UNDERSTANDING THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF ACADEMIC ASPIRATIONS BETWEEN REGULAR AND SPECIALLY ADMITTED STUDENT-ATHLETES

by
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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate in Education

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Fresno State
Kremen School of Education and Human Development

California State University, Fresno
2020
UNDERSTANDING THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REGULAR AND SPECIALLY ADMITTED STUDENT-ATHLETES

Abstract

There is little information on the population of student-athletes who are admitted through a special admission process as compared to regularly admitted student-athletes. Understanding the similarities and differences between these two groups could provide necessary information to support academic success. The group of student-athletes who are admitted through the special admission process with lower academic skills are still expected to meet the same eligibility standards as regularly admitted student-athletes (Brecht & Burnett, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to better understand the similarities and differences of academic aspirations to the commitment of earning a degree between student-athletes who were regularly and specially admitted at Division-I universities. This mixed-method study was a quantitative cross-sectional nonexperimental design. Participants \(n = 187\) from 10 Division-I universities answered questions on a survey with instrumentation from six different scales regarding the transition from school to university, intentions to quit, degree commitment, institution commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement.

An analysis of the results found that there are significant differences between student-athletes admitted through the regular and special admission process. More specifically, regularly admitted student-athletes are significantly
more committed to earning their degree and committed to their institution. However, transition from school to university and student staff engagement show no differences with admission status.

Even though there are significant differences between regular and special admitted student-athletes regarding academic aspirations, research indicated the importance of focusing on the development of initial and continued support of academic success for universities who have special admission processes.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I decided to start the acknowledgments like one starts their dissertation; you just jump in and start writing, and just hope you do not forget something or someone. When I began this journey 3 years ago, I could have never imagined the obstacles and challenges that would be placed in front of me that I had to overcome to persevere. Looking back, I know that I could have never accomplished this without the support and guidance from many individuals throughout the 3 years.

First, I would like to thank my committee Dr. Moradian-Watson, Dr. Yukhymenko, and Dr. Gonzalez. To my chair, Dr. Mordian-Watson your leadership, guidance, and encouragement were unbelievable, and I cannot thank you enough for pushing me through difficult times and reminding me to just keep going forward by focusing on the finish line. Dr. Yukyymenko, the statistics guru, your knowledge, and passion were extremely beneficial in my study, and I am grateful for your intellect and time throughout the process. Dr. Gonzalez, thank you for suggesting and pushing me to earn my Ed.D., and your positive reassurance. Thank you, committee, for your edits, suggestions, and encouragement. You were an amazing committee and I am so glad you agreed to be part of my journey of earning my Ed.D.

Second, to my cohort, my colleagues, and friends. We started as strangers on a school bus headed to a day of ziplining, laughing, and bonding. As a cohort, we quickly became each other’s support through not only academic hurdles but our life’s hurdles. Our normal for 3 years were long Monday evenings, weekend classes and study sessions, and Zoom writing sessions and classes. We talked about how much we could not wait for it all to be over, but how sad it would be to not see everyone on a regular basis. This is something I quickly learned by
transitioning to online in the final year and missed seeing and talking with everyone. The journey of earning an Ed.D. started with the focus on the degree, and I never thought I would develop lifelong friendships. Our discussions started with school but quickly morphed into food discussions and arguments. Writing sessions, especially with Amanda, became emotional support sessions talking through our current life stressors. Even moving away, we found a way to continue laughing, joking, and making sure we stayed connected and focused on finishing. Thank you for your positivity through the quick 3 years.

Third, to my family and friends. Thank you for letting me take a pause and understand the stress I was going through. I promise I will be on the phone and make plans to see each one of you now that I have finished the 3 years of writing. As a cohort, we were told to not be surprised if no one reads your dissertation besides you and your committee. Well, thank you, Mom and Dad, for reading my dissertation, supporting me along the way, and encouraging me to keep going forward no matter what obstacle is placed in front of me.

