

A Case Study of Freshmen Swimmers' College Transition Experiences

Ned Thomas Skinner

Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
State University in partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

Curriculum and Instruction

Richard K. Stratton, Chairman
Kurt Eschenmann
Kerry J. Redican
Jack B. Johnson
Billie Lepczyk

April 2004

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Freshmen, Transition, Student-Athletes

A Case Study of Freshmen Swimmers' College Transition Experiences

Ned Thomas Skinner

ABSTRACT

The transition from high school to college can be a difficult and stressful experience for a student-athlete. University athletic departments across the country, in conjunction with the office of student life, implement transition programs in an attempt to assist freshmen with their new environment. The purpose of this study was to determine a head coach's role in the transition process between high school and college of a freshman student-athlete. Furthermore, the study sought to address to what extent a student-athlete could benefit from evaluating the effectiveness of the transition process.

Fifteen participants from a large NCAA Division I swim program took part in this study in the fall of 2003. Each participant was officially recruited to attend the institution and was entering college for the first time. A two phase approach was utilized to obtain data on the swimmers' first three weeks in college and also their first semester in college.

Each swimmer was interviewed after his or her first three weeks in school in a semi-structured environment. Each participant was asked the same series of questions. Each participant was also interviewed near the conclusion of his or her first semester and was asked a series of follow up questions. The data was analyzed utilizing qualitative methods.

The results of the study indicated that a head coach has a critical role in assisting freshmen student-athletes in their program with the transition from high school to college. Student-athletes look to their head coach as a mentor who can affect the new environment, and thus the head coach is a significant factor in their transition experience. Further, a head coach should know the components of the transition programs offered by both the university and athletic department, and develop his or her own transition model to increase the chances of a well adjusted freshman student-athlete.

The results of the study also indicated that a student-athlete can benefit from evaluating the effectiveness of a transition program annually. Universities, athletic departments, and coaches should make needed changes each year to address the specific needs of freshmen student-athletes entering college for the first time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere appreciation goes to all members of the committee: Dr. Richard Stratton (Chair), Dr. Kurt Eschenmann, Dr. Kerry Redican, Dr. Jay Johnson, and Dr. Billie Lepczyk. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Stratton. His time and insight spent on this project has proven to be invaluable. I also would like to thank Dr. Eschenmann for his guidance throughout the dissertation process. Gratitude is extended to Dr. Baffi who assisted with my studies at Virginia Tech.

I also would like to thank members of the swim team who participated in the pilot study and actual study. Their cooperation and support made this project possible.

DEDICATION

This dissertation and my doctorate are dedicated to my mother and father. Words cannot describe what they have meant to me. A special thank you is extended to my family and friends who have supported me during this time of study. Their encouragement kept me moving forward.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	iv
CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION	
Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Research Questions	5
Research Hypothesis	5
Limitations	5
Significance of the Study	6
CHAPTER 2- REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
Introduction	8
Life Transitions	8
Student Transitions	13
Student-Athlete Transitions	17
A Coach's Role in Transitions	21
CHAPTER 3- METHODOLOGY	
Introduction	25
Participants	25
General Method	25
Timeline	26
Rationale for a Qualitative Study	26
Instrument	29
Data Analysis	30
Assumptions and Beliefs	30
CHAPTER 4- RESULTS- PHASE I- THE FIRST THREE WEEKS	
Introduction	32
Question 1	32
Question 2	33
Question 3	34
Question 4	34
Question 5	34
Question 6	35

Question 7	36
Question 8	36
Question 9	37
Question 10	37
Question 11	38
Question 12	39
Question 13	39
Question 14	40
Question 15	41
Question 16	41
CHAPTER 5- RESULTS- PHASE II- THE FIRST SEMESTER	
Introduction	43
Question 1	43
Question 2	44
Question 3	44
Question 4	45
Question 5	45
Question 6	46
Question 7	47
Question 8	47
Question 9	48
Question 10	49
Question 11	49
CHAPTER 6- DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, and IMPLICATIONS	
Introduction	51
The First Three Weeks' Discussion	52
The First Semester Discussion	56
Conclusions	59
Possible Future Studies and Recommendations	59
Implications for a Head Coach	60
REFERENCES	61
APPENDIX A	65
APPENDIX B	67
APPENDIX C	69
CURRICULUM VITAE	71

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Division I college athletics have become big business. Athletic directors are thought of as chief executive officers charged with the mission of generating a profit while ensuring the various athletic programs are successful in the eyes of the alumni and fans. Universities need to watch their athletic programs closely as some student-athletes are at times better known than the president of the school. Division I athletic departments, in particular, must be aware of their highly visible programs as one wrong move by a student-athlete could cost the school its reputation and revenue.

At times, it may appear difficult to draw similarities with the mission of a particular school's academic community and its athletic teams (Parham, 1993). Universities have placed an emphasis on rigor that challenges its students in the classroom and requires much time and energy by faculty members. Unfortunately, many academic entities feel negatively towards student-athletes and the athletic departments they represent (Enstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). It is not uncommon for opponents of college athletics to argue topics ranging from low graduation rates, to easy university curriculums, to even others taking tests for a student-athlete. The media is quick to report stories such as a student-athlete receiving credit for a course never taken. Whether true or untrue, these beliefs and reports tarnish the image of college athletics. Thus, these issues create a divide between the academic and athletic departments at many universities (Enstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Parham, 1993). Ironically, these issues contrast with the notion that the general public often times bases its feelings towards a school on its athletic programs, but not on its academic programs (Parham, 1993).

Someone may hate or love a school simply because of its football or basketball team. Most Division I athletic departments sponsor at least sixteen different men's and women's athletic teams, comprising 500-1,000 student-athletes (NCAA, 2003). Student-athletes come from every imaginable socio-economic background; the diversity of an athletic department may very well be far different than the entire university

representation (Hill, 1993). A fullback for the football team may be from Brooklyn, New York and on a full scholarship, while a golfer from Augusta, Georgia walked on the team. Some student-athletes may obtain admission easily on their own, while others need the coach's assistance. One student-athlete may have led a very sheltered upbringing, while the other began working at the age of twelve to support his or her family. Nonetheless, these student-athletes merge into the same environment as they commence their collegiate studies. In the eyes of universities, these first time students are considered equal even if differences may be substantial. Obviously, a poorly prepared high school student has a lower chance of collegiate success than a better prepared high school student (Enstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Gabbard & Halischak, 1993).

As stated above, college athletics play an important role at nearly every university in the United States; therefore, universities that sponsor college athletics must recognize the role that the athletic department plays on their campuses (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993; Hill, 1993; Parham, 1993). Whether Division I, II, or III, each institution must recognize the demands on these young adults and do everything possible to support their efforts academically and athletically. In Division I, student-athletes find themselves in the most difficult environment (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1991) as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) allows them more practice time and longer seasons than the other divisions. Furthermore, the presence of scholarship money, readily available to all Division I sports, raises the expectations for success from athletic directors, alumni, parents, and fans. Not only do these student-athletes enjoy the highest level of athletic competition, but they oftentimes are some of the most recognizable people on campus (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1991; Parham, 1993). Some may ask how student-athletes select a school; many choose their school because of an athletic scholarship or a relationship with the coach developed through the recruiting process (Gabert, Hale, & Montalvo, 1999). Unlike traditional students, student-athletes often pick the school for its athletic team first and academic program second. Some universities also recruit students who are academically equipped, but most often, coaches must search the country for the most talented athletes in an effort to build strong teams.

Some of these athletes come from single-parent homes or lower socio-economic backgrounds. They may find themselves at a prestigious school on a full scholarship, but their high school course work has not properly prepared them for the academic rigors faced in college. These students are at risk not to graduate from college.

Not only are many student-athletes poorly equipped for college academics, they also find significant time is committed to athletics once they arrive on campus (Tracey & Corlett, 1995). Practices, competitions, conditioning in and out of season, travel, and film analysis are just a few of the time demands these student-athletes face (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993; Parham, 1993). In Division I athletics, these pressures are greater because the coach's livelihood is dependent on how well the athletes perform on the playing field. Rarely do the media report a coach being fired for a low team grade point average or graduation rate; however, it is quite common to learn of a coach's firing based on a losing season. Student-athletes know that in order to retain their scholarship or starting position, they need to work hard every day and remain in the coach's favor. The combination of time commitments and stress related to athletic performance can take its toll on student-athletes before they even open a book (Murphy, 1986).

Most Division I universities implement their own transition programs to acclimate their new freshmen students (Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terezini, 1996), and they are based on the specific needs and demands of their particular university. This orientation process gives new students an opportunity to learn about the school and its academic performance expectations before classes begin. These orientation programs usually occur during the summer or just prior to the commencement of fall classes. In an effort to assist student-athletes, the NCAA has developed an optional program for participating schools to assist athletic departments with the student-athlete experience. The Challenging Athletes Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS)/Life Skills program began in 1994 and provides materials and resources that support the overall development of student-athletes (NCAA, 1999). Athletic departments also have realized the special needs their student-athletes face, and implement their own programs to assist in the transition experience (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993). Numerous components comprise an

athletic department's transition plan. For example, study hall for incoming freshmen can be found at nearly every school across the country. Many athletic departments have fully staffed academic assistance offices with academic counselors and mentors who meet with student-athletes weekly, or more often, to ensure student-athletes are doing the academic work. Tutors are readily available in every subject matter as well. A recent trend, a one-credit athletic transitions course (Berg, 2003), discusses topics ranging from stress management, to study skills, and home sickness. The athletic department's student life office is charged with the mission of overseeing these programs and being responsive to the needs of student-athletes, and, in particular, the acclimation of student-athletes in their first semester.

As stated earlier, student-athletes come from every imaginable background. The broad spectrum of student-athletes and sports makes it difficult to create a single successful transition program. Even though transition programs are well intended, they can not guarantee the success of each new student-athlete. Therefore, specific sports programs must get involved with the transition experience (Hill, 1993; Tracey & Corlett, 1995). Transition programs need to include components from the general student life office, the athletic department, and the specific head coach. The head coach, who knows the time commitments of the athletes and has the best handle on their lives (Hill, 1993), is a critical member of the team. Having a transition program for each specific sports team is the best way to maximize the chances of a successful college adjustment for student-athletes.

Statement of the Problem

For a variety of reasons, each athletic department implements its own orientation program for their student-athletes to assist with the transition experience. First, the NCAA has no mandated transition models (Jaudon, 2003). Second, student-athletes come from separate, unique backgrounds that can influence their transition experience, and these background differences do not always fit within the standard program an athletic department utilizes, if any. The absence of models forces head coaches to be proactive with the adjustment of their freshmen. In fact, head coaches of Olympic sports

programs in Division I must be able to recognize the components of the university, the athletic department, and their own program in order to create a transition program for their team. Therefore, it becomes essential for a head coach to understand the university they represent, and to work closely with the transition programs established to create a more favorable environment for their freshmen. Unfortunately, there are no tools in place to assist a coach with assessing a student-athlete's transition experience and determining what courses of action could help the freshman experience.

The purpose of this study was to examine the transition experiences of freshmen swimmers of a Division I institution. In particular, the role the head coach plays in the success or failure of the student-athlete's first semester in college constituted the framework of the study. The reason for this inquiry resulted from a perceived high level of dependence of incoming athletes for support from the athletic department and the swim team. This exploratory study, attempting to relate data attained with previous research conducted in similar areas, sought to research the experiences of freshmen student-athletes into college, in particular, incoming swimmers and their ability to adjust to a new environment. The 2003 freshmen class of swimmers provided the needed data.

Research Questions

1. What is the head coach's role in the transition process?
2. To what extent could a student-athlete benefit from evaluating the effectiveness of the transition process?

Research Hypothesis

1. Freshmen Swimmers transitioning from high school to college have a need for their head coach to assist them with their new environment.
2. Changes need to be made annually to keep up with the evolving environment of university and student life.

Limitations

The following limitations are to be found within the design of the study:

1. The head coach also acted as the researcher, which could have influenced the data.

2. The study only encompassed fifteen student-athletes; therefore, generalizations to transition experiences were limited to this study.
3. The study only covers the new student-athletes' first semester in college. It will be difficult to determine if the transition was a complete "success" or "failure" for several years to follow.
4. The study depended on the input of the participants. Therefore, it was difficult to factor in variables such as mood states, bad days, or personal problems while the interviews were being conducted.
5. The head coach interpreted the data, which could have influenced the results.

Significance of the Study

Coaches and administrators play a critical role in the level of success of an incoming freshman. Parents entrust these individuals to look after the well-being of their young adults as they enter a new environment. A multitude of issues may surface during the critical first semester, all of which inspired this study. A better understanding of the trends of incoming students, and ultimately finding solutions to assist future classes of students was a primary goal of this research project. Furthermore, coaches across the country may benefit from the tools developed through this study. The academic and athletic administration at many universities do an adequate job helping student-athletes, but it is very difficult to process 250 new student-athletes without herding them to some extent. Attaining valuable information from new student-athletes who just experienced the transition could prompt changes in the way the athletic department and swim team orient freshmen as they embark on their college careers.

