate to success after school. The reason in which studying football players on this topic will be interesting is VT football players have a mixed participation rate when it comes to SAD, and it will be helpful for SAD to know if their efforts are being translated after college. This project will gather information and research from 8 former VT football players on their involvement or lack of involvement with SAD and how their time after college has been affected by that. Student Athlete Development is made up of a staff of four people, and their main goal is the betterment of VT student-athletes, but in this case specifically football players. These four staff members host countless workshops, seminars, guest speakers, and many more events to help benefit the athletes. These measures are all in place to promote life after football.

Theoretical Framework

During this study, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) will be used. This study will work to address career concerns and examine potential career development programs and advancements that will be beneficial for the future of student-athletes. By using SCCT, it allows for a better understanding of the process in which student-

athletes display their interests, make decisions, and succeed throughout life events (Thompson, 2012). The SCCT is broken down into two different levels of theoretical analysis. The first level is cognitive-person variables, and the second level consists of physical attributes, environmental factors, and different learning experiences, which have led to particular influences upon the career path (Thompson, 2012). Wendling et al. (2020) developed a research study that looked into how the Social Cognitive Career Theory related to college athletes' careers and how they planned for their lives after their sport (Wendling & Sagas, 2020). Wendling showed a relationship between the CSM model, self-efficacy, career goals, and career planning. With these results, it suggests that having a plan is beneficial for the advancements of a career regarding student-athletes. This study shows that planning and having goals are important in life after college, and supports the idea that getting involved could be potentially helpful in success for student-athletes for life after college (Wendling & Sagas, 2020). By exemplifying this theory with Student-Athlete Development, it helps to create an understanding of what it takes to prepare student-athletes for their futures after college (Wendling & Sagas, 2020). SCCT creates helpful knowledge in deciding the purpose behind our study and also give us reasoning as to why people may respond the way they do regarding career choices and opportunities. Raque-Bogdan et al. (2016) wrote a study regarding first generation college students and how they unravel the layers related to social cognitive theory (Raque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016). Student-athletes are also a unique population within the college world, and sometimes additional help is needed towards success, but it isn't always easy for athletes to know what help is necessary for their future. (Satterfield, Croft, & Godfrey, 2010). The SCCT is a way to

discover job ambitions, while looking into different factors that will lead one to those ambitions, such as resources, opportunities and potential barriers (Raque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016). Social Cognitive Career Theory shows a perspective that helps to build upon other theories related to career development and help in supporting relationships between self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations related to goals and interests of future careers (Thompson, 2012).

Virginia Tech football players range in many different ethnicities, backgrounds, majors, and many more categories. One thing that almost all have in common is the drive and desire to become successful in whatever career path they choose to pursue. With that, resources such as SAD could be very beneficial but challenging, and the involvement does not always equate to success. To add, Virginia Tech football players have a very extensive schedule, and time for extra meetings and gatherings is not always available. Finding the correlation can help SAD develop in a multitude of ways and hopefully provide a better connection between football and Student-athlete development. The purpose of this study is to compare the different responses provided by athletes regarding SAD and help to create a better connection between football student athletes and SAD.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to determine the ways in which the office of SAD helps Virginia Tech football players to be successful in life after college athletics. It is believed that student-athletes' involvement outside of their sport could benefit them in their future endeavors. Often times, student-athletes get overwhelmed by their sports, which can lead to possible delays in other parts of life, such as their career or financial

stability after college (Rutledge, 2019). This could potentially cause them to fall behind and create problems after graduation (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). Student-athletes make great leaders and employees but have potentially lower levels of career development factors (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). The purpose of this study is to observe why more football student athletes aren't involved in Student-Athlete Development. Finding ways to improve the relationship between the two programs, SAD and the VT football team, will allow for greater growth and development for both programs. By working together, each program can benefit and create a stronger athletic department as a whole. The study provides 8 interviews with former and current Virginia Tech football players. The objective of the interviews is to get the players' perception on SAD as a whole and observe why there is a lack of interest and involvement.

Hypothesis

I believe that the more involved that a student-athlete is with the Student-Athlete Department program the more successful they will be when they choose to further their careers and life after college. The data is collected from the interviews and analyzed to determine how many football athletes felt they did or did not benefit from their involvement, or lack thereof, while attending Virginia Tech. The belief is that student-athletes who are involved in many of the programs offered by Student-Athlete Development are already on a path to a career or pursuing their next steps after graduation. For the student-athletes that are not involved in Student-Athlete Development programs, the belief is that they are solely relying on how prepared they feel going into their next stages. Student-athletes are given two options when it comes to Student-Athlete Development: use the resources provided by Student-Athlete

Development or other resources provided to them or figure it out on their own without using the resources. There will more than likely be a trend represented in the data regarding graduation year due to the increasing awareness that student-athletes are provided with the importance of using resources in order to be prepared moving forward. The data is thought to detail the resources provided to student-athletes, which prove to be a vital source of guidance for each student-athlete; however, as with most programs, there is always room for improvement.