Finally, to my husband. My amazingly supportive husband. You never made me feel guilty when I spent hours in the evenings and weekends studying and writing. Thank you for reading my dissertation for feedback. Thank you for letting me talk and for listening to me for 3 years about my stress of finishing. Thank you for pushing me to submit my application for the Ed.D. program and telling me along the way that I can do it. Thank you.

The last thing I would like to say is thank you to my 15-year-old dog, Tre, who passed away during this time. Tre was always next to me while I wrote and studied, and I so much appreciated his silent encouragement for me to keep going. These 3 years were more than just earning an Ed.D. These 3 years showed me
through all of life’s obstacles of losing a family pet, changing jobs, moving to a new state, and the COVID-19 Pandemic that I have an amazing support team, without whom I would have never been able to complete this journey. Thank you.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Before student-athletes arrive on a college campus, they must meet eligibility standards set by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2018). The NCAA has established eligibility benchmarks that student-athletes must meet in high school to be eligible to receive a scholarship and compete. Some of these required benchmarks of initial eligibility from high school to college include Grade Point Average (GPA), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and completion of core courses. These minimum eligibility benchmarks are sometimes lower than the university admission standards; thus, some universities have set up a special admissions process to admit these students (Gaston-Gayles, 2003). The special admissions process differs from university to university. McCullough, Gibb, Pennington, and Heath (2019) defined specially admitted student-athletes as students who generally have below-average admission scores, which include GPAs and SAT scores, when compared to other or regularly admitted students. These students commonly struggle with inadequate preparation for academics, such as lack of study skills and low academic self-confidence (Petty, 2014).

Consequently, many student-athletes are being admitted through a special admission process to universities while scoring far below their classmates on the SAT (Johnson J.E., Wessel, & Pierce, 2010). Schools are willing to overlook admission standards for the opportunity to admit student-athletes because of their special talent of athleticism (Gurney, Lopiano, & Zimbalist, 2016). Student-athletes with lower levels of academic performance admitted through the university’s special admission process are still expected and have the pressure to perform at the same level in the classroom as students admitted with the regular
admission standards (Ingram & Huffman, 2017). Since these student-athletes are admitted to the university underprepared, there should be a greater emphasis on what resources are available to assist the specially admitted students (McCullough et al., 2019). The necessary support resources are established to adequately help guide specially admitted students in becoming academically successful while developing an understanding of what is needed to support them at the university (Huml, Bergman, Newell, & Hancock, 2019).

The NCAA has implemented required initial eligibility standards for incoming and continuing student-athletes based on research conducted by the organization (NCAA, n.d.-a). Data collection and research on the academic performance of student-athletes impact decision making of the NCAA on eligibility requirements and what are considered necessary resources to support student-athletes in meeting these requirements (Petr & Paskus, 2009). Through data analysis, the NCAA (n.d.-a) identified a reason to raise the entrance eligibility requirements as a way to raise the academic profile of incoming student-athletes to increase academic success as well as reflect and mirror the academic profile of the other admitted non-student-athletes more effectively. Unlike non-student-athletes, regardless of how student-athletes are admitted to a university, they are still expected to meet continuous NCAA eligibility benchmarks. These continued eligibility requirements include benchmarks student-athletes must meet each semester or quarter, and school year (NCAA, n.d.-a). The requirements include minimum GPA, credits earned, and percentage of the student’s degree completed. According to the NCAA (2018), if a student-athlete does not meet the initial and continuing eligibility benchmarks, they will not be able to compete and could lose their scholarship. An athletic scholarship could be used to cover the costs for things like tuition, books, or room and board. Offering scholarships for students
based on their athletic ability assists with the ability to limit the need for student loans to attend college (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016).