The personal relationship developed between student-athletes and their coaches can be crucial to the development of a young student-athlete. The participants in this study were encouraged to speak freely without fear of judgment. Because there is little information available on this research topic, new ground may have been broken on the trials and tribulations of freshmen swimmers in a college environment. Interviewing the participants allowed those involved in the study to provide honest, strong input, knowing they can make a transition better for a future student-athlete. The athletic department and

swim team may benefit by making adjustments in their orientation process for future incoming classes.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Transitions occur in every aspect of life. For example, there are life transitions, career transitions, and social transitions to name a few. The term transition can mean many things to many people. The term transition is a construct that is useful in describing and understanding how physical, psychological, and social changes can affect an individual (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Schlossberg (1984) defined transitions in the following manner: “An event or nonevent resulting in a change” (p 43). Schlossberg’s (1981) model focuses on three major aspects of an individual involved in a transition: 1) The individual (health, past experiences, social status); 2) The individual’s perception of the transition (whether or not the transition was wanted); and 3) The characteristics of the setting (formal and informal support systems) (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990, p. 7). Until Schlossberg, there was relatively little formalized information regarding transitions of an individual, and the concept of the impact a transition experience has on an individual is still a fairly new area of research. However, people have experienced transitions ever since mankind began. Modern society has taken the issue of a change in life seriously. Formalized studies regarding transitions can be found in many areas of the human experience. Furthermore, people are quite cognizant of change and the need to manage change so it does not affect their lives too dramatically. This literature review intends to provide an overview on life transitions in general, transitions for students, and transitions for student-athletes. Finally, literature will be reviewed that focuses on leaders and a coach’s role within a transition experience.

Life Transitions

Change, whether wanted or unwanted, creates stress on an individual. Most individuals will make numerous career changes throughout their lives. Some will see their careers move forward on their own terms, while others may not be as fortunate. Their change may be a result of downsizing, poor performance, or politics. Nonetheless, there are issues associated with career transitions that arise for both wanted and unwanted

change. Emotions of an individual involved in a career change are a key component of the transition experience (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & Van Ryn, 1989). Managing one's emotions during a transition phase of a career change is important in order for the person to maintain focus. Over the past twenty years, human resource departments have taken on the burden of assisting with employee transitions. Companies are wise to foresee the rigors of life change and assist an individual with information and support (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). Whether into the work force or into retirement, the manner in which an organization handles a transition can significantly impact the well-being of an individual as they encounter change (Schlossberg, 1984).

A literature review on career transitions revealed some common issues associated with this type of life change. As an individual encounters a career transition, an interesting question arises: How much of the change can the individual control versus the amount controlled by the environment (Robbins, Chartrand, McFadden, & Lee, 1994)? A positive attitude regarding a life change and a healthy mental framework does not guarantee success (Zirkel, 1992). Zirkel (1992) concludes that there needs to be a bit of good fortune or even luck along the way. The individual involved in a career transition and his or her ability to adapt to change is the focus of the next section.

Literature pertaining to the idea of self-efficacy was uncovered. Self-efficacy pertains to the notion of an individual's ability to assess his or her own advantages or limitations to any given situation (Heppner, Multon, Gysbers, Ellis, & Zook, 1998). Individuals encountering a career transition utilize self-efficacy without even realizing they are doing so (Robbins et al., 1994). Realizing one's own limitations or areas of expertise is a component of career transitions that all people encounter. An example of this could be an unemployed person searching through the Sunday newspaper looking for a job in which he or she is qualified. Self-efficacy becomes an important aspect of a career change as people decide which path is best for them. Some individuals may know exactly which direction is right for them, while others may have no idea which way to head. The reality is that everyone is responsible for their new environment and need to

recognize potential advantages and pitfalls associated with that environment (Robbins et al., 1994).

Career indecision appears to be a common thread among those who have more frequent career transitions (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996). Gati et al. (1996) used decision theory in an attempt to explain that the best decision comes from one trying to achieve a specific goal. The authors go on to explain that alternative decisions are always available, but an individual who is focused on a specific goal is more likely to make a sound decision rather than a person unsure of his or her goal direction. Career indecision can be seen in various aspects of a person's life. For example, it is not uncommon to hear swimmers say they are quitting the sport because the time involved is affecting their schooling, when in fact, there are many other factors that may have led to this decision. According to Gati et al. (1996) these student-athletes have developed other goals they wish to pursue, or have goal conflicts leading to indecision. An effective leader needs to be cognizant of those who perhaps have changed their goal structure and be willing to pursue proper intervention (Witherspoon and White, 1996). Proper goal identification becomes a major contributor in career decision or indecision (Gati et al., 1996).

Studies indicate that individuals involved in a career transition are typically on their own (Freedman, 1998). They are expected to juggle the demands of a new work system, job responsibilities, egos, and office politics in which they were previously unaccustomed. The change and potential lack of support can be overwhelming to an individual in this situation (Freedman, 1998; Robbins et al., 1994; Zirkel, 1992). Freedman (1998) continues that many individuals involved in a career transition struggle because they are afraid to ask for support as they do not want to appear inadequate or inferior in a certain area. Literature supports the fact that anxiety about a career transition is heightened when the person commences a new job. The individual wants to make the right impression and show he or she is worthy of the position. The exact stress related to this change is difficult to measure for each individual (Zirkel, 1992). However, the potential toll on a person involved in the transition can be debilitating if not managed properly (Freedman, 1998). Common logic suggests that most companies and

organizations would have a plethora of transitional support for a new employee; however, the research suggests most individuals do not take advantage of these services.

In order to get a better idea of emotions and their role in a transition experience, one should understand the concepts surrounding emotions in general. There are five major models associated with emotions: Psychodynamic, Behavioral, Cognitive, Humanistic, and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) (Hill, 2001). Each model will be discussed in the next section.

The Psychodynamic Model is known as the Grandfather of all models and has its roots in Freudian Psychoanalysis (Hill, 2001, p. 1). The premise of the Psychodynamic Model focuses on the unconscious mind. The mind's processing ability and how it ultimately comes to a conclusion is a primary component of this model. Employment of this model in the United States is limited because the length of treatment detracts interest among many individuals. The key to successful implementation using the Psychodynamic Model lies in the individual's ability to understand the psychodynamic approach and willingness to invest both in time and money to obtain the desired results. Labor intensive note taking and self-analysis must be documented over a period of time (up to several years) in order to get the information needed to determine proper protocol. Individuals using this model must be willing to delve further into their own history to assist in creating a clear picture of themselves. Trends, responses to certain situations, and habits are a major focus in making change.

The Behavioral Model has its roots in conditioned responses (Hill, 2001, p. 25). Learning from the environment is known to be the major determinant in shaping a person when using this model. The goal in the application of the Behavioral Model is self-regulation, and substituting self-enhancing behaviors for previously maladaptive action patterns. New learning experiences replace old, poorly adaptive behavior. The individual plays an active role in identifying the problem and implementing a new learning program. Narrowing the list of problems to one or two main concepts is the focus of treatment. Individuals must be convinced that these changes are their own responsibility.

The Cognitive Model states that “thought patterns and mental habits are primary forces in determining one’s behaviors and feelings” (Hill, 2001, p. 63). This model centers on individuals’ interpretations of the environment. The individual must be willing and able to change his or her thought patterns in order to improve performance. The Cognitive Model suggests that systematic distortions in mental processing produce dysfunctional emotions and behavior in an individual. These thoughts usually manifest themselves in a negative manner. The individual must be able to identify and change the distorted cognitive pattern. This method is widely used in the United States because of the relatively short treatment period. Using the Cognitive Model, individuals are taught to: A) Monitor counterproductive thoughts; B) Recognize connections among thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; C) Examine positive and negative distorted cognitions; and D) Replace distorted patterns with reality-based thinking (Hill, 2001, p. 92).

The Humanistic Model places its emphasis on positive growth and development (Hill, 2001). “To be the best you can be” (Hill, 2001, p. 107) is at the center of this model, thus the Humanistic Model bodes well with the pursuit of excellence. This model has its roots in Positive Psychology (Seligman), Self-Actualization (Maslow), and Person Centeredness (Rogers) (Hill, 2001, p. 107). As the Humanistic Model tends to view the individual in a positive light, the *self* becomes central in the Humanistic Model. Thoughts, feelings, values, expectations, and ways of understanding the world are focuses of the individual; therefore, self-concept is a critical component of treatment. Congruence between behaving self and one’s ideal self is an important goal of this model.

The Neuro-Linguistic Programming Model (NLP) combines certain components of the Psychodynamic, Behavioral, Cognitive, and Humanistic models (Hill, 2001, p. 151). In other words, NLP incorporates the best of the models to fit a given situation. When utilizing NLP, individuals develop representations based on the senses. Representational Systems become the building blocks for strategies and processes. For example, general unhappiness and limitation can be attributed to poor representations of the world. Therefore, positive change occurs when individuals are able to implement

new processing techniques and change their representations. Having a better understanding of these models can assist in identifying problems and making better judgments on interventions. Individuals involved in a transition most likely do not know about models and theories addressing their issues. However, they are aware of and can influence their own motivation regarding a transition experience.

Motivation has a direct impact on a person's job performance (Caplan et al., 1989). Studies show that individuals enter a new situation wanting to make a good impression and perform their job at a high level (Caplan et al., 1989; Gati et al., 1996). The specific personality of an individual will determine the general motivation level that he or she exhibits in a given situation (Eschenmann, 2000). Understanding one's personality is an important component to any given transition experience. For example, a person might be more motivated to perform at a higher level if surrounded by others who enjoy being a part of the group or organization. Recognizing specific human behavior as it relates to the study of transition experiences of freshmen swimmers at the Division I level is an important component of this study.

Everyone encounters career changes throughout their lives and handles change differently. The literature review on this topic establishes a connection between life changes in general, with that of student-athletes. There is a wealth of knowledge on life transitions, and an overview of this topic makes clear the need for support through any transition experience. The following section seeks to delve into the subject of student transitions and the trials and tribulations associated with a new environment.

Student Transitions

Each August and September, millions of students commence classes in a new academic year. Along with this new academic year, comes a series of unfamiliar challenges to which students must adapt. These unfamiliar challenges, however, are familiar to professors and teachers who develop into virtual experts at recognizing the pitfalls associated with a new environment. The study of Health Promotions is based upon keeping up with the times in which we live (Kaplan, 2000; Norris & Pittman, 2000). Essentially, the practice of Health Promotion is based upon the transformation of society.

According to Schlossberg (1984), “ Transitions include not only obvious life changes (such as high school graduation, job entry, marriage, birth of the first child, bereavement) but also subtle changes (such as the loss of career aspirations and the nonoccurrence of anticipated events, such as an expected job promotion that never comes through” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 43). The terms “transitions” and “Health Promotions” clearly become connected by virtue of our continuously changing world. Studying transitions of individuals becomes important to give Health Promotion practitioners a better understanding of modern society and the specific needs that these individuals will have as their life changes. Life changes occur in every stage in life (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996), and are both mental and physical. Individuals involved in Health Promotions need to be cognizant of significant transitional events in a person’s life. Typically, a transition marks a turning point for the implementation of new behaviors (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). For example, when a teenager transitions into college from high school, they may be exposed to issues such as drug use and sex. The freedom that students in a new environment sense is coupled with the realization that no one is monitoring their activities the same way as when they lived with their parents. Nearly all students must handle forms of stress directly related to a new environment. It would be virtually impossible not to feel the pressures of academic and social adjustment. Research has found that an individual’s perceptions directly influence his or her adjustment to a new environment (Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terenzini, 1996; Tolson & Chevrette, 1974). Therefore, understanding a new student’s view of a situation can help influence intervention strategies.

Parental attachment and detachment is a major factor in a student’s transition experience from high school to college (Lopez & Gormley, 2002). In fact, the same can be said for any student commencing studies in a new environment (Graber & Brooks-Gunn 1996; Lopez & Gormley, 2002; McDougall & Hymel, 1998). Anytime a student changes schools and encounters a new academic and social system, stress occurs (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). The family social structure at home has much to do with the student’s ability to adapt to his or her new environment (Lopez & 2002). Research

suggests new students reflect on relationships with their parents as they encounter a new environment. Furthermore, the studies indicate that homesickness is a natural occurrence when a student enters a new academic environment (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996; McDougall & Hymel, 1998). Literature makes clear the idea that a child's rearing affects his or her ability to adapt to a new academic environment.

