

The Needs of Virginia Tech Student Athletes During the Transfer Process

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Abstract

This project described the needs of student-athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech and helped provide recommendations for improvement in the University's process of accepting student athlete transfers. Through literature review, NCAA student athletes, transfer students, transfer portal and process and psychological needs were all researched and discussed. The theoretical framework utilized in the development of the study was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Study participants included five student athletes, of which were three females and two males; the sports represented included football, men's basketball, women's basketball, women's lacrosse and women's volleyball. The interviews were semi structured and pertained to personal experiences of the transfer experience to Virginia Tech. Through qualitative interviews, information was gathered and analyzed in unique codes that were grouped into categories revealing six emerging themes for recommendations to Virginia Tech support staff. The results indicated that the Virginia Tech support staff should focus on Establishing Communications, Building Relationships, Facilitating Early Introductions, Increasing Knowledge About Academics, Providing a Smooth Admissions Process and Displaying Authenticity and Transparency. The communication between support staff and transfer student athletes should be transparent, correct and remain constant throughout the transfer process. Relationships should begin early in the transfer process and focus on authenticity. The admissions process should be smooth due to receiving help and knowledge from support staff. This study can be used for other institutions that would like to enhance their process of accepting transfer students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this project was to describe the needs of student athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech. Certain psychological needs need to be met for each transfer student athlete to be able to perform her best. Therefore, it is important for institutions to have an effective system in place to help the transfer student athlete get acclimated to her new home. The athletic department staff can help the student athlete register for classes, complete outstanding paperwork, complete medical requirement assessments, and find and move into housing. Burgess and Cisneros described a “semester of struggle” for junior college athletes that transfer to a four-year college (p. 276). This research showed that changes in the academic environment following the transfer to the Division I institution brought about the semester of struggle. Participants in the study described the academic environment as a significant challenge of the transfer experience (Burgess & Cisneros, 2018). The participants also identified that the support staff served as a coping strategy by facilitating their transition to the D1 institution (Burgess and Cisneros, 2018). This supports the rationale that any help received by the student athlete will limit the amount of stress throughout the process of transferring and hasten the time management adjustment required for school and athletics.

After entering the college environment, coaches, administration, faculty, and other students (tutors) are often required to work together to keep many student athletes academically eligible to participate (Weiss and Robinson, 2013). This collective effort also helps to maintain student athlete retention, which is influenced by team dynamics, coach/athlete relationships, and athlete eligibility (Horton, 2009; Weiss & Robinson, 2013). Rivera believes student retention relates to the quality of academic experience, quality of athletic experience, in-network support, and out-of-network support (Rivera, 2004). This retention is more likely when there are support

structures available for academic success, personal and social development, and a clearly defined path to graduation (Tinto, 1999).

Rivera (2004) defines student athletes as “a unique student population that encounters a number of challenges and obstacles that are not within the usual set of academic and social pressures faced by their non-athlete peers” (p.1). The student athlete will play her sport during a 5-year time clock. This time clock begins when the student athlete enrolls as a full-time student at any institution. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a member led organization that governs 1,098 colleges and universities across the United States making up 102 athletic conferences (NCAA, 2021). According to a 2018 study, approximately 39% of undergraduate student athletes transfer at least once from their four-year institution (NCAA, 2021). Student athletes are required to adhere to rules and regulations mandated by the NCAA such as participating in rigorous practice sessions, traveling to competitions, and enduring physical injuries (Watt & Moore, 2001).

The transfer portal is a helpful compliance tool released in 2018 by the NCAA (NCAA, 2021). The portal allows athletes from any collegiate sport who wish to transfer to another institution to continue their collegiate career at another institution (NCAA, 2021). The NCAA regulates such things as the number of times a student athlete can transfer, as well as the conference into which the athlete can transfer. The athlete will enter her name into the transfer portal and other institutions can see the athletes within the portal for recruitment purposes. It should also be noted that there are stipulations. For example, once a student athlete has entered the portal, the current university is no longer required to continue to fund that student’s scholarship even if the athlete decides not to transfer (NCAA, 2021). Once in the portal, other

universities will contact the student athlete to express interest. The student athlete will choose a new school and start the application process.

Definition of Terms

NCAA- The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a membership-driven organization dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of student-athletes and equipping them with the skills to succeed on the playing field, in the classroom and throughout life.

Physiological needs- Physiological needs are the biological requirements for human survival.

Retention- The continued possession, use, or control of something.

Sport- A sport is an institutional activity, sponsored at the varsity or club level, involving physical exertion for the purpose of competition against teams or individuals within an intercollegiate competition structure

Student Athlete- A student athlete is an individual who engages in, is eligible to engage in or may be eligible in the future to engage in any intercollegiate sport

Transfer Athlete- A transfer athlete is a student athlete that is moving to another school to continue participating in an intercollegiate sport.