With severe consequences of losing financial support, student-athletes have a great deal of pressure on them to succeed academically while at the same time perform well athletically in their given sport. By having the added pressure of athletic performance, student-athletes may not be getting the necessary resources they need to be successful academically at the university level. Academic support resources are necessary to help student-athletes with their studies. However, some universities may not be providing or have enough support needed for the student-athletes they are admitting through the special admission process (Ferrell & De Crane, 2016). Regardless of their academic aspirations and goals of attaining a college degree, student-athletes must perform well in the classroom in order to stay eligible to compete and retain their athletically funded scholarship.

Many universities state in their mission statements their focus to developing individuals as students (Morphew & Hartley, 2006), therefore they have an obligation to student-athletes to provide a meaningful education. As described by Sharp and Sheilley (2008), a meaningful university education as the intellectual development of students engaged in the educational process. The development of intellectual ability is important to ensure that student-athletes have the necessary resources to be successful. Universities and athletics should work together to provide a positive experience for student-athletes with the expectations of academic success and winning in athletics (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Student-athletes feel additional challenges with the expectation of competing in their sport and performing in the classroom while meeting the high expectations the NCAA requires of them (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). Similar to the general student body, there is a relationship between student-athletes’ academic aspirations and
degree commitment. Brookover, Erickson, and Joiner (1967) described academic aspirations as the wishes and desires of performing well in an educational setting. Knowing the academic aspirations in the attainment of a college degree will further an understanding of the differences between regular and specially admitted student-athletes. Sharma, Yukhymenko-Lescroart, and Kang (2018) explored how college students are motivated and committed to earning their degree and found there is a purpose outside of their own interests as it relates to the commitment to earning their degree. Understanding where the student-athlete is at in their commitment to attaining a degree could assist universities in the identification of resources necessary to support all students on campus.

When only looking at data from student-athletes, it does not give the larger picture if the same data were compared to the student-athletes peers of non-student-athletes. Jeske, Kress, and Vogel (2019) recognized the importance of understanding the differences and similarities amongst student-athletes and non-student-athletes. They used questions from the NCAA GOALS survey and administered it to non-student-athletes as well as student-athletes to examine the differences between their academic aspirations. The results from the research conducted by Jeske et al. (2019) indicated there was a significant difference between non-student-athletes and student-athletes with regards to their academic aspirations and goals while attending a university and earning a college degree. The NCAA designed the GOALS survey to have a better understanding of the issue’s student-athletes face and the aspirations they hold as students as well as athletes at their university when considering their goals after their eligibility is completed (NCAA, n.d.-b). However, the Jeske et al. (2019) study did not analyze the difference within the student-athlete population between regular and specially admitted student-athletes. The analysis of the similarities and differences within
the student-athlete population is important, as this group of students has similar requirements and expectations that non-student-athletes do not have. By comparing these data, it could lend to a better understanding of the similarities and differences of academic aspirations of student-athletes to help understand the needs for established success resources.

For many years the NCAA has focused its decision making on the eligibility standards to strengthen the academic success of student-athletes (Hosick & Sproull, 2012). Through all the research, the NCAA has focused on data concerning academic performance and how it relates to eligibility (Petr & Paskus, 2009). However, there has not been enough research to understand the resources necessary to support and assist student-athletes.

Student-athletes are a unique subculture of students on campus as they have been recruited to attend for their athletic and academic ability and are required to meet eligibility standards that non-student-athletes do not have to meet. This unique status necessitates a different organization of academic support services. Another unique trait of student-athletes is the fact that they have been recruited for their athletic ability and may not have a strong academic foundation. If a student-athlete chooses to attend a university, and their academic scores do not get them through the regular admission process, a special admissions process is available (Ridpath, 2010). The problem is that the special admissions process allows student-athletes to be admitted with a different academic standard when compared to their non-student-athlete peers but still expected to perform at the same level. Admitting a student with lower academic aspirations may be problematic because these students may not have high academic aspirations of success and require additional support services and resources to ensure student-athletes stay eligible to compete (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016). Universities chose to admit student-
athletes to their institution to attend for competition on their athletic teams with
the expectations of winning. However, it is up to the leaders of these universities
to understand the proper balance of winning and a successful athletic program that
supports the academic success of student-athletes.