Lopez and Gormley's (2002) study focused on college students and their adaptability to a new environment as they left home for the first time. The following variables were identified for the study: security, dismissive, preoccupied, and fearful. Interestingly, Chi-square analysis found that gender was only a factor in the differences with self-confidence. Results suggest the other variables in the study are similar. Lopez and Gormley's (2002) research found that time passage is a factor in a new student's ability to adapt. These findings and the structure of the study are directly related to the study of freshmen swimmers' transition experiences at a Division I university.

Pascarella et al. (1996) conducted a study to determine the influences on a student's internal locus of attribution in determining success in the first-year of college. The researchers sought to determine if students believe they determine their own fate, or if the environment controls success or failure. Variables tested included: perceived teacher support, perceived teacher feedback, hours per week spent studying, and essay exam grades in courses taken. Pascarella et al.'s (1996) study concluded that success or failure of a college freshman is typically a cumulative result and not just the result of any one experience. This study is important to give insight on the study of freshmen swimmers' transitions in that it aids the researcher in understanding that the entire university experience plays a role in a student's first semester, not just the swim team or head coach.

A study conducted by De Souza, Barberi, and Gomez (2001) utilized qualitative measures to attain information. They asked participants to write a narrative about their life experiences as they progressed through their first-year in college. A key component of this study is the fact that the style of writing was used to evaluate the data. The overall positive or negative tone of the writing compared with the use of nouns and adjectives

(descriptors) and/or verbs and adverbs (dynamic) was the primary source of data. The De Souza, Barberi, and Gomez (2001) study draws numerous similarities to the study of freshmen swimmers' transitions. Results of the study indicate that life changing events correlate with changes in emotion and attitude (De Souza et al., 2001). The exploratory nature, and inferential analysis with a focus on life changes, were all key components of the research. This study is useful in that the information attained and analysis conducted used methodology that is effective when evaluating a transition experience.

Virginia Tech Professor Nancy Seamons conducted a study in 2001 on a freshman's perception on information literacy. The researcher conducted a qualitative and quantitative hybrid study to attain data on how students acquire and use information in their freshman year. Clearly, it takes time to learn a new system, but Seamons wanted to collect data on how diligent a new student is in learning and utilizing the library's services. Seamons concludes that students are capable of seeking out and processing information. Furthermore, the researcher believes that freshmen students are capable of recognizing components of a new situation that are important for academic success. Seamon's (2001) study suggests that the administration needs to recognize how students gather and respond to information. The students in the study, for example, preferred to have information on the Internet that would be constantly accessible. Seamons suggests a dedicated website for students to attain much needed information via the Internet. This study parallels the study of incoming freshmen swimmers in that it is important to understand how students respond to a new environment, and create a system that addresses the specific needs of new students. Another perceived similarity is the need for students to have assistance available to support the various components of a new system.

The academic expectations universities place on students are high. Studies show that new students react to the environment differently based on their personal views. Incoming freshmen spend their first semester in college weaving their way through a myriad of change; however, most have shown the ability to adapt in their first semester by ingesting the entire experience and not fixating on just one problem. Research suggests that incoming freshmen are capable of troubleshooting a new system and

making adjustments so that it will work for them. However, the literature also suggests that assistance with various components within the transition can make the process more effective. Life change literature, coupled with literature involving general students, has formed a solid framework for reviewing literature on transitions of student-athletes. Literature regarding transition experiences of student-athletes will be reviewed in the next section.

Student-Athlete Transitions

Beginning undergraduate studies presents a series of new challenges for students. Students can become overwhelmed by a variety of stimuli that are a result of their increased freedom, expanding social interests, and growing willingness to experiment. Gender differences are also a factor in the transition experience. This is true for all students, and with the addition of athletics, student-athletes find themselves thrust into the fast track very early in the semester. They must find a balance between their academic priorities and athletic demands (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1991). These young adults have significant burdens on their shoulders. They are expected to perform at a high level both academically and athletically. There is also an expectation that these young people properly represent the institution. Most athletic departments are the focal point of a university and their student-athletes set the tone for the school (Jones & Hardy, 1990). It can become very stressful for these young people to adhere to these challenges while experiencing the “normal” rigors of college life.

The broad term transition narrows for each individual organization and the specific nuances of that entity. In collegiate swimming, for example, each academic year presents a new season of transition. A thorough search of literature pertaining to transition experiences for freshmen swimmers revealed that not much information exists on the specific topic of swimmers' transitions. Therefore, a broader search of student-athlete transitions was conducted to understand the topic. Schlossberg (1984) states “A transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual's own perception of the change” (p. 44). Gaining a better understanding of these student-athletes' life changes and their perceptions of the change as they progress through their freshman year may

ultimately impact the way they perform in the pool or on the playing field (Pearson & Petipas, 1990). One benefit of a study on freshmen swimmers' transitions is that new information should be revealed for others interested in the topic and could help pave the way for other studies. It is easy to believe that the life of a student-athlete is different than that of a general student, but why? What are the real differences between the two entities and what can be done to assist this relatively small percentage of any university with a transition experience? Pertinent studies that have been uncovered on the study of freshmen student-athletes and their transitions into college will be reviewed to help answer these questions.

The perception of student-athletes by non student-athletes was the focus of an article by Engstrom and Sedlacek in 1991. Research on 293 first-year students was the basis of the study examined, and the revised Situational Attitude Scale (SAS) was utilized to interpret the data. Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991) cited various studies indicating there is most definitely a bias within the academic community regarding student-athletes. Data from the study shows that, in general, non student-athletes believe that student-athletes are not as academically competent. The article suggests that steps should be taken to bridge the gap between the two groups. One of the possibilities discussed was to eliminate athletic dormitories. The article was written in 1991 and athletic dormitories were abolished by the NCAA several years later (it is not clear if this action was a result of the study); however, it should be pointed out that universities have taken steps to better integrate student-athletes into the general student body. Interviews were utilized in the Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991) study, and it was important to put the participants at ease in order to get the most candid data. A comfortable participant is far more likely to share experiences and details than a participant uncomfortable with their surroundings (Holliday, 2002; Pascarella et al., 1996; Tolson & Chevrette, 1974). The above study is helpful in the development of strategies for conducting interviews of participants. Structuring questions in a manner in which the participants can elaborate will provide richer, more descriptive data.

Universities have increased interest in support services for their student-athletes (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993). Academic support services, as well as personal performance enhancement counseling, are garnering increased attention. For example, in 1996 Virginia Tech began offering a transitions course to first and second semester freshmen student-athletes to assist with the hurdles of a new environment (Berg, 2002). This course covers an array of subjects ranging from balancing a checkbook to achieving a balanced diet. Having the university take greater interest in the well-being of their student-athletes increases the chances of a well adjusted person (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993). The University of South Carolina has developed a center dedicated to first-year students and student-athletes. The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is dedicated to serving freshmen and sharing information with others on the enrichment of the first-year experience (Robinson, 2002). These programs and other programs across the country have become important components in assisting freshmen student-athletes with the transition experience. As discussed previously, men and women share similarities with their transition to college; however, when conducting research that includes both genders, one needs to be aware of gender differences.

Research indicates women are more likely than men to reveal fear and anxiety (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). In his article "Motivational Differences with Female Athletes," Sikes (1999) focused directly on the differences between male and female athletes and how each group handles varying forms of pressure. In the sport of competitive swimming, anxiety is an inherent part of performance, and each gender is capable of showing very high levels of anxiety relative to sport performance (Gackenbach, 1982). Sikes begs the following question: Are there gender differences in coach/athlete relationships? In order to answer this question, it is important to understand the differences in how men and women perceive their new environment. Furthermore, recognizing how the two genders perceive their treatment and internalize it is important to the framework of the study examined. Sikes (1999) points out that the two genders will see their new surroundings in a different manner. The article suggests that women

respond better to bottom line input; therefore, it is suggested that feedback is more productive when given as a fact instead of criticism. Sikes (1999) continues to advise that men need to have a goal placed in front of them, and that they can handle direct criticism better than their female colleagues. The Sikes (1999) study was a qualitative research project that serves as a productive example of data collection through interviews.

The previous study addressed differences in men and women. A different study was uncovered that addressed qualitative data collection with student-athletes. In particular, this study examined college basketball players and their adjustment into the world after their playing days ended (Kolbasovsky, 2001). A small number of participants were utilized for the study. The author delved into the topic of Division I basketball players and their mood disturbances in response to finishing college. This study is pertinent in that it delves into a transitional situation and depends upon qualitative measures to attain the data. Nineteen basketball players participated in the study and were interviewed by the researcher who utilized inferential analysis to interpret the data (Kolbasovsky, 2001). The Division I component is important in that regardless of sport, most student-athletes performing at the highest competitive level sense similar levels of pressure (Pearson & Petipas, 1990). The life change component can be looked upon in a similar manner as well. Certainly two significant changes in college are the first-year and the period of time following graduation (Kolbasovsky, 2001). The above study utilizes qualitative elements to attain data on the transition experiences of college student-athletes.

The literature provided a formidable background of studies previously conducted regarding student-athletes' transitions in general. The information extracted will serve as a basis for the study's direction. Although there is not much literature exactly on point, enough information exists to gain a better understanding of the research area and assist in evaluating the data. Transition experiences for swimmers at the college level do present a new set of issues and questions. This study intends to help the swim program and, hopefully, similar programs around the country. Investigating the research conducted by

others gives a strong framework into the various components of the construct transition. The next section will focus on coaches and leaders who impact a transition experience.

A Coach's Role in Transitions

How can a leader help in a transition situation? First of all, an effective leader should be aware of the fact that a new employee or student wants to do a good job. The leader would be well advised to assist with another's career transition by believing the individual will succeed. Unfortunately, research indicates most leaders are not cognizant of the pitfalls associated with a career change (Freedman, 1998; Zirkel, 1998).

Individuals in leadership positions need to be cognizant of these potential problems and be prepared to assist for a smoother transition phase. Effective leaders can provide significant assistance if they are well versed in life changes and can recognize potential pitfalls during the transition experience (Freedman, 1998). For example, health care organizations realize that it is critical to be proactive with the changes in people's lives or the cost of care could put a company out of business (Kaplan, 2000; Redican, 2000). The trickle down affect of this concept is that health care professionals are more educated, better qualified, and more capable of serving participants than ever before. As discussed earlier, virtually everyone undergoes many career transitions throughout a lifetime.

Proper management of the change by the individual and those who have a leadership role can assist in making the change smoother. Parham (1993) indicates that if a student-athlete's overall mental and physical health is neglected, he or she is more likely to develop issues that can have negative personal effects. Parham's (1993) research suggests that individuals who have gotten into severe trouble or have had life altering events typically are the ones who appear distant and are not as involved with the team.

Researching the career transitions topic has assisted in establishing the need for a coach to be involved with a student-athlete's transition into college. Most student-athletes select a particular school because of its head coach (Gabert, Hale, & Montalvo, 1999). With this in mind, it is important for a head coach to understand his or her role in the transition experience. Furthermore, studies indicate that each individual sports program needs to be involved with its freshmen (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993; Parham,

1993; Pearson and Petitpas, 1990). Therefore, it can be argued that head coaches need to be accountable for identifying and understanding critical components of a university's transition program within their specific program. Coaches need to work closely with the transition programs the university and athletic department provide, and incorporate their own assessments and adjustments, to the same system that can identify issues and make changes for a smoother transition for student-athletes.

Existing literature points out that little difference exists between an individual making a career transition, and freshmen swimmers coming in for their first semester of college. An individual commencing a new job may be afraid to ask his or her supervisor a specific question about a job they are performing in fear of looking incompetent. Unfortunately, a major mistake may occur that could cost the company money and put the individual in a negative situation. Similarly, a freshman swimmer may be afraid to inform a coach that his or her shoulders are injured. He or she may continue to swim through the pain until the injury progresses to the point where the swimmer ends up being out of the water for an extended period of time. Witherspoon and White (1996) have conducted research that bridges the gap between leadership on the corporate level and the concept of coaching. The authors write that business leaders have increasingly hired consultants to assist in developing a plan to create more effective leaders. These leaders have made commitments to become better professionals and strive to be more compassionate figureheads. Coaching or being coached was seen by Witherspoon and White (1996) as something that has been around for many years and that leaders outside of the coaching arena should see themselves as coaches. Furthermore, they should recognize their role and its impact on those they manage and see themselves as someone trying to get the most from those they supervise. A study by Heppner, Multon, Gysbers, Ellis, and Zook (1998), centered on career counselor trainees, and their ability to understand key aspects of their jobs. This study delved into the idea that decision-makers need to understand key areas in order to give reliable guidance. Identifying strengths and weaknesses of individuals and maximizing their qualities is something that a person in a leadership position can do to make transition experiences smoother. Without proper

guidance, individuals may not be sure if they are even in the proper career field (Robbins et al., 1994). The literature creates a bridge between those who are involved in a career transition, and what student-athletes may encounter in their first semester of college.