Research Purpose

Describe how football student athletes who are involved with Student-Athlete Development use this program to prepare and succeed in life after college athletics.

Definition of Key Words

Careers: An occupation that is held for a long period of time with room to grow within it

Football: A team sport played with an oval ball where the objective is to score more points than the other team

Future: A time period that has not yet occurred

Student Athlete: An individual who is enrolled in courses but also performs in intercollegiate sports

Student Athlete Development (SAD): A department in place to help and guide student athletes for their lives after college

Success: Achieving a set out goal

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Setting Athletes Apart

The purpose of this project is to determine the ways in which the office of SAD helps Virginia Tech football players to be successful in life after college athletics. College athletes are a special kind of people, and it takes a lot of resilience to do what they do on a daily basis; however, that does not mean they do not do it without help (Arora, 2015). Athletes in general, but even more-so with college athletes, show different eminence about them that set them apart from many people their own ages (Ting, 2009). Most 18-23 year olds have a lot on their plate during college years with classes and possible part time jobs, but student athletes have a different kind of job that they encounter during their years as college students (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). It has been thought that many employers actually consider hiring athletes over other applicants because they possess qualities that help derive companies to success quickly (Chalfin, Weight, Osborne, & Johnson, 2015). Sometimes, athletes may possess the qualities, but are incapable of expressing them appropriately (Van Raalte, Cornelius, Brewer, Petitpas, & Andrews, 2016). The real question is “do athletes know how valuable being involved outside of their sport is to their future career?” Athletes can be grouped in two different groups: those who are in college for their sport and only their sport and those who go to the university because of their sport, but value their education as well (Vogel et. al, 2019). Student-athletes remain resilient when it comes to their sport, but they also have to perform in the classroom if they want to continue competing. (Rutledge, 2019). Rutledge (2019) looks into four different college athletes who participated in a highly involved Division 1 NCAA sport, and went on to complete

graduate school, and landed a successful career. When student-athletes slack off on the field, they lose playing time, and when they slack off in the classroom, they also lose playing time. Athletes have to be “on their game” in all aspects of the student-athlete life, which is how being intrinsically motivated plays a very large role in success of the athlete (Rutledge, 2019).

Resilience is a great quality for many to have and knowing how interactive and committed most Division 1 athletes are with their sports creates a sense of admiration when understanding what sets them apart in the workforce (Subhan & Ijaz, 2012). Subhan et al. (2012) defines resilience as the capability to recover rapidly from an unfortunate life event. The idea of resiliency is vital for all employed people in society, but it is different with regard to young athletes (Subhan, 2012). Chalfin et al. (2015), states that being able to put “student-athlete” on a resume gives an advantage over those individuals that have non-athletic familiarities. Having athletic experience can make individuals more competitive within the workplace and hiring process. Athletes often possess characteristics of “discipline, dedication, sacrifice, integrity, leadership, ambition, perseverance, teamwork, work ethic, and drive to succeed”, all of which are needed within the workforce in order to be the most effective company (Chalfin et al., 2015). However, although beneficial, being able to simply just put “student-athlete” along with the attributes that coincide on a resume is far less advantageous than actually knowing how to apply the different qualifications and guidelines on how to be successful within careers and life after college.

Student-Athlete Development

Student-Athlete Development teaches athletes how to use their skills in an effective manner by showing them how to apply them to different occupations. Student-Athlete Development also connects these athletes with different companies and employers that may match with their abilities and interests. SAD teaches athletes how to display their qualities and use them to their strengths, making them more competitive candidates for different careers. Kniffin et al. (2015) suggests that student-athletes are expected to possess a higher level of self-confidence and self-respect than others. This article explains that student-athletes have to interact with competitors daily, which helps them to develop confidence overtime and forces them to develop skills that will benefit them in the future (Kniffin, Wansink, & Shimizu, 2015). Student-Athlete Development brings these skills to the athletes' attention and then teaches them how to express them in a way that is most beneficial for their success.

Kniffin et al. (2015) mentions that student-athletes are typically more sociable and interactive which leads them to achieve higher career statuses. This supports student-athlete's involvement in Student-Athlete Development and the hopes of attaining greater success within the workforce. Gayles & Hu (2009) suggests that no matter the type of student, all students should be encouraged to become more involved because those who are more involved develop qualities such as self-awareness, communication, and guidance. Therefore, depending on the athlete, the involvement in Student-Athlete Development might differ but is ultimately helpful.