**Positionality**

As someone who has been working in the student-athlete academic field for
over 15 years, I am aware of the hurdles and roadblocks student-athletes must
overcome to be successful academically. Since being part of a few athletic
departments, I have witnessed and been part of policy changes when it comes to
the special admission process and then the follow-up support resources available
to student-athletes. Part of my career has been devoted to assisting student-athletes
in achieving academic success even if they do not have the same aspirations as
other student-athletes. Understanding some student-athletes may need more
academic support than other students is part of the knowledge needed to assist
student-athletes in achieving academic success. Knowing the academic support
and resources needed to support student-athletes adequately is one component of
properly supporting student-athletes admitted through the special admission
process.

**Problem Statement**

For student-athletes who are admitted through the special admissions
process, there is a need to understand academic aspirations and commitment to
earning a college degree. The current problem is that through a special admissions
process, student-athletes are allowed to be admitted with lower academic
aspirations when compared to their non-student-athlete peers but still expected to
perform at the same level. The admission of a student with lower academic
aspirations puts pressure on support services and resources, which may set the students up for possible failure (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016). It is essential to understand the complexities of admitting students who do not meet regular admissions standards, as it directly impacts the available resources to support student-athletes with lower academic aspirations (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Admitting too many special-admit student-athletes while not having proper support established is a disservice to the student as it does not set them up for success. Brecht and Burnett (2019) suggested after their study that student-athletes with lower high school GPAs need more academic resources than student-athletes with higher entering high school GPAs. Universities and athletics promote an image that student-athletes are performing at a high level; however, the reality of the situation is that there is a subpopulation that is not performing at the level to be academically successful (Bell, 2009). Bell (2009) found that having adequate available academic support resources for student-athletes will assist in the achievement of greater academic success.

The ability to identify the differences between specially admitted students on their self-identified academic aspirations will assist universities in their decision making when considering the available academic resources. Prior to the admission process of all student-athletes, universities should seek to understand what specially admitted students need and how many their current resources can support. If a university chooses to admit additional specially admitted student-athletes, who may have lower academic aspirations, more available academic support resources should be allocated. There is a problem with admitting too many student-athletes based on their athletic ability and assuming they will be academically successful. Researching to understand the differences between
academic aspirations will help to review available resources for student-athletes with lower academic aspirations.

**Theoretical Framework**

An important aspect of research is a theoretical framework. Grant and Osanloo (2014) suggested a theoretical framework should guide and structure all pieces of the research process. For this study, the theories that shaped the theoretical framework were symbolic interactionism (Hall, 2007) and social constructionist theory (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). These specific theories were chosen due to the frequency found in research studies from an extensive review of relevant literature. The literature review was conducted with a focus on the experiences’ student-athletes have on campus.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

The development of the symbolic interactionism theory came from the foundation of the theoretical works of Mead, Blume, and Hughes (Hall, 2007). Symbolic interactionism theory is used in the social sciences to understand the meaning and values of symbols in mind by interpreting actions. In supporting Hall (2007), Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, and Demirbuken (2009) found there has been further contribution to the development of the symbolic interactionist theory, which includes Dewey, Cooley, Mead, Blumer, and others. Aksan et al. (2009) explained that objects or symbols do not have meaning just on their own. Instead, they get their meanings from society and experiences. The experiences that student-athletes have growing up has an impact on the meanings and values they place on things, such as academic aspirations and their understanding of athletic and academic identity.
The symbolic interactionism framework explains how individuals put meaning or symbols to understanding experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017). Before a researcher can understand human behaviors and meanings behind them, it is necessary to understand the definitions formed. Aksan et al. (2009) described this as understanding the social roles, traditions, and purposes for individuals from definitions of meanings. Using symbolic interactionism in this research assisted in understanding further quantitative data of the similarities and differences of the meaning of academic aspirations between student-athletes. Having symbolic interactionism as part of the theoretical framework gave insight into why some student-athletes have higher academic aspirations than others when it relates to their understanding of athletic and academic identities.