A coach's impact on a student-athlete can be very significant (Johnson, 1999). Johnson's (1999) qualitative study delved into the experiences of eight former Division I athletes and their experiences in being coached. This study is pertinent to the proposed investigation in several ways. The methodology for the two studies is quite similar. Interviews were Johnson's primary source of data collection and a small sample was utilized for the Johnson (1999) study. The small sample size, however, does not necessarily mean the quality of information is jeopardized (Uttech, 2000). Furthermore, in preparing for interviews, the researcher must be aware of his or her role in the study. The impact a head coach has on young people's lives is strong, and it is clear that getting accurate information from them could be a challenge. It might be tempting for these student-athletes to simply provide information they think the researcher wants to hear. The Johnson (1999) study gives suggestions on handling an authority position as a researcher.

Head coaches at the Division I level spend much time being involved with the correlation of Health Promotion and transitions. For example, it is important to monitor the flu season. Preaching to a student-athlete about preventive health measures becomes critical to maintaining a group of athletes capable of performing at their best. Another similarity between Health Promotions and transitions is in injury prevention and management. It is not uncommon for student-athletes to miss several weeks, if not an entire season, due to an injury. Quite a bit of time is spent assisting these athletes with their transitions back into full competition. The process can be painstaking and even frustrating, but it is important for the well-being of the individual.

Another significant relevance between Health Promotions and transitions is in the area of mental health. An effective coach should try to maximize every possible positive quality the athlete possesses, and delving into the mind is perhaps the most challenging. Each day presents a new series of issues and obstacles as these young adults transition

into adulthood. Throughout a career, many coaches encounter topics such as: suicide, anorexia, alcoholism, and rape. As a leader and role model, it is important that student-athletes feel comfortable discussing real life issues with their coach. How these issues are handled can make a real impact in the lives of these young adults.

At first glance, the concept of transitions and the practice of Health Promotions may not seem as if they have a lot in common. However, probing into what Health Promotions entails and its role in an individual's life is significant. Life changes are constant and guaranteed. Health Promotion practitioners must stay up to date on important aspects of society, such as the health care industry and health trends. The study of transitions becomes important so that Health Promotions leaders can better understand the people they serve. The literature shows that an effective leader can make a significant positive impact if they prioritize that component of their job.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the participants, methods, and procedures used in the study. Qualitative rationale, instrumentation, data analysis, and the assumptions and beliefs of the study are also explained.

Participants

Fifteen freshmen swimmers comprised the study group; eight of whom were male and seven of whom were female. All participants were involved in their first semester of studies at a large Division I university. Student-athletes met individually with the researcher in an informal, on-campus setting.

General Method

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with these students in a two phase approach. Phase One of the study took place within the first three weeks of the student's arrival on campus. Phase Two of the study took place within the last three weeks of the student's first semester. Each phase of the study involved asking participants the same questions relating to their college transition experiences (Appendix A and Appendix B).

The target groups, between the ages of 17-19, were beginning their first academic year following their senior year in high school, and were officially recruited during their senior year in high school. The head coach becomes quite familiar with the participants through the recruitment process. Knowledge regarding geographic location, family background, number of siblings, interactions with parents and current coaches and other pertinent information are all revealed throughout the year prior to commencing collegiate studies. Therefore, a relationship had already been developed that should have created a positive, and relaxed environment for the participants. Furthermore, the researcher knows specific demographic information about the participants which precludes the need to ask specific questions in the interview process. Interviews were selected because the

researcher was most comfortable in a one-on-one setting and already knew the individuals coming to the session. Personal experiences have shown that success as a coach comes when a positive interpersonal relationship is created with the student-athlete. Putting student-athletes at ease from the beginning and asking them to speak without fear of judgment was important in attaining usable data. Four to six interviews each week, averaging about one hour per session, framed the study.

Timeline

- Fifteen participants were involved in the study (seven women) (eight men).
- Each participant was asked the same interview questions in both phases of the study.
- Each interview session lasted approximately one hour and involved only the participant and the researcher.
- Four to Six interviews were conducted each week over three consecutive weeks.
- Time was allotted for follow-up interviews.
- Several weeks were allocated to review and interpret data.

Timeline by dates

September 1-21 – Phase One Interviews conducted.

September 22-27 – Follow-up interviews conducted.

September 28 - November 28 – Data interpreted.

November 29 - December 13 – Phase Two Interviews conducted.

December 14 -18 – Follow-up interviews conducted.

December 19 – January 18 – Data interpreted.

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, a change in environment can be difficult for many people, especially for students entering college for the first time. Many freshmen college students find themselves faced with difficult decisions with no one to turn to for advice. Furthermore, student-athletes face these problems along with high expectations of performance. The pressure on a student-athlete can be excessive. This study sought to answer questions related to a student-athlete's transitional experiences to

determine what, if any, changes could assist in making the college transition smoother. There has not been much qualitative or quantitative research conducted in the sport of competitive swimming involving freshmen transitions into college, or student-athletes in other Olympic Sports to guide the study. However, the smaller study design and high access to the participants bode well for a qualitative study (Holliday, 2002; Johnson, 1999; Uttech, 2000). According to Holliday (2002), “Qualitative research is increasing in use in a wide range of academic and professional areas. It develops from aspects of anthropology and sociology and represents a broad view that to understand human affairs it is insufficient to rely on quantitative survey and statistics, and necessary instead to delve deep into the subjective qualities that govern behaviour” (Holliday, 2002, p. 7). Since this study delved into the nature of humans and their perceptions, a qualitative study is better suited to answer the research questions (Saveyne & Robinson, 1996). Therefore, this study used qualitative measures to attain information from the participants, and inferential analysis was conducted on the data attained.

There is evidence that a negative bias exists within the academic community surrounding student-athletes. Studies have shown that many non student-athletes view student-athletes to be academically inferior (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). An investigation into the perceptions of freshmen swimmers regarding their non student-athlete counterparts would shed light on the issue. Interview analysis revealed information to improve the situation between student-athletes and non student-athletes. Another important aspect of this study involved interviewing men and women regarding their transition experiences into college. An observant coach must be cognizant of the two genders and respond accordingly with what is best for their situation (Sikes, 1999). Perhaps a by-product of this study will be more knowledge regarding coaching the two genders, and a better understanding of how men and women who train together interact to affect the situation either positively or negatively.

One of the primary components of this study was the qualitative nature of the design. Direct feedback was an excellent way to attain the information needed. The participant’s pointed comments directly addressed the research questions. Also, narrative

descriptions from participants allow the researcher to get reflections of their experiences (Seamons, 2001). Therefore, a one-on-one interview in a comfortable setting assisted the participants in speaking freely. Although time consuming, the information attained may be more credible than some quantitative measures (Holliday, 2002; Uttech, 2000). A one-hour session in which the participant is focused on the topic brought stronger information than simply completing a questionnaire on his or her way out of practice.

Most student-athletes performing at the highest level sense similar levels of pressure (Pearson & Petipas, 1990). The life change component can be looked upon in a similar manner as well. As stated earlier, the two significant changes in college are the first-year and the period of time following graduation (Kolbasovsky, 2001). Preparing for these interviews, the researcher needed to be aware of his role in the study. A coach's impact on student-athletes can be very significant (Johnson, 1999), and creates a challenge when trying to get accurate information from them. Since it might be tempting for these student-athletes to simply tell the researcher information they thought wanted to be heard, the setting needed to be comforting to the participant. Holliday (2002) points out, "Settings are not always ready-made or easy to find. Their choice will depend upon the complex logistics of the broader environment. They may well be the construction of the researcher" (Holliday, p. 45). Not only was the head coach's office a private area to conduct the interviews, but the researcher was able to structure the setting to put the participant at ease. The researcher closed the door with a sign placed on front indicating an interview session was in progress and to not disturb. Furthermore, the office telephone was placed on mute to decrease distraction.

Understanding the transition experiences of college freshmen is an important element of the coach's career. This study can help assess how the swim team and athletic department's roles in the transition experience can be changed to help others in the future. There are not many studies that are similar to this one study, however, recognizing the trials and tribulations of a freshman student-athlete and making adjustments is something most college coaches wish to improve. The qualitative nature of the study allows for the proper environment to collect the data. Furthermore, the small

sample size does not necessarily mean the quality of information is jeopardized (Uttech, 2000). Possibly, this study can pave the way to assist other coaches with their teams and perhaps spark similar studies in the future. Gaining a better understanding of the trials and tribulations of freshmen swimmers as they commence college is a goal of this project. Perhaps by gaining a greater appreciation for their unique situation, beneficial adjustments can be made for future incoming classes of student-athletes.

Instrument

The primary instrument for this study was the researcher. This was the best instrument because it would have been difficult to develop a non-human instrument that can adapt to the realities encountered in the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Also, it was important for the researcher to realize any personal biases and acknowledge the influence of power on student-athletes. The researcher stressed to the participants that their comments were confidential and would not affect their standing on the team. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. The Institutional Review Board Consent Form (Appendix C) put into writing the student-athlete's protection against any such biases or repercussions.

Questions asked during Phase One of the study were sixteen open-ended questions developed by the researcher. Some of the questions were pilot-tested during the fall of 1999 with the incoming class of freshmen swimmers at the same institution. The other questions were revised and added to reflect the needs of the study. Phase Two of the study featured questions that the researcher developed from the answers given in Phase One. Eleven open-ended questions were utilized in the Phase Two interviews.

Oral interviews were selected over written surveys for several reasons. First, the ability for the researcher to ask immediate follow-up questions in an oral interview allows for more in-depth data. The pre-existing relationship that the researcher has with the participant allows for pointed questions and follow-up questions addressing certain subject areas. The demographic information uncovered during the recruitment process gives the researcher pre-existing knowledge of the participant allowing for the interviews to run smoothly and eliminate the need to ask standard questions early in the interview.

Second, written surveys would require content analysis and could increase the chances of researcher influence in a case study where the researcher already knows the participant (Uttech, 2000). In this case study, Interviews allow the researcher to flow with the participant, whereas written surveys only give specific data for a specific question. Clearly the oral interview will give more valid, reliable data.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews from each phase, the researcher waited two days before analyzing the data to allow the mind to start fresh with the information collected. The first step was to passively review all notes to obtain a general picture and/or determine possible themes that emerged. From there, different color pens were used to denote trends in the findings, which were useful to draw similarities within the interviews. Color-coding was useful in helping extract major issues that numerous participants mentioned.

After getting a general picture of the findings through passive reading and color-coding, the researcher categorized the data looking for obvious trends or areas. An active, micro-analysis of the data accomplished a clearer picture of each individual. It was beneficial to take each participant and evaluate his or her “total picture” first before comparing it with the rest of the participants. Once able to understand the micro-components of the findings, the larger discoveries fell in place with greater validity. These findings ultimately assisted in formulating the discussion section.

Assumptions and Beliefs

The researcher had been personally involved in observing the transitions of about one hundred and fifty student-athletes from high school to college for fourteen consecutive years. Furthermore, the researcher had seen a multitude of issues surface during the critical first semester which inspired the study. A better understanding of the trends for incoming students and ultimately finding solutions to assist future classes was a significant goal of the study. The researcher suspected some of the interviewees would indicate they had experienced feelings of being overwhelmed. There was also an

anticipation of getting some feedback on changes that could make a difference in the way the athletic department and head swim coach assisted its new student-athletes.

It had been observed at several universities by the researcher that most new students work mostly in large groups and large class settings in their freshman year. The young student-athletes never develop a relationship or work closely with just one person, aside from their coach or academic advisor. Rather, they worked together in large groups which can make new students nervous and present a feeling of being on their own. Understanding about ways these group settings can be altered or improved could be beneficial for future classes. Finally, the researcher was curious to find out how the participants perceive the head coach's role versus the swim team's role in the transition process. The team is a very significant component of their collegiate experience, but it was not known if an adequate job was being done in helping them better understand the university and adjusting to its sometimes distressing environment. Changes can be made in assisting first time student-athletes to college life as a result of this study.

Chapter 4

Phase I- The First Three Weeks

Interviews in Phase I commenced as scheduled after the first three weeks of classes in the fall of 2003. Fifteen participants agreed to take part in the study and its terms. Each meeting lasted nearly one hour and took place in the head coach's office as planned. Participants were asked the same questions with similar follow-up questions for each question posed. The interviewer sat on a couch facing the interviewee who sat in a chair. The environment was structured such as described in Chapter Three. This section will divulge the findings of the Phase I interviews and discuss relevant information.