Transfer portal- The transfer portal is a database of every player who has interest in transferring from his or her current school to another school. The transfer portal includes every collegiate sport.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project was to describe the needs of student athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech. Interviews were conducted to help identify the areas of improvement for Virginia Tech to best ensure a smooth transition for student athletes transferring to Virginia Tech. This evaluation will provide insight into the transfer experiences of

students engaging in a variety of different sports. An expected outcome of this evaluation is to present findings and recommendations to the athletic department to improve the process of transferring to Virginia Tech athletics as it relates to student satisfaction, academic and athletic performance, and university retention.

Limitations of the Project

The first limitation to the project was the sample size. The study only recruited student athletes who had transferred to Virginia Tech. This limited the number of athletes that could be recruited for participation. Of the 16 transfer student athletes that had been recruited, only five participated in the interview. It can prove to be difficult to recruit student athletes to participate in project studies because of the time constraints on their busy schedules.

Second, there was a lack of previous research studies pertaining to transfer student athletes as well as the transfer portal and transfer process itself. When completing the literature review, the researcher had to find many articles regarding transferring as regular students (not athletes) because of the lack of available research. The information gathered in this study will hopefully lead to more research in this field of study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this project was to describe the needs of student athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech. As athletes, there are specific needs that need to be met to perform in both athletics and academics. Despite high initial expectations upon entering college, the exorbitant demands pressed upon them by being a student and athlete can become overwhelming (Weiss and Robinson, 2013).

Psychological Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of needs is a psychological development theory produced by Abraham Maslow in 1943 (Fredricks, 2016). Maslow's stages of growth are as follows: physiological, safety, belongingness/ love, esteem and self-actualization. In each of these stages the individual builds on the previous stage until they reach the final stage of self-actualization. Maslow believed that illnesses, particularly mental health issues, are developed from not having various stages of the hierarchy met (Fredricks, 2016). Given the amount of student athletes that participate in sports within the NCAA, the probability of having student athletes with psychological concerns is a certainty (Neal et al, 2013). An active and purposeful dedication to meeting each of these needs during the transfer process, might significantly diminish the rate of mental illness among student athlete transfer students and improve the likelihood of success for the student athlete.

NCAA Student Athletes

NCAA student athletes represent a special population of students on campus who face different challenges and needs compared to the non-athlete students (Gayles, 2009). Student-athletes are "confronted with an array of demands that includes athletic training, competition, media relations, and frequent travel during their athletics season. Student-athletes are also

constantly managing the roles of student and athlete while attempting to successfully satisfy their obligations to their academic unit, family, coach, team, athletics department, and the policies and regulations of the NCAA” (Rivera, 2004, p. 1). These challenges and needs come from the expectations and workload required of the student athletes on a weekly basis. For example, in addition to the traditional college course load, a student athlete may spend twenty hours per week practicing or playing her sport, as well as attending required study hall hours, and spending hours in treatment. The student athlete will be expected to perform well in the classroom as well as in her respective sport. High quality support service programs are usually put in place to help student athletes be successful throughout their collegiate carrier (Gayles, 2009). Having a team of professionals that can properly address these psychological concerns is important and should include the team physicians, athletic trainers, campus counseling service, and community-based mental health care professionals (Neal et al, 2013).

Transfer Students

Laanan believes that transfer students may have a hard time adjusting to their new institution (Laanan, 2007). This is because the academic standards can be more rigorous depending on the size of the new institution, enrollment challenges, institution location and competition among students. (Laanan, 2007). Some social challenges regarding administrative and personal problems are only faced by transfer students and can add to the difficulty of maintaining academic standards (Tobolowsky, 2012). This difficulty adjusting can cause “transfer shock”, which is a temporary dip in academic performance in the first or second semester after transferring (Laanan, 2007). Understanding the transfer experience and how the receiving institution can influence the transfer student’s adjustment is of great importance. (Dika et al, 2014) The authors conclude that institutions should be prepared to include “counseling,

advice from faculty and staff, and having an understanding of academic requirements to influence first-semester academic performance post-transfers” (Dika et al, 2014, p.370)

Transfer Portal and Process

Transferring can be stressful for student athletes, and they will require specific needs throughout the process. Due to the dual nature of their responsibilities, student athletes must perform well both physically and academically, and they arguably are held to a higher standard than their peers. (Love & Stemer, 2019). Academic support programs provide assistance for college athletes who are attempting the balance between their roles and responsibilities as students and athletes (Gaston-Gayles, 2003). These support programs offer tutoring, academic advising, study table, mentoring and more, however, not all programs achieve the same level of success (Gaston-Gayles, 2003). More attention should be devoted to the social and personal adjustment of student athletes as they acclimate to their new home. Investing in a student athlete’s commitment to the university will increase performance (Love & Stemer, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The theory that will be used to help identify the needs of a transfer student athlete during the transfer process is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954) (Appendix A). This theory helps describe the needs of student athletes when transferring to a new institution. Maslow’s theory proposed five categories and stages: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. Maslow “hypothesized that these needs appeared sequentially as one moved up the phylogenetic scale and as the human individual developed from birth to adulthood. Furthermore, the lower needs were more powerful than the higher needs. The more these basic needs were satisfied, the better would be the psychological health of the individual.” (Lester, 2013, p. 113) Each of the stages builds onto the next until the individual

is in pursuit of achieving her full potential at the self-actualization stage. Student athletes should be in pursuit of the final stage while expected to perform their best in the classroom and in their respective sport. Each stage within Maslow's theory is presented below.