Van Raalte (2016) suggested that often times student-athletes have all the qualities to be a successful business person, but they do not necessarily know how to express it appropriately (Van Raalte et al., 2016).

Virginia Tech, Helping Athletes with the Next Step

Student-Athlete Development is a department within Virginia Tech Athletics that was created to help student-athletes within all aspects of life. They help with community outreach programs, leadership development, and aspects of career development, including helping with resumes, sponsoring career jumpstart programs, hosting Student-Athlete Advisory Committee and Next Level leadership. Only about two percent of college athletes advance to a professional career in their sport, which means ninety-eight percent of college students-athletes must prepare to go into the “real world” and participate in career preparation. Therefore, this organization is provided to student-athletes to help them become more involved and more aware of the amount of opportunities beyond sports (HokieSports, 2020).

Virginia Tech Football and SAD

Virginia Tech football is an icon program within the university. Collegiate student-athletes, especially football players, are often seen as “heroes” or “celebrities” within college town communities, so for athletes to get involved, it creates a positive image for themselves, as well as the university (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011; Chalk, 2008). Getting student-athletes involved in activities outside of their sports helps them to grow in all aspects of life. When interacting within the communities, it helps athletes develop a desire to serve others and also helps to give them perspective of different types of life

(Chalk, 2008). Virginia Tech Student Athlete Development offers different community outreach programs that help athletes interact with community members of all ages helping to create better communication and people skills for athletes (HokieSports, 2020). Virginia Tech football players participate in different community events each year that get them involved with fans of all ages and allow them to interact and appreciate the fame that comes with the sport. The football team also has 2-3 representatives on the SAD-SAAC, Student-Athlete Development-Student Athlete Advisory Committee each year. This committee meets every couple of weeks and discusses the events happening within the athletic life on campus and different outreach or community events that are coming up on campus. Coaches, sports administration, and Student Athlete Development staff work hard to encourage student-athletes to get involved in whatever they can, whenever they can (Huml, Hancock, Bergman, & Hums, 2019). The Virginia Tech coaches and administrators understand that the game is a vital part of the success within the football team, but life after the sport is just as, if not more important. Interacting within the community helps to create better life skills and help individuals grow as adults and human beings, but over the years, the number of those football players who are involved in these events has decreased, which is concerning for the department.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this project is to understand why there is a lack of involvement from football players within Student-Athlete Development at Virginia Tech. Interviews helped to obtain information and understanding from the interviewee's perspective, while gaining better knowledge about the lack of involvement in SAD (Rowley, 2012).

Study Design

This study is a qualitative study interviewing eight former Virginia Tech football players and utilizing information along with principles of grounded theory approach for data collection and understanding. The grounded theory is a qualitative data technique that aims to explore information about the topic at hand (Chun et al., 2019). This research design is used to explore the potential benefits and opportunities available when student-athletes participate in Student-Athlete Development (SAD). It also helps to explore perceptions of SAD programs and how involvement, or lack thereof, can impact the future of student-athletes after their college years.

Grounded theory studies aim to identify phenomena, and possible relationships or themes among various concepts (Chun et al., 2019). In this specific study, grounded theory approaches are used to explore the possible connections between SAD involvement and student-athlete success after college. With regards to this study, the cross sectional approach involves the student-athlete population at Virginia Tech, and the interview is aiming to explore potential patterns and associations between student-athlete involvement in SAD and their future success after college. This interview and research approach are used to help explore the possible perceived benefits and

opportunities student-athletes have had following college with regards to their amount of participation in SAD. The interview is believed to develop more realistic and compassionate answers from the interviewees. The interviews were verbal exchanges where the researcher asked questions to gather information about the interviewees' attitudes, beliefs and experiences with SAD with the hope that they will provide open and honest answers. Interviews were chosen because the researcher wanted to gain insight and a better understanding of the attitudes, experiences, values and perceptions that the football players have/had with SAD and their preparation for life after college football. Specifically, a semi-structured interview was conducted. A semi-structured interview consists of six to twelve specific questions that are presented mostly in order but can be altered with sub-questions if necessary in order to guarantee the main question is answered adequately (Rowley, 2012). The data collection in this study can help provide information for future programs for student-athletes, as well as further educate student-athletes in the importance of participating in these programs. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation in this study.