Question 1: *Describe your feelings during your first two weeks in college.*

All fifteen participants expressed various levels of anxiety and nervousness regarding their new environment. It was clear to the researcher that the freshmen were still fairly uncomfortable with their new surroundings three weeks into the semester. One participant (Allison) stated, "It has crossed my mind more than once to go back and live at home and swim for my local college." Another participant (Cathy) expressed her fear by saying, "I just don't want to get yelled at." These comments were typical from all of the participants in the study. In fact, no one said the adjustment was perfect. The freshmen student-athletes made it clear the initial period of time in college was a stressful process.

Nervousness was the most consistent theme throughout all of the participants' responses to this question. The second most consistent finding was a high level of excitement from the participants regarding their new environment. Many of those interviewed expressed joy in meeting many new people. Many felt the surroundings of a collegiate environment were very positive places in which to be associated. Three of the participants mentioned that everyone was going through the same process, which brought about a sense of comfort. (Bill) explained his comfort thusly: "I've been having a good time; it is like being at swim camp." It was quite clear how happy these student-athletes

were about making new friends. “I was really looking forward to meeting my roommate and getting our dorm room made up.” explained (Harry). He continued, “We had a good time bouncing around to everyone’s rooms and hanging out and having people stop by our room.”

Even though no one indicated that the first three weeks of college was a miserable experience, certain participants encountered difficulties with their initial transition experience ranging from disrupted class schedules to a mouse in the dorm room; however, the majority of the student-athletes expected a certain level of stress and indicated they were prepared to handle the rigors associated with the transition experience.

Question 2: Did the athletic department’s weekend orientation prior to classes beginning help make your transition smoother? How can it improve?

The respondents were completely split on their assessment of the effectiveness of the athletic department’s weekend orientation. Nearly all of the participants did not like giving up their Sunday prior to classes commencing the following day. A high percentage of the participants believed their time would have been better spent relaxing in their rooms in preparation for the start of classes. (Darla) stated, “Personally, I think it was a waste of time; most of the topics covered did not pertain to me and I fought off going to sleep the whole day.” (David) explained the orientation this way: “The information presented was not much different than the summer orientation I attended- don’t party too much, and go to class and study.” It became clear through the interviews that many of the participants felt the material covered in the athletic department weekend orientation was similar to the summer orientation conducted by the university.

The group of participants who believed that the day was beneficial mostly focused on the meeting of new people. In particular, meeting members from other teams was highlighted as being a positive aspect of the weekend orientation meetings. (Ellen) pointed out, “Receiving the student-athlete handbook was good. I also enjoyed meeting the other athletes. I hope we are all able to get to know each other better.”

Question 3: *What have been positive aspects of your first several weeks in college?*

The overwhelming most consistent answer was the positive interaction with the swimming and diving team. Nearly all of the participants indicated that coming to college as part of a group was very helpful in the transition experience. (David) expressed it this way: “I fit in immediately. Many of us were in the same suite and we all had to go to the same place at the same time. It was a lot of fun!”

Question 4: *What have been negative aspects of your first several weeks in college?*

Numerous negative aspects of the first three weeks in college surfaced during the Phase I interviews. The most common response was difficulty in learning the new academic environment. All of the participants attended high schools that were much smaller and found it challenging to understand class location and campus layout. (Everatt): “I’m stuck in the world of college. I’m bouncing from one location to the next trying to know what to do; it’s frustrating.”

Another theme that emerged was a high level of stress associated with expectations from the swim program and athletic department. Many of the participants expressed aggravation about attending study hall for ten hours per week. A common theme emerged that even after only three weeks study hall was a noisy, non-conducive study environment. Many of the participants expressed frustration regarding a ten hour per week study hall program implemented by the athletic department. (Greta): “Study hall is bittersweet for me. I know that it is supposed to help me, but I do not like going; it’s too loud.” The previous quote is representative of the feelings of ten of the fifteen participants.

Question 5: *As a student-athlete, do you feel other students look at you positively or negatively? How?*

The student-athletes in the study did not have a strong opinion of their reception by the general student body just three weeks into the semester. Understanding the perceptions students have of student-athletes in this study is to be evaluated through the semester; however, having an idea after the first three weeks gives the researcher a

starting point for analysis. Several important discoveries emerged from the question posed in the Phase I interviews.

Clearly, the first notable discovery was the perception of the participants that revenue-generating sports (football, men's and women's basketball) are viewed by students differently than non-revenue sports (Olympic sports). Furthermore, the participants in the study overwhelmingly believe there is a significant difference between the ways in which students perceive revenue producing sports versus non-revenue producing sports. (Charles) stated it this way: "You see a football player you know it's a football player, and you think of him as a football player. We (swimmers) pretty much blend in." Interestingly, all fifteen participants held similar opinions just three weeks into the semester. The opinion of the participants of their perception by students was more split.

Nine of the participants believed that most of the students they encountered were generally positive about their association with the athletic department. (Betty) stated, "When I told a girl on our hall that I was a swimmer she said, 'Oh, that's pretty cool, are you on scholarship?'" (Betty) went on to explain that her reception has been positive, with students appreciating the amount of time needed to be successful both academically and athletically. (Betty's) view depicts nine of the participants in similar agreement. Three of the participants saw the perceptions of students towards them a bit differently, however, (Bill) had a mixed view of his first three weeks in college: "People respect the work I put in. However, people sitting behind me (in class) were complaining how a student-athlete they knew got into college because they were an athlete... they also complained about free tutors provided to us." The other three participants in the study had no opinion of the perception of students towards them. The findings in this question will be compared to the same question posed in the Phase II interviews.

Question 6: *Was the swim team helpful in your transition? What role did they play?*

All fifteen participants strongly indicated the importance of the swim team's role in the transition experience. In fact, not one participant diminished the role the swim team played in their first several weeks in college. "It's like a nurturing kind of thing,"

(Cathy) explained. (Everatt): “I had fifty new friends upon arrival in college. It was great.” These statements depict the general opinion of the participants regarding the swim team’s role in their first several weeks in college.

Question 7: *What changes can the swim team make in its orientation process to help future classes?*

The swimmers in the study felt the swim program did a good job overall in assisting the freshmen’s acclimation to their new environment. In fact, not one participant suggested a major change in the transition program. All fifteen participants indicated the coaches and upperclassmen took an interest in their adjustment. “It’s good as it is,” said (David), “Keep the strictness up.” (Felicity) discussed the orientation: “There was a lot of team oriented stuff that helped me feel part of it.”

This question is one that will be evaluated as a semester long process. The team’s involvement during the first three weeks is obviously important and useful to a freshman’s transition experience. Questions in the Phase II interviews should reveal more in-depth information on the program’s overall effectiveness and any changes that could positively impact the transition experience.

Question 8: *What are your biggest concerns about college life as a student-athlete?*

All fifteen participants were unanimous in expressing their concern of balancing time. Each one discussed, in various ways, their schedules being very busy with little time outside of academics and swimming.

Various levels of anxiety about grades were depicted in the interviews. Many of the participants expressed fear of disappointing their parents or becoming ineligible. (Everatt) remarked, “Trying to keep my grades up with all the demands of swimming is difficult.”

An interesting theme that emerged in this question was the participants’ surprise in the structured environment that a student-athlete faces. Much of each day is dedicated to academics and swimming. It became apparent in the interviews the student-athletes

were under the impression that they were going to have more free time. (Felicity): “Not a lot of personal time for me and I’m getting used to that... my sister is a student here and I have only seen her once in three weeks.” Learning to prioritize their time was discussed by twelve of the fifteen participants.

Question 9: *What are some benefits of being a student-athlete?*

The highest response component from the interviews pointed to the services provided by the athletic department. In particular, respondents referenced the relationship afforded to them by the athletic academic coordinator for swimming. Comments regarding their relationship with her ranged from critical to fun. Study hall was mentioned by fifty percent of the participants as being helpful; however, many of the student-athletes once again referenced study hall as a poor studying environment. A theme emerged in which the mandated study time was valuable, but the environment was non-conducive for actual studying.

Four participants mentioned the multitude of services available to them through the athletic department. Comments ranged from the benefits of the sports nutritionist to having an athletic trainer on the pool deck during swim practices. (Betty) stated, “It’s good having so many people looking after you, although it makes you scared to mess up.” In general, the participants believe the athletic department provides a positive learning environment for the student-athletes.

Question 10: *What are some drawbacks of being a student-athlete?*

The overwhelming response to the question was time management. All fifteen participants indicated each day was filled with obligations that were required or necessary to fulfill so they would not fall behind in school. (Bill) seemed almost exasperated when he exclaimed, “I’m always running around doing something, I’m tired a lot!” It became apparent in the interviews that many of the student-athletes were unaccustomed to this type of schedule and that adjusting to it was challenging.

Nearly half the interviewees revealed concern that their interactions with non-swimmers centered on student-athletes from other sports and not the regular student body. Many of those interviewed expressed concern they are not able to spend more time

getting involved with groups outside of the athletic department. Even with many regular students living close by in the same dorm, some of the participants believe much of the potential interaction occurs in the afternoon while they are at practice. (Fred): “I can’t have a normal college life.” (Gavin): “It’s difficult meeting new people who aren’t swimmers.” Questions in Phase II should elaborate further on these issues which surfaced in the Phase I interviews.

Question 11: *How have your professors supported your efforts as a student-athlete?*

All swimmers and divers representing the program are given a travel schedule at the first team meeting three days into the start of classes. The student-athletes are instructed to meet with their professors to discuss any absences needed to represent the school in competition. Typically, the swimmers and divers take several weeks before actually showing the professors the excuse letters and getting approval regardless of the coach’s demands to take care of it early. The Phase I interviews revealed that ten of the fifteen participants had actually met with their professors and had interacted with them at the time of their interview with the researcher. The other five participants had various explanations for their professors not yet knowing their need to miss certain classes.

The overwhelming majority (eight of ten) of the participants who had become acquainted with the professors were quite pleased with their reception. These respondents believed their professors fully intended to support their efforts as a student-athlete. In discussing his meeting with one professor (Bill) quoted his professor as saying, “Of course, if you have a meet on a Friday, I can’t ask you to take a test at that time.” Many participants’ seemed relieved with their professional interactions being so positive.

Two of the interviews revealed some negative interactions with a professor about their status as a student-athlete. The most intense statement came from (Greta) when she quoted her professor as stating, “If you are going to miss a lot of Fridays, get out of this class.”

The general picture the researcher surmised was that the student-athletes had been well received by their professors in their first three weeks in college. Phase II interviews will help complete the understanding of this topic.

Question 12: *What do you see is the role of the head coach in the transition from high school to college for a student-athlete?*

This question is very important to the researcher in that it directly asks one of the research questions. Some of the participants' responses were quite flattering, while others were a bit surprising. In general, most of those interviewed perceive the role of the head coach in the transition process as a leader who is available to provide guidance as needed.

Twelve of the fifteen participants indicated the role of the head coach in the transition process was quite significant. Many of those indicated the head coach should be available for the student-athlete for needs well beyond the scope of their sport. (David) explained, "A coach is more likely to understand our situation, you (the researcher) recruited me and I hope that means you want me to do well." (Charles) discussed the head coach's role in the following manner: "The head coach should lay out the rules, expectations, and goals for the student-athletes."

Three of the interviewees did not feel the role of the head coach was much of a factor in their transition from high school to college. These swimmers indicated the head coach was only present to assist with their swimming and should not be involved with other aspects of their collegiate lives. (Darla): "I'm not sure." (Gavin) looked at it this way, "I don't think the head coach has that much responsibility unless it is with the swim program."

Question 13: *Can you think of any specific examples where you felt confused and unsure of who to see for a specific problem during your first two weeks in college?*

Eleven of the participants were fully confident they knew which avenues of support to contact for issues that might surface. In particular, the athletic academic coordinator for their sport was mentioned by all eleven participants who felt their

relationship with her was very important in their early days in college. (Betty) stated her feelings regarding the coordinator: “Her personality helps me feel comfortable and informed... I really like her, she makes me laugh.” (Felicity) said, “She has been very helpful to me. She’s like a grandmother.”

Four of the participants had issues develop in which they had no idea with whom to turn for assistance. (Adam) indicated he had a problem with one of his loans and stumbled around campus for several weeks before getting it sorted out by his mother. (Ellen and Betty) had a mouse in their room which scared them to the point that they needed to sleep together. (Cathy) had no idea with whom to speak regarding the expectations the athletic department has with study hall.

The role the swim team played in the participants’ first three weeks in college surfaced during the Phase I interviews. Nine of the participants indicated that word of mouth was a significant component of their problem solving. Most of these nine swimmers indicated upperclassmen took an active role in their adjustment and had concrete answers or direction for their questions. (Allison) viewed the team’s role as follows: “I can be my own resource, if I can’t figure it out, one of the older girls can help me.”