Physiological Needs:

At the most basic level of the pyramid are the needs that are vital to our survival. Some examples of these needs are food, water, shelter, and clothing (Cherry, 2020). As a transfer student athlete, physiological needs are one of the first things considered when transferring to a new institution. An example of means used to supply this need may be an athletic scholarship that will provide the student athlete access to dining halls for food. Another example may be having an athletic staff member help locate and share options of affordable off campus housing options. The athletic staff member could also serve by compiling and sharing a list of other student athletes who need a roommate. These basic needs are important in the overall transfer process experience that includes acclimation to the new environment as well as peak academic and athletic performance.

Safety Needs:

The second level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs begins to become more complex. This level focuses on needs such as financial security, health and wellness and safety (Cherry, 2020). A student athlete needs to feel safe both during the transfer process and once she arrives at the new institution. One example of a step that can be taken to help a transfer student athlete feel safe is to assure them their mental and physical health will be maintained while at their institution. Another example may be to keep the athlete up to date with requirements and be knowledgeable enough to answer any questions they may have during the transfer process. The

second level of needs will reduce potential anxiety and stress that can come with the transfer process.

Belongingness and Love Needs:

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs declares that human behavior is driven by the need for emotional relationships (Cherry 2020). These needs can be fulfilled through friendships, family, social groups, community groups, etc. When a student athlete is transferring this means she has made the decision to leave friends from another institution. Cherry (2020) states that "in order to avoid problems such as loneliness, depression, and anxiety, it is important for people to feel loved and accepted by other people" (p. 1). When the student athlete has arrived, the support staff should try their best to help support these needs. Simple introductions and information on different groups and communication can help provide the necessary feelings of belongingness and love. An example might be communicating to see how the transition is going and if there is anything the need help with.

Esteem Needs:

The fourth level of Maslow's Hierarchy is the esteem needs for appreciation and respect. Once the bottom three levels of needs have been satisfied, the esteem needs to play a more prominent role in motivating behavior (Cherry, 2020). It is important for the transfer student athlete to feel respected and that they are appreciated at the new institution. These needs are directly correlated to the performance in both academics and athletics.

Self-Actualization:

The final stage of the Hierarchy is self-actualization needs which allow for people to achieve their full potential as human beings. To achieve full potential, all of the other needs must have been met prior. The goal of any university or college is to recruit players who can help

them be successful in academics and athletics. To achieve this success, it is imperative for these needs to be met. If the student athlete has made it to the final stage, the transfer process has been an overall good experience. Knowing what can be improved and what was effective to achieve this final stage can help institutions be successful in providing the needs for a student athlete to be successful. This success will gradually open doors for the intuition and athletic program. This can help recruit more talent and will help continue to grow the success of the athletic program and the school.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this project was to describe the needs of student athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech. Hopefully this study will allow others to easily research within the same field. Qualitative research is a means of collecting data. Rowley (2012) identifies interviews as face-to-face verbal exchanges where an interviewer attempts to understand and acquire information. Rowley also states that “interviews are generally used in conducting qualitative research, in which the researcher is interested in collecting ‘facts’, or gaining insights into or understanding of opinions, attitudes, experiences, processes, behaviors, or predictions” (Rowley, 2012, p. 261).

Designing and Planning

For this project, interviews were the most effective tool for collecting qualitative data because they help collect facts, develop insight in deciphering attitudes, behaviors, experiences, predications or processes (Rowley, 2012). The interviews were semi-structured and allowed for various degrees of adaptation of questions to accommodate the interviewee to answer with open ended responses (Rowley, 2012). The interviews were designed to elicit responses from participants indicating their personal experiences and what needs they felt were or were not met during the transfer process. If the interview is conducted properly, Rowley believes it can generate useful understandings and insights (Rowley, 2012, p. 262). The interviewer asked a variety of questions to ensure the responses related to different types of needs based upon Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs pyramid.

Choosing Participants

Before contacting any potential participants, a Virginia Tech IRB application was submitted and approved (Appendix B). Data for the project was collected through sampling and

recruitment. The sample for this project included male and female student athletes from various teams at Virginia Tech who transferred to the University within the past four years. The sample of transfer student athletes recruited to participate was intentionally diverse to ensure the best data collection. A recruitment script was created in order to introduce the project and researcher to the potential participants (Appendix C). A consent form was created to ensure the participant gave written consent to be a part of the study (Appendix D). A total of 16 transfer student athletes were recruited to participate in the study through campus email. An email was sent to each potential participant that introduced the researcher, project and the purpose behind the interview questions (Appendix E). This email ensured that the researcher would maintain confidentiality throughout the interview process and project. A follow up recruitment letter email was sent to any participants that had not responded to the first email. After the transfer student athlete agreed to participate, a second email was sent to schedule an interview time. The goal of interviews was to gather sufficient data on the needs of student athletes during their transfer process and their feelings about the transfer process to Virginia Tech (Appendix F).