Participants

Before contacting participants for the study, a Virginia Tech IRB approval form was submitted and approved (Appendix D). Participants were recruited via convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a sampling method that obtains participants that are easy to reach, whether that be geographically, or via the internet (Stephanie, 2015). The participants of this study were recruited through email. Inclusion criteria required that the participants must be either a current senior football student athlete, or a former football student-athlete having graduated from Virginia Tech within the last six years

(2014-2020). A total of 15 participants responded to partake in the study and eight were chosen to be interviewed. The participants of this study were all former football players at Virginia Tech. The participants were asked a series of questions via phone call, regarding their involvement with SAD during college and how those college years did or did not prepare them for the workforce. The interview questions were designed by the researcher, using Microsoft Word. The interview questions were created to gain responses to benefit SAD. These questions were reviewed with a university expert to confirm the correct data would be collected. It was decided to not send the questions before the interview because of the possibility of less authentic or planned responses to the questions.

Conducting interviews

An email (Appendix A) was sent out to the participants based on the convenience sampling done by the researcher. The email explained who the researcher was and gave a brief overview of the purpose behind the study. After participants agreed to participate, a second email (Appendix B) was sent to schedule a 30 minute interview session with the researcher via phone. The interview's audio was recorded, and many notes were taken during the interview process. Following the interview, the researcher listened to the audio again and further broke down the information presented in order to observe the emotions and meaning on a deeper level. This process was done for each of the interviews.

Interpreting the interviews

Interpreting the interviews is a time consuming and personal process. Essentially, the transcription of the interviews is about gaining a better understanding of data presented and familiarizing oneself with the various perspectives (Rowley, 2012). It was stated that the best approach to effectively understanding the data is to listen and transcribe a couple of the interviews' data in word form. All eight of the interviews were transcribed by the interviewer. Rowley (2012) suggests that the components to making sense of the data is to "organize the data set, get acquainted with the data, classify, code, interpret the data, and lastly, present and write up the data." Overall, the purpose of transcribing and interpreting interviews is to figure out common themes and to focus on the meaning of what the interviewees have to say.

Organizing the data

Based on Rowley (2012), the interviewer first organized the data in a word document for each interview and then split up the answers to specific questions so they were all in one place. While organizing the data, it was very important to keep track of the specific statements from each interviewee. In order to keep track of these statements, the interviewer took notes during each interview and organized the notes by common themes, statements or quotes.

Getting acquainted with the data

It was vital for the interviewer to be overly acquainted with the data to fully understand the messages and create an understanding for what the interviewees were discussing (Rowley, 2012). The interviewer took time when reading through the

interviews and picked out specific or interesting points and key themes throughout the data. It was decided during this time to present the data based off of the interview questions asked. The data will be presented based on relevance in answering the questions and supporting or denying the hypothesis.

Classifying, coding and interpreting the data

Overall, the researcher's purpose is to create an interpretation in order to make sense of the data. The final part of interpreting the data is breaking down the themes and understanding whether they come from the developing data or if they were pre-figured from the interview questions or hypothesis (Rowley, 2012). These themes will become the basis for the "Findings" section of the research. Each theme is given a different name decided by the interviewer based on the data from the interview. Finally, the data is uncovered and broken down into the different themes to help create an appropriate understanding, where the quotes and information can be identified to support the findings (Rowley, 2012). During the coding section, it is easy for bias to appear; therefore the researcher constantly reflected and noticed where questions for further research appeared. In order to limit bias, the researcher also asked another researcher to check and give insight on the information within the findings (Rowley, 2012).

Reflexivity statement

I really enjoyed completing this project and gaining a better insight on why student-athletes, specifically football players, do not participate more within Student-Athlete Development. I personally have taken advantage of SAD as much as I could

during my time at Virginia Tech. I was an active member of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, attended different workshops, and regularly set up meetings with the staff to work on my resume and prepare for future interviews, but I was always curious to know why more of my teammates were not doing the same.

Before completing this study, I reached out to one of the staff members and asked their opinion on completing this study and why they thought there was such limited involvement from football players. She stated that it is not only within Virginia Tech SAD itself, but entirely across the NCAA; SAD wishes there was more they could do to increase the involvement. They mentioned a couple of questions that they were curious to know as well and I included them in the study.

The results I found were somewhat split, which I was thought was interesting. I do think the data presented will be beneficial for the Virginia Tech SAD to observe and potentially make some alterations in how they reach football student-athletes.

Chapter 4: Results and Conclusion

Results

The purpose of this project was to determine the ways in which the office of SAD helped Virginia Tech football players to be successful in life after college athletics. Comprehensive interviews were completed and included former Virginia Tech football players who discussed their interactions regarding VT SAD. All of the student-athletes had graduated within the last five years of attending Virginia Tech. During the interviews, a semi-structured framework was used and four themes were created based on these interviews to help provide answers to the underlying research purpose:

Describe how football student-athletes who are involved with Student-Athlete Development use this program to prepare and succeed in life after college athletics.