Question 14: Did you feel the coaching staff for your sport was available to assist you? Did they know the answers? Were they willing to direct you properly if not?

This question was an indirect way of seeking information for one of the research questions. The majority of the participants were quite positive with their remarks, while only a few had little to say either positive or negative.

Fourteen of the swimmers in the study indicated the coaching staff was approachable and interested in assisting with issues. In general, there was a trend of responses suggesting the strict nature of the environment was helpful in their adjustment, knowing that coaches are looking out for the best interest of the student-athlete. (Gavin): “Intimidation is important; it keeps me on my toes.” (Betty): “I knew that I needed to walk the straight line when you recruited me. I need that.”

Three of the participants in the study indicated the coaches were available for them, but their services were not needed.

Question 15: *Did you attend summer orientation conducted by the university? If so, what aspects of that orientation were helpful to you?*

This question seeks to understand the role of the athletic department's orientation program versus that of the university's orientation program. The researcher is interested in gaining a better understanding of the two programs which directly relates to the idea of improving the transition process for a freshman student-athlete. The responses brought to the forefront speculation that perhaps the athletic department and the university need to communicate better regarding the orientation process. Fourteen of the interviewed swimmers attended the summer orientation. Nine of whom indicated there was too much overlap between the two orientations. However, the majority of those swimmers commented the summer orientation provided the most useful information and services.

Seven of the fourteen swimmers who attended summer orientation indicated that receiving their school identification, email account, and class schedule was a significant advantage over students who did not attend. (Adam) explained: "It was not bad at all; every student needs to do this stuff anyway." The responses from the freshmen swimmers provided valuable insight on improving the transition orientation for student-athletes.

Question 16: *In your opinion, what are the most important components of success in college?*

Achieving balance in their lives was the primary response of the student-athletes who were interviewed. In fact, eight of the fifteen participants mentioned balancing their academic, athletic, and social lives as being the most important component for their own success in college. Other responses ranged from creating the right schedule, to perseverance, and maintaining a positive attitude.

There were no real surprises in the answers given by the swimmers regarding this question. (Cathy) voiced her view: "Don't let the world get you down; this helps my

swimming, too.” (Fred) gave this advice: “Keep a level head and not get carried away with all the freedom.” The participants’ gave solid answers on components for success. How well they listen to their own advice will be revealed in the Phase II interviews.

Chapter 5

Phase II- The First Semester

Interviews in Phase II commenced as scheduled just after Thanksgiving Break in the fall 2003 semester. Each meeting lasted approximately thirty minutes and took place in the head coach's office as planned. Participants were asked the same questions with similar follow-up questions for each question asked. The interviewer sat on a couch facing the interviewee who sat in a chair. The environment was structured as described in Chapter 3. This section will divulge the findings of the Phase II interviews and discuss relevant information.

Question 1: *Describe your overall experience in your first semester in college.*

Eleven of the fifteen swimmers interviewed indicated the first two months of the semester were the most difficult. The participants believed that, in general, their environment became less stressful as the semester progressed. Furthermore, the majority of the swimmers indicated they have had an enjoyable experience in college. In summarizing his first semester in college (Charles) stated, "I have enjoyed it; I feel like I got my footing about mid-way through the semester." (Cathy) viewed her first semester as follows: "It was good, but the adjustment took time."

Seven of the fifteen swimmers interviewed expressed certain components that made their first semester experience more difficult. Three of those seven participants expressed difficulty in adjusting to the freedom of college and their inability to discipline themselves academically. (Fred) concluded, "The first two months were adjustment months for me; things got a bit easier towards the end." (Greta) expressed her feelings as follows: "It was stressful in many ways. It is a lot more work than high school."

Question 2: *Do you feel the athletic department and its programs helped you in your first semester? How can it improve?*

The responses were quite mixed in grading the athletic department's program and services. The overwhelming majority of the participants continue to believe the current structure of study hall is a poor environment. In fact, only (Adam) believed that study hall was a positive program, whereas all of the other fourteen participants expressed displeasure in the study hall program. (Cathy) was the most adamant with her opinion: "Study hall is stupid. I can't get any work done in there because it is always so loud." (Bill) was a bit more reserved with his comments, but with a similar point: "The idea of study hall is good, but I really think too many people are there just killing the time."

A theme through this interview question emerged indicating many of the participants enjoy certain components of the athletic department's assistance programs. Eight of the swimmers discussed various meetings or services that assisted in their first semester. The services mentioned ranged from the athletic training room, to the availability of free tutors. Once again, the athletic academic coordinator was mentioned by five of the swimmers as a huge asset in their transition experience. (Gavin) had an interesting comment: "I don't really remember anything about the athletic department's involvement with me, unless you count how much she (athletic academic coordinator) has helped me." The input provided by the swimmers in this question will greatly assist in answering the research questions.

Question 3: *What have been positive aspects of your first semester in college?*

The swimmers interviewed gave general answers when asked about positive aspects of their first semester in college. Follow-up questions were needed to extrapolate necessary data. Nine of the fifteen participants indicated they liked the overall Virginia Tech experience: the campus layout, the university academic calendar, and home football games throughout the fall. Furthermore, the participants indicated they were generally pleased with their involvement regarding the swimming and diving program. (Betty) summarized her feelings this way: "I have enjoyed the whole experience, I'm training

hard and swimming fast, and meeting new people. It's been a lot of fun!" Betty stated she enjoyed meeting new people, as did nearly everyone interviewed.

Question 4: *What have been negative aspects of your first semester in college?*

Three major themes developed regarding negative aspects of the first semester in college: the dorms, study hall, and the rigors associated with being a student-athlete. The most reported negative aspect by the participants was the dormitories. Four of the swimmers felt the dorms were far too small and noisy for proper living conditions. All four respondents believed it was their first time living with someone and the adjustment was difficult. (Fred) did not like dormitory living at all: "The dorms are overcrowded, and there is far too much partying going on."

Three participants once again mentioned study hall as a negative aspect for them. All three were adamant the environment needed to change in order to be a more productive place to study. Finally, three participants indicated the adjustment of the demands as a student-athlete was more than they anticipated, which caused stress for them. (Felicity) believed that life as a student-athlete was a very taxing daily grind: "I'm getting used to it (student-athlete demands); the workload in swimming runs me down which affects my school work." Overall, the swimmers were fairly mixed in their responses to the question posed.

Question 5: *Has enough attention been paid to your academic life by the coaches and the student-athlete support personnel?*

The participants gave very strong input regarding the efforts put forth by the coaches and academic support personnel. The data attained will serve as critical input when answering the research questions. The swimmers were mixed in their responses with nearly half mentioning the support was very good, while nearly half of the remaining participants indicated a lack of attention being paid to their academic pursuits.

Eight of the fifteen interviewees revealed they were comfortable with the academic support offered by both the coaches and student-athlete support personnel. Numerous respondents stated they are responsible for their own academic life and support from other entities is almost a burden. (Gavin) gave very interesting input

regarding the topic: “Coaches should stay out of it (academic issues); they should only get involved if it is going to affect their swimming.” (Cathy) took a different approach with her answer, though with a similar message: “I prefer space, but I understand that your job is to make sure that I stay eligible.” Other participants who were happy with the support system were complimentary of the coaching staff and the athletic academic coordinator. (Ellen) had strong input with her views: “I am very comfortable speaking to the coaches about school, and she (the athletic academic coordinator) is helping me study for my Psych. Final.” The responses previously mentioned contrast sharply with the other half of the participants.

Seven of the freshmen swimmers suggested more attention needed to be placed on their academic lives. Furthermore, several of the participants were fairly critical of those who are in charge of their academic standing. (Bill) was one of the participants adamant with his opinion: “The coaches need to be more understanding with us; sometimes I feel like they forget we go to school too.” (Greta) expressed disappointment in her interview: “Somebody should have stayed on me more; I expected someone to do it and no one did.” The data attained, both positive and negative will be elaborated further in the discussion section.

Question 6: *What changes can the swim team members make in their assistance with its freshmen to help future classes?*

The participants did not change their views from the Phase I interviews regarding the role the swim team played in the transition experience. The overwhelming trend of the responses was very positive in describing the team’s efforts in making the adjustment to college a smooth endeavor.

All fifteen freshmen swimmers gave positive comments regarding the swim team’s transition plan for freshmen. There was no viable criticism, and the researcher was led to believe that no changes are to be made with the involvement by the current team.

The participants were complimentary of the upperclassmen swimmers who would stop by their room throughout the semester and take interest in them. All fifteen

participants indicated that at least one person went out of his or her way to assist in making the transition experience a smoother one.

Question 7: *What are your biggest concerns about college life as a student-athlete?*

The freshmen swimmers were unanimous in their concerns about college life. The two major themes that emerged through the interviews were achieving balance in their academic, athletic, and social lives, coupled with maintaining eligibility.

Twelve of the fifteen participants were clearly concerned with maintaining balance in their daily lives. Many of these swimmers discussed how difficult it is to stay on top of their academic demands while tending to their athletic commitments. (Ellen) expressed her concerns as follows: “I do not have enough time to put into my studies; swimming always seems to get in the way.” (Felicity) discussed balancing her life this way: “Swimming keeps me in line; I’m forgetful and unorganized and it (swimming) helps me balance my time.” The previous quotes were representative of the twelve swimmers concerned with balance.

Four of the fifteen participants indicated maintaining eligibility was their most significant concern as a student-athlete. Several of these freshmen expressed fear that if they failed out of school and lost their scholarship, their parents would remove financial support. (David) took the following perspective: “It (concern) used to be not graduating, but as the semester moved on, it was making grades to keep my scholarship.”

The data attained from question seven in the Phase II interviews will assist the researcher in gaining better insight into the needs of first time student-athletes.

Question 8: *Do you sense student-athletes are treated differently by the university than non student-athletes? How?*

Several interesting trends in responses emerged through the course of the Phase I and Phase II interviews regarding university treatment of student-athletes. Easily the most unanimous consensus was the perception that non-revenue sports (Olympic Sports) received some level of preferential treatment by the university community. Another trend was the indication of preferential treatment of revenue generating sports (football and men’s and women’s basketball).

All fifteen freshmen swimmers held the opinion they were treated in a special manner to some extent. Comments of preferential treatment for student-athletes ranged from professors making special test taking arrangements, to a student-athlete not being disciplined in a dormitory situation due to their status on campus. The swimmers in the study acknowledged that support services were in place to assist with their special needs as student-athletes. The majority of them indicated these services were an extra benefit, but were necessary to assist with the demands placed on them.

Three of the fifteen participants were adamant the athletes in revenue producing sports were treated far better than the athletes in Olympic Sports by the university. Interviews revealed that these swimmers were under the impression that members of the football team, and men's and women's basketball team received treatment in excess of the rest of the sports teams on campus. (Ellen) stated her views as follows: "Higher profiled sports are favored; there is no difference for most student-athletes, though."

Question 9: *How have your professors supported your efforts as a student-athlete?*

Twelve of the swimmers interviewed were quite positive regarding the support received from their professors. In fact, many of the swimmers were very impressed by the degree of professionalism and level of interest that many of the professors had in them as student-athletes. (Adam) recounted his conversation regarding rescheduling a test for a competition as follows: (Adam) "Thanks for letting me do this." (Professor) "Why wouldn't I let you? You do a lot for the university."

Three of the participants stated one or more of their professors were unhappy with their academic conflicts to some extent. However, none of the participants indicated any single professor was completely against their needs as student-athletes. (Greta) stated, "My Renaissance teacher was not really into my swimming, but she is biased towards certain people in general."

Question 10: *What do you see is the role of the head coach in the transition from high school to college for a student-athlete?*

Data attained from the question seeking information on the role of the head coach in the transition experience directly addresses one of the research questions. The participants interviewed had varying views of the head coach's role in the transition experience; however, several common trends emerged that will be discussed.

Ten of the fifteen swimmers view the head coach as a mentor involved in all aspects of their lives, starting with the recruiting process and continuing through their college career. These participants, in general, believed the role of the head coach is to oversee their overall well-being, much like their parents did when they were in high school. (Cathy) took the following perspective: "You (the researcher and head coach) are my father figure at school". (Bill) stated, "You are the general manager of this group of people." The previous statements give a general idea of the feelings of ten participants who perceived the head coach as a mentor or parental figure.

Four of the fifteen participants' opinions centered on the belief the head coach was simply another person involved with their collegiate experience. (Ellen) discussed the head coach's role as follows: "You should be concerned with academics so we can all stay eligible." (Allison) had an interesting perspective: "Help us become better athletes, no more, no less." The data attained will be crucial evidence in answering the research questions.

Question 11: *What would you change if you could start your first semester again?*

The overwhelming majority of the participants would have spent more time on their academic demands if they could start the semester over again. In fact, all fifteen swimmers believed they could be in much better academic standing had they paid more attention to their academics earlier in the semester.