**Social Constructionist Theory**

The development of the social constructionist theory is the understanding that people have basic ideas and perspectives that form their understanding of reality (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Social constructionist theory, as Fairhurst and Grant (2010) identified, has origins from the phenomenology theory (Schultz) and the symbolic interactionism (Mead). The social constructionist theory lets the researcher study how individuals construct their own interpretations of their world experiences through their lived experiences and interactions when compared to other individuals. Using a social constructionist theory as part of the theoretical framework allowed the researcher to understand how knowledge is constructed and understood for the individual. As student-athletes arrive at universities, it is their previous lived experiences and interactions that interpret their understanding of athletics and academics.

The social constructionist theory explains that through daily relationships we build and observe the world around us (Gunawardena et al., 2009). Using the
social constructionist theory as part of the framework assisted in understanding the data from a quantitative perspective on how and why student-athletes put meaning on their academic aspirations. In using the social constructionist theory, the researcher can base an understanding of the meaning of the why on a process (Gergen, 1985). Researching student-athletes through a social constructionist perspective provided an understanding of the meanings of why student-athletes view their athletic and academic identity as it relates to their academic aspirations.

The use of two social science theories to form a mixed-methods research study assists in presenting information drawn from individuals to understand the meaning of an event or situation. Creswell (2014) described how using social science theory in a mixed-methods study allows the researcher to use multiple theoretical frameworks to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data to explain and validate the findings. Using social constructionist and symbolic interactionist theory provided a window into how student-athletes view academic aspirations as it relates to degree commitment. The reason for using these specific theories is that humans put the meaning of things based on their interactions with others and their previous lived experiences. Thus, symbolic interactionism and social constructionist theory were used in understanding the formation of academic aspirations of student-athletes and how it correlates to degree commitment.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to understand the similarities and differences of academic aspirations between regularly and specially admitted student-athletes at NCAA Division-I universities. Universities have established a special admission process if student-athletes are not regularly admissible based on lack of academic requirements and special ability, such as their athletic talents. The focus of this
research was to examine the academic aspiration differences between student-athletes admitted through the regular admission process and those admitted through a special admission process and how it relates to their commitment to earning a degree.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

RQ1: How are student-athletes defined as specially admitted at the institutional level?

RQ2: Are there significant differences between student-athletes who met the university’s admission criteria and specially admitted student-athletes on transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?

RQ4: Are there significantly differences between specially and regularly admitted student-athlete in academic intentions to leave, degree commitment, and institutional commitment, after controlling for student-athletes’ perceptions of transition from high school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student-staff engagement?

**Delimitations**

For the purpose of this study, certain restrictions were established to guide the approach off the research. The first restriction was to focus on NCAA Division-I athletic departments. The NCAA has distinct levels that universities fall
under Division-I, Division-II, and Division-III. The reason to focus on Division-I is the number of scholarships allotted to student-athletes and resources available for student-athletes in athletic departments. Division-I universities are permitted to offer more scholarships than Division-II, and there are no available athletic scholarships at the Division-III level (NCAA, n.d.-a). Athletic departments recruit students to attend the university from across the country and do not solely focus on regional students (Rubin & Rosser, 2014). Understanding that student-athletes are earning an athletic scholarship to attend a university from anywhere in the country is important to have a broad scope of data. Administering the survey to student-athletes across the country instead of focusing on one area will lend to the opportunity of a broader response and provide a more accurate representation of student-athlete academic aspirations.