The four themes are included below:

1. Time difficulties/opportunities missed
2. Participation in SAD/Lack of attention to SAD
3. Knowing the role of SAD
4. Participants' recommendations

Theme 1: Time difficulties/Opportunities missed

One of the roles of SAD is to offer a career fair for student athletes where various organizations meet students and discuss possible summer internships opportunities.

Understanding this, one participant stated:

“I wasn’t able to do an internship while at Tech... I couldn’t spend all the time in the summer with a company and then compete for a full time offer” (EG 1:38).

Additionally, knowing his summer schedule was booked with practices, the participant went on to say that he did not pursue meeting those employers to learn more about the internships as:

“Our football schedule is so intense during the summer” and the “most difficult part was our football schedule... I wasn’t able to go do an internship while I was at Tech” (EG 1:38).

Participant EG summarized that they missed events scheduled by SAD knowing that “student-athletes can’t do full internships” and that it may be best for student-athletes to have “only a long weekend.”

Student-athletes also talked about their decisions to not attend various SAD sponsored workshops:

“As a football student-athlete, I only focused on football and where it was going to take me, but after several injuries and setbacks, I realized that unfortunately, football wouldn’t be my future and had to take an alternative track, but because I didn’t take advantage of career opportunities I missed out on a lot” (CC 1:12).

Theme 2: Participation in SAD/Lack of attention to SAD

College students alone receive a lot of emails from professors, random promotions and other campus related events. The addition of athletic emails adds another constant email, which can cause student-athletes to become overwhelmed with the amount of emails in their inbox. It is easy to let a few slip between the cracks every now and then. One athlete stated:

“A lot of folks really aren’t informed, and when they see Student-Athlete Development, they just think it is an email, and they just erase the email.” (JC 4:31).

Athletes are also always on the go. When they are not on the fields or the courts, they are trying to catch up on schoolwork or trying to have a bit of a social life. With that, it becomes hard to throw other events in the mix while still having priorities. This was evident when these participants stated:

“I didn’t look into them (SAD) too much. I was just focused on football. I feel like football players probably care the least about programs and development. All football players care about is football until their senior year” (JC 3:56).

Another participant stated:

“As an athlete, we don’t have much time to do anything” (TY 4:04).

These words alone go to show why there is minimal participation in SAD. Although some athletes were not able to participate as much, one participant stated:

“There was a couple of things, but the most prominent one was the career jumpstart program. I was actually hired out of that program that they put on” (CP 2:13).

Another stated:

“To be honest, I didn't really take part in the Student-Athlete Development program too much. There were some events that I went to that I honestly thought were very useful. I was a big fan of the career fair and the resume remixes” (CC 1:49).

Finally, another added:

“I went to a couple of those things where we did the networking and different companies came in” (EG 3:17).

Even if it was limited involvement, after school and football are over, some athletes realize it is important to make time for career related functions due to the benefits they provide down the line.

Participant CP suggested that athletes:

“Take advantage more... The opportunities and the programs they had to try to better myself professionally” (CP 3:13).

A different participant elaborated that:

“Career jumpstart was extremely valuable” (TY 3:26).

Theme 3: Knowing the role of SAD

The definition for Student-Athlete Development may sound self-explanatory: *developing athletes*. But developing them how? It can mean different things to different athletes. To some, SAD is in place to help demonstrate different abilities to athletes.

Understanding this, some participants stated they:

“Help athletes for life after their sport, that they’re planning in college” (JW 2:57).

Another participant added:

“They teach student athletes some skills they’ll need, and then try to connect them” (JC 2:07).

Other athletes know that SAD provides different programs that benefit career and life after college stating that:

“My understanding was that it was like workshops and resume remixes and career fairs. All of those things lining up to help student athletes get full time jobs” (EG 2:54).

A participant also added:

“I can’t say that I do definitively know, but from what I can remember they help athletes better prepare themselves for life after college. They offer many programs and workshops that student athletes can come to for many different reasons. I honestly think they should be taken advantage of more” (TY 2:47).

Another athlete sees SAD as a department that provides to the athletes:

“They are here at VT to make sure that all student-athletes who choose to use this resource can be prepared when they’re done at college. They will make phone calls, set up interviews, and put you in front of companies or help create contacts with companies to get your foot in the door” (CC 1:37).

None of the answers aligned perfectly to one specific role of SAD, but they all suggested that SAD is a valuable place to help advance and grow the experience and knowledge for each and every student athlete in their own unique way.

Theme 4: Participants' recommendations

Student-Athlete Development provides so many helpful events and functions that provide beneficial incentives for athletes looking to expand their works outside of their sport; however, SAD needs some help on meeting athletes where they are in order to provide the most advantageous help they can. Athletes were asked to provide some recommendations or feedback on how to make SAD more helpful.