Conducting Interviews

The interview began with an introduction of the interviewer and a couple warm up questions to build rapport. Rowley (2012) explains how important it is to have a connection between the interviewee and interviewer from building rapport. In this study, rapport was to be already present with several interviewees due to the connection that is obtained within the athletic department. Rapport was built with the other participants easily by having similarities in lifestyle and passion for the sport.

The interview was under 30 minutes for each participant to ensure that interview fatigue did not occur (Rowley, 2012). The interview had minor modifications based on the responses by

the interviewee and the overall flow of the conversation. If the interviewer needed more information, an additional question was asked to gain necessary insight for data analysis. The interview focused on the transfer process to Virginia Tech, gathering data on the experiences of transfer student athletes. A script of the entire interview and list of questions can be found in Appendix F.

Making Sense of the Data

After the interview was complete, the interviewer listened to the interview to ensure the data transcribed was in depth and accurate. To protect identities, a key was made giving each participant a different alphabetical letter. An app that recorded and transcribed the interviews called “Transcribe” was used to ensure quality data collection. Levitt (2018) states that analyzing data in the form of natural language of experiences and expressions is qualitative research. After transcribing was complete, the transcriptions were carefully examined multiple times to begin coding. The five interviews were broken down through Tesch’s eight steps (see Appendix G) to create codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is used to organize and prepare data for analysis collected in interviews. The eight steps presented in the coding process allow the researcher to create themes by writing a list of topics and forming these topics into columns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.199). The topics are then abbreviated into codes that are placed into certain categories that were reoccurring from each participant. After finding similar patterns within the categories, the researcher was able to find emerging themes within the qualitative data.

Reflexivity Statement

I have thoroughly enjoyed the project I have completed to better understand the needs of student athletes during the transfer process. I am passionate about this study because I have

experience and knowledge about the transfer process. I began my collegiate volleyball career in 2016 at Southern Methodist University where I spent my first summer and fall semester.

Immediately after the volleyball season ended, I decided I was going to transfer to a different university for the remainder of my volleyball career. At this time, the transfer portal had not been established so the best way to get recruited to a new university was by word of mouth. I utilized my connections from my old club and an online resource where college coaches created ads for open positions. I decided to transfer to the University of Alabama where I stayed for three and a half years. During that time, I was able to graduate with a bachelor's degree and my first master's degree. I decided to enter my name into the transfer portal again and finished my collegiate career at Virginia Tech while earning a second master's degree.

I would not change my decisions because I believe I have grown from the wide range of experiences and volleyball programs offered by these universities. Although transferring can be beneficial, the process can be very stressful. Even though I was not able to utilize the portal the first time I transferred, I felt like the process was very smooth and efficient. Unfortunately, I found the opposite to be true about my transfer process to Virginia Tech. I found myself to be extremely stressed and felt like the entire process was difficult. Contemplating the topic of my master's project allowed for the realization the need for Virginia Tech to improve its transfer process for incoming athletes. This topic is of great importance as the program was experienced first-hand. I do understand that some interviewed athletes may not have the same negative experience that I had. The principle outcome of this project is to understand and complete data that demonstrates areas that could be improved. The improvements could be based on the athletic team depending on their support staff. Because I have had a negative experience, potential for bias is acknowledged. It is not my intent to influence the participants in any way, but to collect

data that accurately reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Survey questions were developed and data analysis were completed having taken these potential flaws into consideration.

Chapter 4: Findings, Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to describe the needs of student athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech. Detailed interviews with transfer student athletes identified ways that their physiological needs had and had not been met during the transfer process. Of the five student athletes interviewed, there were three females and two males. The sports represented included football, men's basketball, women's basketball, women's lacrosse and women's volleyball. Using semi-structured interview methods to answer the study questions, six themes emerged from the data and were considered to be significant needs of transfer student athletes:

1. Establishing Communications
2. Building Relationships
3. Facilitating Early Introductions
4. Increasing Knowledge About Academics
5. Providing a Smooth Admissions Process
6. Displaying Authenticity and Transparency

Theme 1: Establishing Communications

Within theme one, the message was that communication from the support staff to the student athlete is vital during the transfer process. Transfer student athletes expressed how having more communication would be beneficial during the process of transferring. Two of the student athletes discussed how the communication from support staff should be improved and that there was information they would have liked to have known during the transfer process. One student athlete expressed that communication from some of the support staff did not begin until after arriving on Virginia Tech's campus. The increased communication would have helped the

student athletes make knowledgeable decisions as well as feel more comfortable throughout the transfer process.

Three examples illustrated Establishing Communications. Interviewee A discussed how more communication during the transfer process with the academic advisors would have been helpful by saying:

“Without a doubt, communication would have been the key to everything.