Thirteen of the fifteen swimmers interviewed indicated more time should have been spent on their studies. However, five of the participants commented that commencing college with no major or any real academic direction made the task even more difficult. The swimmers interviewed indicated their semester had gone well and

their adjustment had been fairly successful overall. Every comment from the participants centered on improving their academic lives.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Universities that sponsor college athletics must recognize the role the athletic department plays on their campus (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993; Hill, 1993; Parham, 1993). Student-athletes come from every imaginable background with diverse interests and needs, which increases the need for each coach to be aware of his or her team's dynamics. Whether Division I, II, or III, each institution must recognize the demands on these young adults and do everything possible to support their efforts. Student-athletes in Division I find themselves in the most difficult environment in terms of time demands and pressure (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1991). Therefore, special assistance for these groups becomes virtually essential. Most Division I universities implement their own version of a transition program to acclimate their new freshmen students (Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terezini, 1996). This orientation process gives new students an opportunity to learn about the school and its expectations before classes begin with the added expectation of academic performance. Even though transition programs are well intended, they cannot guarantee the success of each new student-athlete. Therefore, specific sport programs must get involved with the transition experience (Hill, 1993; Tracey & Corlett, 1995). Transition programs need to have components that include the general student life office, the athletic department, and the specific head coach who takes an active role in a first time student-athlete's adjustment. The head coach of each sport knows the time commitments of the athletes and has the best handle on their lives (Hill, 1993). Each sport in an athletic department needs to develop its own individual transition program for its team members. The head coach oversees the transition plan and evaluates the plans successes and failures to make adjustments for future classes. This is the best way to maximize the chances of a successful adjustment to college.

The purpose of this study was to determine the head coach's role in the transition process of a freshman student-athlete. Furthermore, the study sought to address to what extent a student-athlete could benefit from evaluating the effectiveness of the transition process.

The First Three Weeks' Discussion

Each participant interviewed in the Phase I portion of the study expressed certain levels of anxiety during their first three weeks in college. Graber & Brooks-Gunn, (1996); and McDougall & Hymel, (1998) discussed feelings and anxieties exhibited by most students in a new academic environment. The feelings the participants encountered during the first three weeks of school were consistent with the literature. No matter the level of stress, it appears that a coach can expect first time student-athletes to be anxious in their new environment. Therefore, coaches should take an active role in assisting their student-athletes in getting acclimated to the new setting. Coaches must be cognizant of the stress associated with a transition experience, along with knowing the intricacies of their particular school, and assist in guiding freshmen through the initial phase of their transition. A good example of this is (Cathy) saying, "I just don't want to get yelled at." Coaches should know that many student-athletes are going to be afraid to ask pertinent questions in a new setting, and thereby create a positive environment encouraging their freshmen to seek assistance. Communication is a key component in helping student-athletes feel more comfortable in their environment. A coach can assist his or her freshmen student-athletes by reinforcing simple guidelines such as an "open door policy," or stating that "there are no dumb questions."

Twelve of the fifteen participants believed the role of the head coach is important in the transition experience. Many of these swimmers repeatedly stated the head coach can assist well beyond the swimming pool. In fact, many of the participants depended on the head coach for guidance in their new environment. The data in this study confirms the need for the head coach to be interested in the overall well-being of his or her students-athletes, knowing the adjustment will have challenges along the way. Many of the athletes indicated they chose the school largely based on the swim program and the

head coach. This information correlates with the literature which suggests the head coach is a significant factor in a student-athlete's decision to attend a certain college (Gabert, Hale, & Montalvo, 1999). However, not all of the participants felt this way. Based on Phase I interviews, it appears that some of the participants need more room for growth, while many prefer to be monitored and directed. The head coach needs to be perceptive to the psyche of each freshman and determine how much, if any, space each individual needs in his or her new environment. Comments associated with the first several weeks of the college experience were completely consistent with the literature.

The effectiveness of the athletic department's transition program prior to the start of fall classes is of high interest, and the opinions of the participants were split equally. Half believed the orientation program was important, while the other half believed it was a complete waste of time. A portion of those interviewed recognized certain information needed to be disseminated; however, some swimmers believed the information closely resembled the information provided in the general student orientation over the summer. The athletic department first should understand what information is presented by the university, and second, adjust their orientation program to avoid redundant information. Furthermore, the athletic department should know exactly how many student-athletes do not attend the summer orientation program to ensure everyone is getting the needed information. The data attained from the participants indicate the student-athletes can benefit from an athletic department orientation which is aware of the university's orientation program, and presents information which addresses the specific needs of student-athletes. Furthermore, an athletic department should be aware of any changes the university makes in its transition program for freshmen, and evolve accordingly to minimize repetitive information.

Many of the freshmen student-athletes entering college already know each other through the swimming world and the recruiting process. The incoming swimmers factored in their relationship with fellow recruits and the current team when making their decision. Being closely associated with a group has proven to be a strong component of a positive transition experience (Pearson & Petipas, 1990). The findings of this case study

point to the idea that group association creates a bond that can be beneficial to those in a new environment. A coach would be wise to understand the role of his or her team in assisting freshmen with their new environment and work diligently to cultivate an atmosphere that encourages older team members to look after their freshmen. All fifteen participants valued the assistance of the current team in their transition experience. The data suggests a role of the head coach is to utilize the current team in assisting incoming freshmen in their new environment. The upperclassmen have been through the same process, and are able to give insight and guidance to the freshmen class. The majority of the participants were adamant the current team was critical in their first three weeks' adjustment phase. Comments from the participants made it clear to the researcher that freshmen students oftentimes look to their peers for guidance.

The study by Enstrom and Sedlacek (1990) suggests a negative student bias may exist for all student-athletes. The initial results of this case study point to possible differences in perception between revenue versus non-revenue producing sports. The participants consistently inferred that the football team was viewed differently by the entire university. Furthermore, members of the football team had a negative academic stigma far greater than the stigma attached to Olympic Sports. As stated by the researcher, a transition program from high school to college needs to be specific for each particular sport since each program has unique needs and areas of concentration of which only the coaching staff is aware. For example, the football program needs to develop specific transition models for its team, and the tennis team needs to have its own model. A "one size fits all" approach most likely will miss important components of a specific team's transition plan. The uniqueness of each program forces the head coach to be responsible for overseeing the various components of the program's transition plan.

The literature revealed that time management is a critical component for a student-athlete to have a successful transition experience (Gabbard & Halischak, 1993; Parham, 1993; Tracey & Corlett, 1995). The researcher was surprised to learn that only two interviewees discussed alcohol or drugs as an issue. Obviously, this could either be a component of the researcher's role in the lives of the participants, or the fact that the

participants have enough balance in their schedules to know the proper time for the social component of college. Perhaps a different study going in-depth into the social lives of freshmen student-athletes could provide more information on the subject. The fifteen participants in this study were all concerned about time management in some form. The interviews in Phase I correlate with the literature regarding balance in the lives of a freshmen student-athlete.

It was interesting to discover that nearly half of the participants expressed concern over lack of opportunity to meet students outside of their own team or from other sports programs. These expressions of concern correlate with studies from Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991) in which a bias exists from students regarding student-athletes. Indeed, it is difficult for freshmen student-athletes to devote much time to outside activities after their daily studies and athletic obligations have been fulfilled. Comments in the Phase I interviews led the researcher to believe it is difficult to bridge the gap between student-athletes and regular students when there is minimal time for interaction.

The role of the athletic academic coordinator for the swim team emerged as very important for the swimmers as they entered college. The majority of the participants had met her during the recruiting process, thus, already developing a comfort level with her before school began. The researcher has developed a good relationship over the years with the athletic academic coordinator, but never realized how strong her role is in the transition process until the Phase I interviews were conducted. The data revealed the role of the student-athlete academic coordinator appears to be just as important as the role of the current swimmers in the transition experience for many of the swimmers in the study. Eleven of the fifteen participants felt a strong connection with the academic coordinator. Many of these swimmers indicated she provided insight and guidance not found by another source. A head coach would be wise to realize the key individuals who interact with their freshmen on a daily basis, and develop strong relationships with them to get a better overall perspective of the challenges faced in the transition experience.

It should be noted the head coach of the program is very expectant that his freshmen closely follow the philosophy of the program. The head coach also believes

young adults make mistakes, and an education process through mistakes needs to occur. The responses from the participants indicate the head coach's philosophy assists the freshmen student-athletes in getting accustomed to their environment. It is interesting to learn the opinions and needs of incoming freshmen in an attempt to create an environment that is positive for every type of personality. Clearly, an important role of the head coach for incoming freshmen is to oversee the transition environment and lend support as needed in all facets of their lives.

The First Semester Discussion

Input from the participants gave valuable insight on the transition experience for those entering college for the first time. The second series of interviews revealed a change of opinion for some swimmers regarding their experience, and a similar depiction of events for other swimmers. Some of the participants readily discussed how smooth things were going in the Phase I interviews, only to indicate it was a stressful period of time for them in the Phase II interviews. It becomes clear that a head coach must trust the fact that most freshmen student-athletes will struggle with their adjustment to some extent, and the head coach can make a difference in the transition experience if he or she remains proactive.

The swimmers in the study were highly critical of the study hall component of the athletic department's transition program. Fourteen of the fifteen participants believed the environment was non-conducive to studying. Even though the swimmers did not object to going to study hall, they were adamant the environment created was too loud and permissive and ultimately too much time was wasted. The input from the participants suggested those in charge of study hall should restructure the environment to create quiet areas, and talking permitted areas. This would help account for group discussions or tutoring versus individuals studying alone. It should be noted, though, that the participants were complimentary of the athletic department in general for offering so many programs and services to its student-athletes in an attempt to assist in every way possible. Input received from the participants suggests an annual evaluation regarding transition programs and subsequent changes would benefit the student-athletes.

The data received from the participants regarding the interest level of the coaching staff and student-athlete support personnel revealed some important issues. Most important is the fact that many of the freshmen student-athletes expect, or at least need, a certain amount of attention from the head coach and academic support personnel. Unfortunately, nearly half of the participants believed they did not receive enough attention to their academic needs. This is a bit telling in that the head coach, who was conducting the study, should have had a heightened awareness of the needs of his student-athletes. Hopefully, other coaches can learn from this important discovery. The other half of the participants prefer the coach to be less active in their academic life. (Gavin's) comments indicating coaches should only intervene if poor academic performance affects their swimming summarized the views of a portion of the swimmers who do not want too many people watching over them. Other respondents were less aggressive with their opinions, but still preferred space regarding academic matters. Therefore, it appears a role of the coach is to identify at risk students, and track those students thoroughly in an attempt to increase academic performance. Further, the data suggests a coach should be willing to allow students with stronger high school academic credentials a little more freedom. The academic role played by the head coach may vary by individual; however, the data indicates all of the freshmen swimmers interviewed depend on the head coach to some extent to assist in their new environment.

The socialization aspect of a transition experience should not be underestimated (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). Studies show new students who are comfortable in their environment are more prone to a positive experience (Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terenzini, 1996; Tolson & Chevrette, 1974). Data suggesting that many participants in the study perceived their overall environment in their first semester as positive correlates with the literature regarding a strong transition experience. It also appears the negative component for swimmers in their first semester varies by individual. What may be considered a good situation for one student-athlete may be poor for another. The head coach can make a difference in the transition experience by recognizing key components for each freshman and assisting with necessary changes.

The role the swim team played in the transition experience did not change in the Phase II interviews. All fifteen participants were complimentary and appreciative of the members of the swim team in assisting with the first semester. A trend emerged during the Phase I and Phase II interviews suggesting a head coach needs to understand the importance of the upperclassmen in the transition experience, and incorporate them into the overall transition plan. The data supports the importance of socialization in a positive transition experience.

The Phase II interviews revealed nearly all of the swimmers recognized they are treated differently than the general student body. They readily admitted they are a special needs group that requires specific attention. The participants examined did not view certain allowances as an extra benefit, but rather a necessary component to assist them in representing the university. An interesting discovery was learning how the participants backed away from the strong opinion many carried in the Phase I interviews regarding revenue producing sports. Only a minority of those examined at the end of the semester viewed the treatment of the football and men's and women's basketball programs as excessive. Statements from the swimmers in the Phase II interviews began to streamline the notion the athletic department took an active interest in all student-athletes. This information is of importance in that it might assist in the understanding of how a particular athletic department may wish to make changes in its freshmen orientation programs at the beginning of the semester.

It should be noted that little difference in data emerged between the male and female genders. The swim program examined is a combined men's and women's team with each gender training together. The transition experience and subsequent information attained in the Phase I and Phase II interviews revealed each gender endures a similar level of stress and has a similar view of the experience. This data correlates to the studies by Lopez and Gormley (2002), and Sikes (1999). It is unclear if the results are due to a combined program, or if men and women would produce similar data on a gender specific team. Future studies might address this topic.