One athlete responded by suggesting more opportunities or programs for athletes:

“More programs, you know? Internships or helping student-athletes get internships in the summer. Or, something that just came to my mind is they can reach out to athletes to find ways that they can connect more. I feel not many athletes are engaged because of the methods that we are reached out in. So I’m basically saying ask the athletes ways that 18-22 year olds receive information the best” (CC 3:10).

While programs themselves are important within career development, creating connections is an even greater aspect. The participants made some great suggestions that tie into former student-athlete connections and creating partnerships with different departments on campus.

“Leveraging prior or former student-athletes and expanding the network... I’d love to come back and talk to anybody interested in the technology field” (TY 6:22)

Adding to the connections EG added:

“Stronger relationships with the campus side of things, like the business school and we’re able to transform that relationship to employers. Pamplin has hundreds of companies on retainer that I’m sure would love to come talk to student athletes directly” (EG 7:09).

Communication is also a very important part of the business world, but also with getting athletes involved with SAD.

“I think just work on getting the word out more, just spreading the word more” (NP 3:02).

However, many former athletes agree that it’s difficult to know what email is important to read and what is should be deleted, especially when there are a lot coming their direction. JC states:

“...A lot of folks don't really, aren't really that informed and they see Student-Athlete Development and they just think that it's an email. And they just erase the email. But there's not, I don't know, maybe not a ton of awareness” (JC 4:31).

What are some interesting ways to get the athletes more involved? One participant suggested creating some real life courses:

“Only thing I could maybe think of is more real life skills courses. Like where we learned to do taxes, budget money or dress professionally. Things like that” (TY 5:56).

Another stated that having a platform where athletes could go that is specifically related to SAD, but outside of social media.

“Honestly, what would be really awesome, not really sure this would be possible, but it would be cool if there was an app or something that athletes could easily click on that lets them know what different things are happening quick and easy rather than having to read so many emails all the time” (JC 4:31).

SAD’s main priority is to meet athletes where they are and try to benefit them in whatever ways they can. Feedback is very valuable in order for them to grow and develop to help provide assistance to athletes, their futures, and their greatness.

Summary of the Themes

By the eight interviews that were conducted with former football student athletes at Virginia Tech, four themes were created: Time difficulties/opportunities missed, Participation in SAD/Lack of attention to SAD, Knowing the role of SAD, and Participants recommendations. The first theme, time difficulties/missed opportunities, explains how grueling the schedules are for a football student-athlete and how there are many opportunities they aren’t allowed to take because of the time commitment with football. The second theme, Participation in SAD/Lack of attention to SAD, describes the student-athlete’s personal involvement with SAD and what they potentially feel they missed out on in life after college. The third theme, Knowing the role of SAD, expresses

the athlete's individual representation on what and how SAD works with student-athletes. The fourth and final theme, Participants' recommendations, describes different tactics that SAD could try to increase student-athlete involvement.

Discussion

Upon completion of the interview process the researcher was able to find that the SCCT Theory was an effective theory for this study. The SCCT Theory focuses on self-efficacy beliefs, goals, and outcomes (Thompson, 2012), and a few of those areas were addressed in the results of this research. During the interview process, the researcher discussed goals that former players had prior to graduation; however, most of those were broad and did not go into great detail of what each person really wanted to accomplish or the goals they saw for their life beginning college. It was not always apparent what each person's journey was to get to their current occupation or position in life. Unfortunately, the researcher noticed that because of the lack of time that these athletes had, there was little time to discover their ambitions into discovering a job, which limited them on the resources, opportunities or barriers that they would potentially face in careers after football was complete (Raque-Bogdan et. al, 2016). EG explains this stating:

“Our football schedule is so intense during the summer” and the “most difficult part was our football schedule... I wasn't able to go do an internship while I was at Tech” (EG 1:38).

Additionally, the lack of time and/or lack of proper planning were factors in the preparation these athletes had with their future, and it seemed as though the goals

presented by these athletes were mostly revolved around football and what they wanted to accomplish with the sport, not necessarily thinking about a career until the latter part of their athletic careers (Wendling et. al, 2020). JC states:

“I didn’t look into them (SAD) too much. I was just focused on football. I feel like football players probably care the least about programs and development. All football players care about is football until their senior year” (JC 3:56).

After completing the study, the researcher observed that it could have been beneficial to ask questions that would have addressed any information regarding plans during college years for each individual.