I didn't actually get introduced to the support staff until I was on campus. So I had very brief conversations with some of them via text or email.”

Interviewee T expressed that the communication could be improved during the transfer process by saying:

“I think the coaches could improve their communication during the spring and summer when I was committing because I was lost at several points in the recruiting process. I also think that improved communication about everything from expectations to our expected schedule would be really helpful so that the transfer process feels less chaotic.”

Interviewee K expressed that she was able to communicate effectively with her coaches about her mental health by saying:

“I feel like from the psychological theories talking about mental health, yes, I certainly feel like my coaches were really good resources for me.”

Theme 2: Building Relationships

Theme two focused on the importance of the relationships being built by the support staff during the transfer process. Transfer student athletes feel that the effort to build relationships with them during the transfer process was a large part of the decision to transfer to Virginia Tech. From the interviews, I found that relationships are important to a student athletes' sense of

belonging to an institution and team. This stage suggests that human behavior is driven by the need for emotional relationships (Love & Stemer, 2019). Considering that the positive relationships being built were part of the decision to transfer to Virginia Tech, building positive relationships with transfer student athletes is vital.

Some examples from the interviews represent the theme of Building Relationships. Interviewee J discussed the effort the coaching staff made to build a relationship during the transfer process:

“It was clear that they knew who I was, it was clear that they did their homework on me. When they were recruiting me they made it a point to connect with me and build that relationship.”

Interviewee A explained how relationships were a big part of the decision to transfer to Virginia Tech by saying:

“When I first got here the culture was different than my other team. It is helpful to see how people act with each other and the comradery that people have, you know, everyone down from the coaching staff to the lowest grade players on the team, everyone has a great relationship and it makes me feel more comfortable.”

Interviewee T discussed how relationships helped her to feel like she belonged on the team but that it was a difficult part of the transfer process by saying:

“The hardest part of transferring was definitely building relationships. Um, but after several weeks I did feel like I belong to the team.”

Theme 3: Facilitating Early Introductions

In theme three, Facilitating Early Introductions, I found that having facilitated introductions to support staff and teammates before arriving at Virginia Tech was very important

to the transfer student athletes. The interviews showed that without early introductions, the transfer student athletes did not feel a sense of love and belonging with the new team and staff. Several of the participants believe the support staff could do a better job of connecting them to teammates and support staff early so they can begin building important relationships. Without this early connection, the transfers were left feeling alone once they arrived on campus.

Facilitating Early Introductions is illustrated by the following statements by the participants. Interviewee J discussed how he wanted to have had contact with his teammates during the transfer process by stating:

“I wasn't able to come here to meet and visit with the team. I feel as though something that could have done better throughout the process was putting me in contact with more of the players.”

Interviewee D explained how she would have appreciated early introductions to her teammates by saying:

“I wish I had ways to get to know my teammates a little bit more during the recruiting process. Obviously, that was hard since everything was virtual. I wish there was a way for me to just talk to them a little bit more prior to coming to the school. I had only spoken to one person on my team.”

Interviewee K expressed how the coaching staff could have done a better job connecting her to her new teammates by saying:

“For me personally, I think the coaches could have done a better job connecting me with the team before. I feel like I had a couple of friends on the team already, which I was fortunate enough to have. However, the first time that I would have been meeting or

speaking to any of these girls would have been our first day of practice, which was conditioning.”

Theme 4: Increasing Knowledge About Academics

Theme four was built around the lack of knowledge about academics during the transfer process. Through the interviews, many of the transfer student athletes discussed a lack knowledge about academics during their transfer process. The participants expressed how their decisions would have changed if they would have had all the information available about what they were choosing to study at Virginia Tech. One of the student athletes did not believe any of the support staff had a real understanding of the master’s program they were telling her to choose. This data indicated that knowledge of academic curriculum can significantly improve the transfer process, as well as the overall experience at Virginia Tech.

Three examples from participant interviews outlined this theme. Interviewee A described how he would have chosen a different path in academics if he had more knowledge about the program by saying:

“It would have been more useful to have a conversation with the academic advisors. So, I could have figured out more about the program I was entering. If I would have known more, I would have to probably chose a different path.”

Interviewee D explained how there can be improvements on the amount of knowledge pertaining to academics by saying:

“I feel like they can improve on understanding the degree program more. I don't think the coaches and the academic advisors have a real understanding of the program. So that kind of leaves the transfers to just figure it out, which is very important.”

Interviewee T explained how the academic staff helped her gain knowledge and stay on track by saying:

“The academic support staff primarily helped me understand how all the academics work at Virginia Tech and were involved in getting deadlines to me for things like course registration and staying on track with everything in my courses.”

Theme 5: Providing a Smooth Admissions Process

Theme five revealed how a smooth admissions process limits the amount of stress during the transfer process. The interview participants discussed how crucial the support staff was during the admissions process. Some of the transfer student athletes expressed how much they appreciated the effort of the support staff to complete the admissions process and how that created good relationships. Interviews showed the help from support staff in the admissions process was found to be very appreciated and led to positive emotions.