**Significance of the Study**

After speaking with several colleagues and personally working at multiple institutions, universities struggle with the special admissions process and allocated academic support resources. Jeske et al. (2019) found there are very little research and statistics available on the number of student-athletes admitted through the special admission process. Researching the sub-population of specially admitted student-athletes is significant to have a better understanding of what this population needs for academic support and resources to be successful.

Student-athletes put a strain on resources available to assist them in being academically eligible for competition. Universities struggle with the balance of admitting student-athletes, knowing they may not have a higher level of academic performance or aspirations to be successful. McCullough et al. (2019) found that specially admitted student-athletes struggle within the first year to fully understand resources available to support them academically. By understanding how student-
athletes, who are admitted through the special admissions process, view academic resources, and how it relates to their academic success, for universities can use these data to consider how to establish needed resources.

Symbolic interactionism and social constructionist theory were used as a perspective to understand the difference of academic identity and athletic identity between regular and special admitted student-athletes. The use of symbolic interactionist and social constructionist theory provided further clarity of how student-athletes view their academic aspirations while identifying degree commitment. The implications of this research were to have a better understanding of the similarities and differences of academic aspirations of student-athletes admitted through the regular or special admission process when it comes to degree commitment and completion.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this research study, the following definition of terms will be used:

*Academic Aspirations* - Academic aspirations are having goals and plans to graduate and do well academically (Carroll et al., 2009). Huang (2012) described academic aspirations as the individual’s ability to identify, set goals, and take action for their academic future. This definition of academic aspirations is the baseline within the research to understand the differences between special and regular admitted student-athletes.

*Academic At-Risk* - Academic at-risk is a term applied to individual students who face circumstances or factors that could threaten their ability to be successful academically and/or complete school (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Factors that could adversely affect the educational performance and attainment of individuals could consider them as at-risk students. As described by
J. Horton (2015), individuals who have characteristics of learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, grade retentions, or other learning-related factors are considered at-risk academically.

*National Collegiate Athletics Association* - A member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes (NCAA, n.d.-a). The NCAA comprises of three distinct levels referred to as divisions, Division-I, Division-II, and Division-III. This study focused on Division-I as it is the largest and highest level.

*Special Admit or Admissions* - Specially admitted students commonly struggle with inadequate preparation for academics, study skills, and low academic self-confidence (McCullough et al., 2019). Student-athletes who are special admits have generally below-average admission scores and GPAs compared to regularly admitted students. As special admits to the university, they are primarily admitted due to the fact they have a special talent, such as athleticism, which allows them to be admitted outside of the regular admission process (Gurney et al., 2016).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided background information as relevant to the study the researcher plans to conduct as outlined in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 1 broke down the positionality of the researcher, the problem statement, theoretical framework used, the purpose statement, research questions, any delimitations already determined, the significance of the study, and definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 will provide a review of relevant literature, and the three themes identified as it relates to the study. Chapter 3 will present the methodology and the methods of the study the researcher conducted to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 will show the data analysis and results. Chapter 5 will identify the findings,
implications, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and concluding thoughts.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to have a better understanding of the similarities and differences between academic aspirations as it relates to degree commitment between specially and regularly admitted student-athletes. Chapter 2 will present the findings from a review of literature as it relates to the understanding of student-athletes admission and support to a university. At the conclusion of this chapter, the researcher will present why it is necessary for further research in this field.

In the last decade, research has increased tremendously within the culture and wellbeing of student-athletes at the collegiate level. Current research has only recently been available to assist in understanding the culture of student-athletes, which can be something of a challenging process. Hildenbrand, Sanders, Leslie-Toogood, and Benton (2009) supported this as they found that the literature around student-athletes has only recently increased from a previously small number of available studies. The Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics (2019) recognized a need for a collaboration of ideas and research on the issues of intercollegiate athletics where articles can examine the variety of topics facing administrators, coaches, and student-athletes in collegiate athletics. On top of the relatively small research conducted, the rest was constructed mainly through the organization of the NCAA. The NCAA has made and established its own rules, policies, and regulations based on internal research within the organization (NCAA, n.d.-a). Research is continuously being conducted and has an impact on current policies, which are then modified for student-athletes and athletic departments to adhere to for eligibility (Hosick, 2012). The NCAA has focused its
research on eligibility decisions (Hosick & Sproull, 2012) as the best predictors of college success when looking at high school student-athletes.