Ten of the fifteen swimmers in the Phase II interviews perceived the head coach as a mentor. These participants believed the role of the head coach is to be involved in the overall well-being of his or her student-athletes. The opinions of the participants regarding the role of the head coach did not change much between the Phase I and Phase II interviews; however, four of the fifteen participants continued with the Phase II trend of requesting more freedom in their lives. Although not an easy task, a head coach should work to identify the specific needs of the individuals in his or her program, and work diligently to provide the most conducive environment for each member.

Conclusions

The results of the study show the research hypothesis was retained for both research questions. Freshmen Swimmers transitioning from high school to college do have a need for their head coach to assist them with their new environment. Changes do need to be made annually to keep up with the evolving environment of university and student life. The data obtained from the participants in the study coupled with existing literature on the topic and in related areas correlate. The head coach for each sport should take an active role in the transition experience of a freshman student-athlete. Furthermore, in an ever-changing environment, such as a college climate, evaluation of the transition program's effectiveness should be conducted annually with proper adjustments taking place.

Possible Future Studies and Recommendations

Further studies regarding a transition program's effectiveness should take place in other sports. This way, multiple sports can collaborate on the development of tools needed to assist a coach in monitoring a transition program's effectiveness. Each university and sports program should look at its own various transition components and determine which model to implement.

Another possible study is to determine the transition experience differential between revenue producing and non-revenue producing sports. Should different components be utilized in the highly specialized needs of high profile programs?

Implications for a Head Coach

This study may help head coaches and their staff to better identify and evaluate important components of their freshmen student-athlete's transition experience. It may give some coaches the information they need to better understand the various needs a first time student-athlete might have in a new environment.

Furthermore, this study may help athletic departments realize how critical head coaches are in the development of the lives of the student-athletes on their team. It is important for head coaches to be involved in every aspect of the administration of their program and for an athletic department to give needed resources to increase the chances of success for its student-athletes during their critical first semester in college. Additionally, this study produced data suggesting college climates change annually, and universities, their athletic departments, and coaches should annually evaluate their transition programs and make changes to account for the changing environment.

References

- Berg, L. (2002). Transitions class for student-athletes at Virginia Tech. *Personal interview*.
- Caplan, R., Vinokur, A., Price, R., & Van Ryn, M. (1989). Job Seeking, Reemployment, and Mental Health: A Randomized Field Experiment in Coping with Job Loss. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 10, 74, 759-769*.
- De Souza, M., Barberi, A., & Gomes, W. (2001). Significant life events: A phenomenologic study. *PSICO, 32, 87-103*.
- Danish, S., Petipas, A., & Hale, B. (1993). Life Development Intervention for Athletes: Life Skills Through Sports. *The Counseling Psychologist, 21, 352-385*.
- Engstrom, C., & Sedlacek, W. (1991). A Study of Prejudice Toward University Student-Athletes. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 9/10, 189-93*.
- Eschenmann, K. (2000). *Class notes and materials from Applied Motivation Techniques (EDVT 5984) class*.
- Etzel, E., Ferrante, A., & Pinkney, J. (1991). Counseling College Student-Athletes: Issues and Interventions. *Fitness Information Technology, Inc*.
- Freedman, A. (1998). Pathways and Crossroads to Institutional Leadership. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, 50(3), 131-151*.
- Gabbard, C., & Halischak, K. (1993). Consulting Opportunities: Working With Student-Athletes at a University. *The Counseling Psychologist, 21, 386-398*.
- Gabert, T., Hale, J., & Montalvo, G. (1999). Differences in College Choice Factors among Freshmen Student-Athletes. *Journal of College Admissions, 164, 20-29*.
- Gackenbach, J. (1982). Collegiate Swimmers: Sex Differences in Self-Reports and Indices of Physiological Stress. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 55, 555-558*.
- Gati, I., Krausz, M., & Osipow, S. (1996). A Taxonomy of Difficulties in Career Decision Making. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 10, 43(4), 510-526*.

- Graber, J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1996). Transitions and Turning Points: Navigating the Passage From Childhood Through Adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 7, 32(4), 768-776.
- Heppner, M., Multon, K., Gysbers, N., Ellis, C., & Zook, C. (1998). The Relationship of Trainee Self-Efficacy to the Process and Outcome of Career Counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 10, 45(4), 393-402.
- Hill, K. (2001). *Frameworks for Sports Psychologists*, Human Kinetics Publishing.
- Hill, T. (1993). Sports Psychology and the Collegiate Athlete: One size Does not Fit All. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 21, 436-440.
- Holliday, A. (2002). *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*, London: Sage Publications.
- Jaudon, J. (2003). Associate Athletic Director at Virginia Tech. *Personal Interview*.
- Johnson, M. (1999). *The athlete's experience of being coached: An existential-phenomenological investigation*, Dissertation Abstracts International, 9,60(3-A).
- Jones, G., & Hardy, L. (1990). *Stress and Performance in Sport*, Wiley Series in Human Performance and Cognition.
- Kaplan, R. (2000). Two Pathways to Prevention. *American Psychologist*, 4, 55(4), 382-396.
- Kolbasovsky, A. (2001). *When the cheering stops: Adjustment to life after college Basketball*, Dissertation, University of Hartford.
- Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lopez, F., & Gormley, B. (2002). Stability and Change in Adult Attachment Style Over the First-Year College Transition: Relations to Self-Confidence, Coping and Distress Patterns. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 7, 49, 355-364.
- Maccoby, E. & Jacklin, C.N. (1974). *The Psychology of Sex differences*. Stanford University Press.
- McDougall, P., & Hymel, S. (1998). Moving into Middle School: Individual Differences in the Transition Experience. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 4, 30, 108-120.

- Murphy, D. (1986). Stress and the Athlete: Coping with Exercise. *Physician and Sportsmedicine*, 14, 141-146.
- National Collegiate Athletic Association, Indianapolis, IN. September, 1999.
- NCAA Compliance Manual 2003-2004, Indianapolis, IN.
- Norris, T., & Pittman, M. (2000). The Healthy Communities Movement and the Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities. *Public Health Reports*, 6, 118-124.
- Parham, W. (1993). The Intercollegiate Athlete: A 1990's Profile. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 7, 21, 411-429.
- Pascarella, E., Edison, M., Hagedorn, L., Nora, A., & Terenzini, P. (1996). Influences on Students' Internal Locus of Attribution for Academic Success in the First-Year of College. *Research in Higher Education*, 37, 731-56.
- Pearson, R., & Petitpas, A. (1990). Transitions of Athletes: Developmental and Preventive Perspectives. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 69, 7-10.
- Redican, K. (2000). *Class notes and materials from Public Health Administration (EDHL 5314) class.*
- Reininger, B, Dinh-Zarr, T., Sinicrope, P., & Martin, D. (1999). Dimensions of Participation and Leadership: Implications for Community-Based Health Promotions for Youth. *Family & Community Health*, 7, 72-82.
- Robbins, S., Chartrand, J., McFadden, K., & Lee, R. (1994). Efficacy of Leader-Led and Self-Directed Career Workshops for Middle-Aged and Older Adults. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1, 41(1), 83-90.
- Robinson, S. (2002). *Gaining the Competitive Edge: Enriching the First-Year Experience of the New Student-Athlete*, University of South Carolina.
- Saveyne, W.C., & Robinson, R.S. (1996). Qualitative research issues and methods: An introduction for educational technologists. In D.H. Jonassen, ed. (Ed.), *Handbook of Research for Educational Communications and Technology*, New York: MacMillan.
- Schlossberg, N. (1984). *Counseling Adults in Transition*, Springer Publishing Co.

- Seamons, N. (2001). *Information Literacy: A Study of Freshman Student's Perceptions, with Recommendations*, Dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- Sikes, J. (1999). Motivational Differences with Female Athletes-Part 1. *Championship Performance*, 2,9.
- Tolson, H. & Chevrette, J. (1974). Changes in Attitudes Toward Physical Activity as a Result of Individualized Exercise Prescriptions. *Journal of Psychology*, 7, 03-07.
- Tracey, J. & Corlett, J. (1995). The Transition Experience of First-Year University Track and Field Student Athletes. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience*, 7, 81-102.
- Uttech, M. (2000). *Class notes and handouts, Educational Research class*.
- Witherspoon, R., & White, R. (1996). Executive Coaching: A Continuum of Roles. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 48(2), 124-133.
- Zirkel, S. (1992). Developing Independence in a Life Transition: Investing the Self in the Concerns of the Day. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3 62(3), 506-521.

Appendix A

Interview Questions- Phase I

- 1) Describe your feelings during your first two weeks in college.

- 2) Did the athletic department's weekend orientation prior to classes beginning help make your transition smoother? How can it improve?

- 3) What have been positive aspects of your first several weeks in college?

- 4) What have been negative aspects of your first several weeks in college?

- 5) As a student-athlete, do you feel other students look at you positively or negatively? How?

- 6) Was the swim team helpful in your transition? What role did it play?

- 7) What changes can the swim team make in its orientation process to help future classes?

- 8) What are your biggest concerns about college life as a student-athlete?

- 9) What are some benefits of being a student-athlete?

- 10) What are some drawbacks of being a student-athlete?

- 11) How have your professors supported your efforts as a student-athlete?

- 12) What do you see is the role of the head coach in the transition from high school to college for a student-athlete?

- 13) Can you think of any examples where you felt confused and unsure of who to see for a specific problem during your first two weeks in college?

- 14) Did you feel the coaching staff for your sport was available to assist you? Did they know the answers? Were they willing to direct you properly if not?

- 15) Did you attend summer orientation conducted by the university? If so, what aspects of that orientation were helpful to you?

- 16) In your opinion, what are the most important components of success in college?

Appendix C

Consent Form

Introduction- I am a student at Virginia Tech involved in research for fulfillment of my doctorate.

Purpose of Study- To evaluate the transition process of freshmen men and women swimmers. This research is in conjunction with fulfilling my degree requirements at Virginia Tech.

Procedure- 1 hour interview, along with taking notes of our interview. The interview will not be audio-taped.

Confidentiality- All interviews will be confidential, and pseudonyms will be used.

I am a student in the department of Education at Virginia Tech. For the next couple of months I will be researching the impact of transitioning to student life at Virginia Tech. The study will focus on the pros and cons of your first semester. I will be asking you questions regarding the support that the athletic department, swim team, and coaching staff have offered you. I will also be asking you about your perceptions of college life at Virginia Tech. Your input will help me better understand the swim teams' experiences here as a freshman.

To understand this topic I will be interviewing eight women and eight men swimmers from the incoming freshmen class. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in at least one interview, and a follow-up interview. Each interview session will be held in the swim office and is slated to last one hour. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may terminate the interview at any time. Your participation or non participation will not affect your status as a student-athlete on the swim team.

All information will be kept confidential. If excerpts are used from the interview, a pseudonym will be substituted for your real name. Even though there are limits on the protections that can be provided, there are no more than minimal risks for your involvement in the study. Please know that if you discuss components of your interview with others, then you might be identifiable in the report. Furthermore, you should be aware that you know other participants in the study well, and discussing your interview with them would increase your chances of being identified in the report. A copy of this consent form is available for you.

Signing this form will indicate you have been informed of the nature of this research and give your consent prior to participation. Federal regulations require written informed consent prior to the participation in this research study so that you can know the nature and the risks of participation and can decide to participate in a free and informed manner.

You may contact myself (Ned Skinner) at 231-5086 or by e-mail nskinner@vt.edu, or Richard Stratton at 231-5617 or by email at rstratto@vt.edu. You may also contact the IRB Chair, David Moore, at 231-4991 or by e-mail moored@vt.edu.

I have read and understand the above information. My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Name (please print)_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Curriculum Vitae

Ned Thomas Skinner

1831 Greenbrier Circle
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 231-5086
nskinner@vt.edu

- EXPERIENCE:** **Head Men's and Women's Swim Coach**
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
(1998 to present)
- Director of Competitive Swimming and Diving**
The College of William & Mary (1994 to 1998)
- Men's and Women's Head Swim Coach/Aquatic's Director**
Central Connecticut State University (1990 to 1994)
- Physical Education Instructor**
Central Connecticut State University (1991 to 1994)
- Graduate Assistant of Men's and Women's Swim Teams**
Ohio University (1989 to 1990)
- Assistant to Associate Athletic Director**
Louisiana State University (1988 to 1989)
- EDUCATION:** **Doctor of Philosophy, Teaching and Learning,**
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2004
- Master of Science, Athletic Administration, Ohio University 1990**
- Bachelor of Arts, Advertising, Louisiana State University, 1989**
- BIRTHDATE:** May 3, 1966