Providing a Smooth Admissions Process was best illustrated by the following examples: Interviewee A described how the athletic staff was crucial in making the admissions process easy by saying:

“What made it easy was the people here that treated me well and said, I understand it's quick turnaround. We're going to get these papers pushed through, we're going to get you here. Like, don't worry about it. We'll get you into school. Don't worry about the application, everything like that. So, the people and the good communication that they had, the relationship that we built here was awesome. They made it very easy to do the transfer when it was very difficult at the time.”

Interviewee T explained how the support staff helped the admissions process go smoothly by saying:

“Something that I think they did a pretty good job of was just making sure all the logistical details went smoothly for me even transferring in the middle of the pandemic.”

Interviewee K expressed how helpful the support staff was in the admissions process by saying:

“It just shows that it was all hands-on deck from the coaching staff, from the academic support staff and obviously from admissions too, it was really helpful.”

Theme 6: Displaying Authenticity and Transparency

Theme six demonstrated how the authenticity and transparency of support staff can affect the student athletes transfer experience. Two participants spoke of how the transparency and authenticity of the support staff was a huge part of the decision to transfer to Virginia Tech. Other student athletes wished there was more transparency from the support staff. Generally, most participants suggested that relationships and communication were vital in the transfer process. Specifically, the participants emphasized that the authenticity of the relationships and transparency of the communication were also essential. In other words, the participants highly valued authenticity and transparency.

Three examples from the interviews clarified the theme of Displaying Authenticity and Transparency. Interviewee A described how more transparency would have been helpful by saying:

“I would definitely say that more transparency on what you were going into in terms of the master's degree would have been helpful.”

Interviewee J explained how easy it was to build relationships with staff members was because of authenticity during the transfer process by saying:

“It was pretty easy for me to build the relationships with the coaches and the staff because I felt were genuine, because they were authentic relationships and authentic conversations.”

Interviewee K expressed how the transparency of Virginia Tech was a factor in her decision to commit and made the transfer process easier by saying:

“I just really liked how transparent Virginia Tech is with how they treat their student athletes, I love the balance, a lot of schools were just known for being a big football school, it really prioritizes all the student athletes as opposed to literally just the money-making machine.”

Summary of Themes

From the interviews with transfer student athletes six themes emerged: Establishing Communications, Building Relationships, Facilitating Early Introductions, Increasing Knowledge About Academics, Providing a Smooth Admissions Process and Displaying Authenticity and Transparency. The first theme, Establishing Communications, demonstrated the importance student athletes placed on two-way interactions. The second theme, Building Relationships, illustrated that establishing connections between the student and personnel at the university was valuable. The third theme, Facilitating Early Introductions, displayed that facilitating introductions before the student athletes moved to campus was beneficial. The fourth theme, Increasing Knowledge About Academics, demonstrated the significance student athletes placed on the support staff being knowledgeable about academics. The fifth theme, Providing a Smooth Admissions Process displayed how a smooth admissions process limited the stress of the student athletes. The sixth theme, Displaying Authenticity and Transparency, illustrated that the student athletes highly valued authenticity in relationships and transparency in communication.

Discussion

The six themes found within the project study center around the desires of student athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech. By applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Cherry, 2020) the researcher was able to categorize the themes according to the framework. The theory behind Maslow's framework suggests that the first three lower-level needs are more powerful than the higher-level needs (Lester, 2013, p. 113). While the themes drawn from the data do not correspond to the first stage of Maslow's Hierarchy—likely because most athletes receive athletic scholarships and their primary physiological needs have been fulfilled—the two immediately higher stages relating to safety needs and love and belonging needs were prominent in the data collected from interviews.

Stage 2: Safety Needs

Theme 1- Establishing Communications

Theme 4- Increasing Knowledge About Academics

Theme 5- Providing a Smooth Admissions Process

Theme 6- Displaying Authenticity and Transparency

Stage 3: Love and Belonging Needs

Theme 2- Building Relationships

Theme 3- Facilitating Early Introductions

Theme 6 - Displaying Authenticity and Transparency

The table nearby indicates which themes corresponded with the two levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for safety and love and belonging. The themes of Establishing Communications, Increasing Knowledge About Academics, Providing a Smooth Admissions Process and Displaying Authenticity and Transparency correlate with stage two of the Maslow's Hierarchy of needs that focuses on safety. The theme for communication correlates with the second stage of Maslow's Hierarchy which focuses on safety. The increased communication

would have helped the student athletes make knowledgeable decisions as well as feel more comfortable throughout the transfer process. The theme on knowledge about academics correlates with the second stage of the hierarchy because some of the transfer student athletes did not feel secure with the amount of knowledge about Virginia Tech academics. Increased knowledge of academic curriculum can significantly improve the transfer process, as well as the overall experience at Virginia Tech. The theme regarding a smooth admissions process is crucial to limit stress during the transfer process. This can be applied to Maslow's stage that focuses on safety. Maslow's safety needs can be applied to this theme because a smooth admissions process can limit the stress of the transferring process. The theme regarding authenticity and transparency can relate to both the second and third stage of the hierarchy. Transfer student athletes find relationships and communication to be vital in the process as well as the authenticity of the relationships and transparency of the communication.