The eligibility standards within the NCAA organization have changed over the 120 plus years they have been an association (NCAA, 2018). Eligibility metrics are for incoming and continuing student-athletes. These eligibility standards are something unique to student-athletes that non-student-athletes do not need to overcome or be concerned with during their academic careers (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Hosick, 2012). For example, some of the requirements include required courses that non-student-athletes do not need to meet to attend a university (NCAA, n.d.-a). These eligibility metrics are required for all student-athletes regardless of the university they attend. If a student-athlete commits to attend a university where they meet the NCAA initial eligibility requirements but not the university requirements, the student-athlete may be admitted through the special admissions process (McCullough et al., 2019). If a student-athlete is admitted through the special admissions process, they are typically being admitted with lower academic GPA and test scores (Winters & Gurney, 2012). McCullough et al. (2019) supported these findings and also identified that special admits could have lower academic aspirations.

As a result, student-athletes who are admitted with lower academic aspirations are still expected to perform at the same level as regular admits in the classroom (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016). Regardless of how a student-athlete is admitted, they are still required to meet NCAA eligibility benchmarks. The situation is that while student-athletes are being admitted with possible lower academic aspirations, the support units are expected to support the student-athletes to be successful (Huml et al., 2019). Universities need to understand first if the current academic support programing is adequate before admitting more student-
athletes through the special admission process due to not meeting the regular admission standards (Knight Commission, n.d). The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (known as Knight Commission), established in 1989, is an independent group that promotes any improvements which support and toughen the educational goals of collegiate athletics (Knight Commission, n.d.). The individuals who serve on the Knight Commission (n.d.) include university presidents, Director of Athletics, attorneys, and commissioners of professional athletic leagues. To guarantee there are minimum support standards established for student-athletes, along with the consideration of the wellbeing of the student-athlete, The Knight Commission, through independent research, outside of the NCAA governance, aids in establishing advancement on the educational mission of institutions and the welfare within collegiate athletics. Recommendations by The Knight Commission (n.d.) has influenced policies within college athletics, which have improved the graduation success of student-athletes, as well as placing a greater emphasis on their wellbeing and overall educational experience.

The Knight Commission views themselves as the conscience for higher education in promoting college athletics within the missions of the universities to refer to and to help guide the balance of academics and winning (Knight Commission, n.d.). Research has been conducted on the balance and struggles universities face between the expectations of winning while keeping their academic integrity (Ayers, Pazmino-Cevallos, & Dobose, 2012; Morris, 2013). When considering admitting a student through a special admissions process, knowing the student may not have the same academic aspirations as their peers, the expectation is the university has fully committed to the student with resources for optimal success. Research from Ferrell and De Crane (2016) and Morris (2013) has indicated there needs to be an appropriate amount of support systems
established for student success after being admitted to the university, and the administrators should recognize what is available.

Setting up a student for optimal success is defined by Ferrell and De Crane (2016) as an institution focused on five areas for student success academically: institutional commitment, expectations, support, feedback, and involvement/engagement. Institution commitment is when the university establishes opportunities for the success of the students with diverse programming, support services, and opportunities for involvement on the campus. Morris (2013) explained the unique dynamic universities are facing with admitting student-athletes for their athletic ability to be successful athletically while ensuring their success academically as well. Huml et al. (2019) presented through their research the importance that there should be clear expectations and reception of feedback for the growth of the student’s outcomes and what the university will provide will help guide the student in their success. Universities and athletic departments need to work together to support student-athletes success with available resources.