Social Cognitive Career Theory focuses largely on an individual’s interests. This is important for student-athletes because although their main focus may not always be on school, they are aware of what they are interested in which ultimately helps in career choices. Student-Athlete Development has programs that specifically help with exploring interests if athletes choose to take advantage which could be beneficial. Social Cognitive Career Theory also focuses on the value of an individual’s involvement and personal goals which are also aspects that Student-Athlete Development encourages. Overall, this theory was proven to be a good theory to evaluate the programs of Student-Athlete Development and how student-athletes are prepared for the future if they choose to take advantage. The Social Cognitive Career Theory matches up with what the researcher found because if what SAD offers aligns with the personal goals of the participant, they were more willing to get involved.

The majority of participants chose not to participate in SAD due to their lack of interest along with the time constraints due to playing college football, but the few that did take advantage of the program were able to use the information in their career search or at least gain an understanding of how to speak with potential employers. CC mentioned:

“To be honest, I didn't really take part in the student athlete development program too much. There were some events that I went to that I honestly thought were very useful. I was a big fan of the career fair and the resume remixes.” (CC 1:49).

However, most people knew about the SAD program, but chose not to use the program to their benefit in preparation for life after college athletics and realized later that the experience and connections could have played a vital part in career opportunities.

“They offer many programs and workshops that student athletes can come to for many different reasons. I honestly think they should be taken advantage of more” (TY 2:47).

The four themes displayed during this project correlate to how student-athletes did or did not use SAD to help prepare and then succeed in life after college. The four themes include: time difficulties and opportunities missed, participation in SAD and more specifically the lack of attention to SAD, knowing the role of SAD, and participants' recommendations. If I were to complete this study again, I would try and find a theory that pays attention to the student-athlete's individual progress through career searching

as well as an evaluation of the Student-Athlete Development program to determine issues within the program compared to participant recommendations.

Conclusion

In completing this research, four themes were created from the different interviews conducted: Time difficulties/opportunities missed, Participation in SAD/Lack of attention to SAD, Knowing the role of SAD, and Participants' recommendations. Each of these themes played a vital role in answering the research purpose stated as describe how football student-athletes who are involved with Student-Athlete Development use this program to prepare and succeed in life after college athletics. Each of the themes helps to explain different aspects of life of a student-athlete and how time is a factor in the lack of involvement; however there are student-athletes that wish they could be more involved because they believe SAD is a beneficial resource.

Through my own involvement as an active member of SAD and through the research conducted in this study, I feel assured that my findings are accurate. I was able to relate to the participants in the study because of my own personal experiences and involvement with SAD. The findings within the research align with what the literature review expresses and how the time commitment that athletes face towards their sport plays a critical role in making them feel they are behind in the job search when their time as an athlete is finished.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Limitations

Recommendations

The purpose of this project was to describe how football student-athletes who are involved with Student-Athlete Development use this program to prepare and succeed in life after college athletics. After interviewing participants, I was able to find four themes that went along with my study including: time difficulties/opportunities missed, participation in SAD/lack of attention to SAD, knowing the role of SAD, and participants recommendations. Once I completed my project “Virginia Tech Student Athletes’ Involvement with Student Athlete Development,” I was able to come up with a few recommendations that I think can be useful.

The first recommendation is to improve the communication between the Student-Athlete Development office and the football office at Virginia Tech. If all of the football staff along with the Student-Athlete Development staff are all on the same page with upcoming events and the stressing importance of taking advantage of the resources offered, the communication will be relayed to football student-athletes more frequently which could increase the number of football student-athletes that attend events. This communication is important because the football staff engages with the players every day, and they will be able to advocate for players to attend.

The second recommendation is to have the Athletics Department mandate two to three Student-Athlete Development events per year. By making these events mandatory, students will have exposure to the events and gain a better understanding of what Student-Athlete Development is and what it can offer a student-athlete during

their time at Virginia Tech. It will also provide them with an opportunity to get involved and attend events on their own and not just because they are mandatory. Due to NCAA rules and regulations, it may not be permissible for these events to be mandatory. Student-athletes are limited to the number of hours that they can be “required” to do something, and they are also mandated to have one day free of athletic activity. Additional conversations and research would need to be completed in order to determine if SAD events could be mandated or if that would impact the restricted number of hours for student-athletes.

Throughout this project, I also noticed that this is a bigger issue than Virginia Tech; it is an issue with most schools in the Atlantic Coastal Conference (ACC). The third recommendation is to improve the partnership with the ACC in hopes of promoting the importance of all phases of student-athlete development. This partnership could be an on-going task for the ACC to make a push for the importance of student-athletes networking, creating and editing resumes, and preparing for life after the sport. For example, the ACC emphasizes the importance of unity in the United States, and they created a Unity Week during the football season for all ACC schools to show their support in unifying people from all backgrounds. With the ACC having the authority to mandate something as important as unity, they would be able encourage student-athletes to take advantage of their resources with their platform.