The themes of Building Relationships, Facilitating Early Introductions and Displaying Authenticity and Transparency correlate with stage three of the hierarchy that focuses on love and belonging. The theme concerning relationships was also important to transfer student athletes because relationships create a sense of belonging to an institution and team. This sense of belonging directly correlates with the third stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. The theme addressing early introductions is important because without them, the transfer student athletes did not feel a sense of love and belonging with the new team and staff. Maslow's third stage can be easily connected to these findings through the sense of loneliness and lack of belonging to other people. (Love & Stemer, 2019). The theme regarding authenticity and transparency can be related to both the second and third stage of the hierarchy. Transfer student athletes find

relationships and communication to be vital in the process as well as the authenticity of the relationships and transparency of the communication.

Conclusion

Six themes emerged from interviews with transfer student athletes: Establishing Communications, Building Relationships, Facilitating Early Introductions, Increasing Knowledge About Academics, Providing a Smooth Admissions Process and Displaying Authenticity and Transparency. The themes for Establishing Communication, Increasing Knowledge About Academics, Providing a Smooth Admissions Process and Displaying Authenticity and Transparency correlate with Malsow's second stage of the hierarchy that focuses on safety. The themes pertaining to Building Relationships, Facilitating Early Introductions and Displaying Authenticity and Transparency correlate with Maslow's third stage of the hierarchy that focuses on love and belonging. There are significant benefits to understanding and reforming the transfer process so that institutions can better ensure transfer student athletes have their psychological needs met.

As a researcher and a transfer student athlete, I feel confident in the findings of the study. Through my own experiences within the transfer process, I was able to relate to many of the real-life examples of the participants and recall similar scenarios of my own. Additionally, the data reflected the topics discussed in the literature review and the relative importance of accommodating transfer student athletes' needs throughout the transfer process. Further, the themes uncovered in the project correspond with two of the fundamental stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Chapter 5: Recommendations

The purpose of this project was to describe the needs of student athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech. The six themes found within the project study were Establishing Communications, Building Relationships, Facilitating Early Introductions, Increasing Knowledge About Academics, Providing a Smooth Admissions Process and Displaying Authenticity and Transparency. After completing the project on the needs of student athletes during the transfer process, there are a few recommendations I would like to propose. The following recommendations flow from the themes elicited from data shared by interviewees. Three recommendations flowed from the six themes found within the interviews and two recommendations focus on further research.

The first recommendation is to improve and establish communication during the transfer process. It is important to get the transfer student athlete in communication with the appropriate support staff. It is also important for the communication to be transparent and correct. If there is a lack of knowledge about academics, the support staff should communicate with someone who is more knowledgeable about the topic and follow up with the student athlete or get them in direct contact with the more knowledgeable professional. Not only is communication necessary during the transfer process but the quality and transparency of that communication should be high.

The second recommendation is to place a focus upon relationship building with the transfer student athlete. The support staff should facilitate introductions early so that the transfer student athlete can begin to form relationships before they arrive on campus. Another important aspect about relationships is to ensure they are authentic during the transfer process. Having a genuine relationship throughout the transfer process will hopefully carry over the remainder of

the student athletes career at Virginia Tech. Word of mouth is vital when considering transferring to a new school because new transfers will contact other transfers about their experience.

My third recommendation for Virginia Tech support staff is to help the student athlete as much as they can during the admissions process. The transfer student athlete will likely not be knowledgeable on the steps to get admitted so having help is crucial. Being able to answer any questions the student athlete has and help during the admissions process will limit stress and allow focus to shift to other priorities.

My fourth recommendation is for future research to aim for a larger sample size so that the data can be broken down by sport. Future research could potentially include multiple institutions to ensure a large sample size. I believe breaking the data down further by sport will be very beneficial to understand areas of improvement and possible discrepancies of transfer experiences based on each sport team.

My fifth and final recommendation is that further research be done from a different angle by interviewing the support staff who play a role in the transfer process. This project study focused on the transfer student athletes experience to Virginia Tech. More research could be done that includes the thoughts and experiences of the athletic staff on transfer student athletes and the transfer process. This will produce a holistic study on the transfer process and provide more data to consider.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-4136760>



Appendix B: Human Research Exemption Approval Letter

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

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 10, 2021
TO: Richard James Rateau
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: The Needs of Student Athletes During the Transfer Process
IRB NUMBER: 21-534

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

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

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

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

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Not Research**
 Protocol Determination Date: **June 10, 2021**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

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

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

This activity does not meet the definition of research, as defined within the Federal Policy for the Protections of Human Subjects. The primary goal is to describe the needs of Virginia Tech student athletes during the transfer process to Virginia Tech, specifically to understand the academic and athletic support the student athletes need during the transfer process. The activity involves conducting semi-structured interviews with Virginia Tech student-athletes who have transferred to Virginia Tech. This activity does not meet the federal definition of research, since information collected will focus on the needs of Virginia Tech transfer student-athletes and will not be generalizable.

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

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

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

Appendix C: Recruitment Script

Hello _____, this is Ashley Homan, and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree and I will be conducting my research on the needs of student athletes during the transfer process. Part of this project includes interviews with transfer student athletes as well as an interview with an academic advisor from Virginia Tech athletic department. Due to your involvement and knowledge within this program I am asking if you would like to participate. The interview would be no more than 30 minutes and will be conducted by myself.

Appendix D: Consent Form

Hello _____, this is Ashley Homan, and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree and I will be conducting my research on the needs of student athletes during the transfer process. As a part of my Virginia Tech Master's Degree project I will be conducting interviews. These recorded interviews will provide feedback that will not only guide my project, but will also allow for the Virginia Tech Athletic and Academic Staff to continue enhancing their strategies. Please answer the following questions below to the best of your abilities.

Appendix E: Recruitment Emails

OMALS Project 🖨️ ✎️



Ashley Homan <aghoman@vt.edu>
to Leta ▾

3:20 PM (0 minutes ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Leta,

Hello! This is Ashley Homan, and I am currently working towards the completion of my Masters degree and I will be conducting my research on the needs of student athletes during the transfer process. Part of this project includes interviews with transfer student athletes as well as an interview with an academic advisor from Virginia Tech athletic department.

Due to your involvement and knowledge within the Academics and Athletics at Virginia Tech I am asking for your help to create a list of 10 names and emails of current student athletes that transferred to Virginia Tech. If possible, I would like this selection of student athletes to be diverse from both mens and womens sports.

Thank you
Ashley Homan

↶ Reply

↷ Forward

OMALS Project Interview Inbox x 🖨️ ✎️



Ashley Homan <aghoman@vt.edu>
to me ▾

7:09 PM (0 minutes ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Hello Ashley, this is Ashley Homan of the 2021 VT womens volleyball team. I am currently working towards the completion of my Masters degree and I will be conducting my research on the needs of student athletes during the transfer process. Part of this project includes interviews with transfer student athletes at Virginia Tech. Due to your involvement and knowledge within this program I am asking if you would like to participate? The interview would be no more than 30 minutes and will be conducted by myself.

Best,

Ashley Homan-VT womens Volleyball
aghoman@vt.edu

↶ Reply

↷ Forward

Appendix F: Interview Protocol and Script

Protocol

The interviewer will follow a standard protocol for each semi-structured interview session:

- Greeting
- Interview Guidelines
- Questions and Answers
- Final remarks

Greeting

Hello! I appreciate you consenting to be a part of my research project by agreeing to be interviewed. My name is Ashley Homan and I am a candidate for a Leadership Master's Degree. Part of my Master's degree project here at Virginia Tech includes conducting interviews. My graduate research project is a study on the needs of student athletes during the transfer process. For this reason, I have selected you and other student athletes who have transferred to Virginia Tech. These interviews will provide feedback to guide my project as well as provide recommendations to the Virginia Tech athletic support staff. Based on your personal experiences, please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Interviewing Guidelines

The entire interview will be recorded and transcribed for data and analysis. I guarantee that your responses will remain anonymous. Do you have any questions about your participation in this interview? I will now turn on the recording device and begin the interview questions.

Interview Questions

Warm-up Questions

- 1) What sport do you participate in here at Virginia Tech?
- 2) When did you transfer to Virginia Tech?

Structured Questions

- 1) What made you decide to transfer here or from your last school? (icebreaker)
- 2) What were some of the things Virginia Tech support staff helped you with during the transfer process?
 - a) What were some of the things the academic support staff offered, and were you satisfied?
 - b) What were some of the things the athletic support staff offered, and were you satisfied?
- 3) What were some things you felt Virginia Tech could have done a better job with during the transfer process?
- 4) From your experience at your previous University, were you offered any support that you did not receive at Virginia Tech that you would like to have had?
 - a) Athletic support
 - b) Academic support
- 5) What areas of your transfer process did you find easy/difficult and why?
- 6) Did anyone help you navigate your transfer? And if so, who?
- 7) Can you give specific examples of how your physiological needs were/ were not met?

Examples of psychological needs, safety, money, friends
- 8) Can you give an example of something the support staff could improve on?
- 9) Can you give an example of something the support staff did very well?

Last Minute Remarks

I appreciate you taking the time to participate in this interview. Do you have any additional comments?

Appendix G: Tesch's 8 Steps of Analysis

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Table 9.4 Tesch's Eight Steps in the Coding Process

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read all the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind as you read.
2. Pick one document (i.e., one interview)—the most interesting one, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, "What is this about?" Do not think about the substance of the information but its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
3. When you have completed this task for several participants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns, perhaps arrayed as major, unique, and leftover topics.
4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try this preliminary organizing scheme to see if new categories and codes emerge.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for ways of reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode your existing data. (pp. 142-149)