Lastly, I would recommend to Student-Athlete Development the idea of creating an app for student-athletes to download so that they have all of the information about upcoming events and programs in one place. This was recommended by one of the participants of the study, and I believe that having a quicker way to access a schedule

of events and any announcements would increase the involvement in Student-Athlete Development. Students are more likely to open an app to quickly look at a schedule or an announcement than to comb through their emails or check a specific post on social media. I think this was a great recommendation by the participant and one that could be a vital part of increasing participation in programs hosted by Student-Athlete Development.

Limitations

There are some limitations behind this research, including a small response rate, invalid responses, only using one university, and my personal bias. Reaching out to 35 people, I had hopes of receiving a lot more than the 15 people that I ended up hearing from. I went into this knowing it would be difficult to get people to respond, but I am glad and appreciative of the 15 that got back to me. Invalid responses was tough due to me having to deal with answers that did not give me much information. Some responses like “yes I did get involved” were simply not enough and I was forced to ask my participants to dive deeper and explain. One university limitation is difficult because my participants all attended Virginia Tech, and not all student-athletes can be grouped into one category based off of one university. Lastly there was personal bias. This was due to my connection to Virginia Tech football and SAD. Having strong ties to both made it interesting to deal with during the entire process.

Different sports have different off/in-season training times, which could result in more or less time to complete internships or interviews for a potential job (Scott, Paskus, Miranda, Petr, & McArdle, 2008). Another limitation was my own personal bias within the study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Email to participants

Good evening,

My name is Tyrell Smith and I am a student-athlete at Virginia Tech. I am currently in my last semester of school, after competing on the football field for the last 6 years. I am currently working towards the completion of my OMALS degree, which requires me to complete a research study. I am completing my study with regards to being a student-athlete and the ability to succeed after college in the career force. I have been an active member of our Student-athlete development programs, such as, Student Athlete Advisory Committee and our Leadership Advisory Team for the last 4 years at Virginia Tech. I have had the opportunity to meet with many student athletes who have been active members of these two programs and many other functions of SAD. I am curious to find out if active involvement within SAD helps to jumpstart student-athletes success after college outside of their sport.

For this study, I am completing an interview full of about 12 questions looking to find how many people actually use SAD to their advantage/disadvantage during school. I am eager to hear the many different responses. If you are interested, would you please take 10-20 minutes to complete the interview?

It is greatly appreciated and I thank you in advance.

Best,

Tyrell Smith

Appendix B: Acceptance email

Good evening,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. Now we can get to the fun part, the interviews. Below I have attached a signup schedule with 30 minute segmented interview spots. Please pick a time that is most convenient for yourself and I look forward to speaking with you.

Thank you for your time and please let me know if you have any further questions.

Best,

Tyrell Smith

Appendix C: Questions for study

1. What was your major in college?
2. Do you feel you were prepared for life after college?
3. What were your goals for after college while at VT?
4. What do you currently do?
5. What was the most difficult part of the job search?
6. Were you able to complete internships/volunteer during your college career?
7. Are you aware of the Student Athlete Development program Virginia Tech has?
8. Do you know what Student-Athlete Development does?
9. What sort of involvement with Student-Athlete development did you take part in as a student athlete in college?
10. Did you receive your job because of your involvement in student athlete development? Explain?
11. How does your experience as a student athlete benefit you in your career? What skills helped you get your job?
12. Is there any advice you would give yourself as the freshman student-athlete?
13. Are there any activities or programs that you wish were available during your college years?
14. What could SAD do to benefit more athletes?
15. Other Statements?

Appendix D: IRB approval



**Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance**

Institutional Review Board
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Blacksburg, Virginia 24060
540/231-3732 irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 2, 2021
TO: Richard James Rateau
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Virginia Tech Student Athletes Involvement with Student Athlete Development and Their Future Success after College
IRB NUMBER: **21-753**

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.

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Not Research**
Protocol Determination Date: **September 2, 2021**

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.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

This activity does not meet the definition of research, as defined within the Federal Policy for the Protections of Human Subjects. The primary goal is to explore former Virginia Tech football players involvement with Student Athlete Development at Virginia Tech. The activity involves interviewing former Virginia Tech football players (approximately 6-8) about their involvement with Student Athlete Development and how it translated to success after their time in college. This activity does not meet the federal definition of research, since information collected will focus on Virginia Tech football players and Student Athlete Development at Virginia Tech and will not be generalizable.

***Please note, this determination only covers the activities described in this determination submission. Any future plans to further analyze or compare will need to be submitted and approved by the HRPP office before analyses or comparisons can occur.

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the HRPP office (irb@vt.edu) immediately.