Collaboration between universities and athletic departments within the special admission process is critical to support the students after being admitted to the university. Universities and athletic departments should be able to balance how many special admits or at-risk students to admit based on their understanding of the proper available academic support to help the admitted student-athletes (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008; Shuman, 2009). Admitting student-athletes that do not have high academic aspirations and are at risk of not being eligible to compete athletically may put the student and university in a vulnerable state. Sharp and Sheilley (2008) concluded after their research that universities should consider the needs of the student-athletes by working as a team to ensure there is proper academic support available for success. Admitting student-athletes who do not
have the aptitude to be successful in the classroom puts pressure on the support services available to them.

Processes have been established to waive the regular admission standards in order to admit a student with a special talent, such as being a highly-skilled athlete (Gurney et al., 2016). Student-athletes with lower academic aptitude admitted through the university’s special admission process are still expected and have the pressure to perform at the same level as students admitted with the regular admission standards even though they are admitted at a lower academic level. After surveying 200 Division-1 student-athletes, Simons and Van Rheenen (2000) recognized the pressures student-athletes feel when compared to non-student-athletes on campus. The study reinforced the understanding student-athletes have pressure on their identity as an athlete, but also their identity as a student. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018) found, in a multilevel structural equation model, that the two identities of athletic and academic are the dominant social contexts that develop student-athletes’ motivation and achievement in athletics and school. The pressure to perform academically is there even if they do not have the same academic aspirations on campus as non-student-athletes.

Simons and Van Rheenen (2000) and Shuman (2009) found there is a direct correlation between academic achievement, motivation aspiration, and student-athletes academic success. The higher the level of academic motivation leads to the higher the GPA (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). Understanding the correlation between having a high academic motivation to be successful academically is important as student-athletes are expected to excel in the classroom in order to maintain eligibility regardless if the admission of the student-athlete is through the regular or special admission process.
There needs to be a way to understand if a student-athlete has the aspirations of being successful academically and the organization of universities to support specially admitted student-athletes. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) identified that understanding how universities could be more efficiently organized will assist with the overall positive experiences of student-athletes. The organization of the university could have a positive impact on a student’s academic success. The athletic ability of a student has historically been established as an opportunity to earn an education when otherwise, it would not have been an option (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Special admission processes are providing an opportunity to earn a college education. Through the literature review, three themes have been identified to understand the need to research possible indicators of academic aspirations of specially admitted student-athletes compared to regularly admitted student-athletes. These three themes include different admission standards, the collaboration among athletics and campus, and the student-athlete dual identities of academics and athletics.

**Different Admission Standards**

The NCAA has established different admission eligibility standards than what each university has for its institution (NCAA, n.d.-a). A student-athlete could be admissible and eligible at one university and not at another. Universities and the NCAA are raising the admission and eligibility requirements for incoming students (Jeske et al., 2019; Price, 2010). When the NCAA implemented proposition 16, which was to increase initial eligibility minimums, there was a rise in graduation success rates amongst student-athletes (Price, 2010). After analyzing student-athletes’ SAT and GPA admission scores, Price (2010) recognized a difference in having a higher level of admission eligibility requirements to an increase in graduation rates. Even though the NCAA raised its initial eligibility
requirements, universities are raising their admissions standards at a more rapid rate when compared to the rate of the NCAA (Jeske et al., 2019). The opportunity to bring in student-athletes through a special admission process may bring in student-athletes with a significant difference in academic preparedness than non-student-athletes. If athletic departments bring in student-athletes with lower academic preparedness consideration of looking at more than just if the student-athlete is meeting the NCAA minimum. Instead, athletic departments should be considering if the student-athlete has academic aspirations to accept services to assist them to be academically successful.

Special Talent Admissions

Student-athletes’ academic aspirations and desire to be academically successful with the balance between time commitments is a real issue for student-athletes, as they are required 20 hours a week maximum for the sport, but have difficulty juggling all expectations placed on them (Ayers et al., 2012; Bell, 2009). Even with the time restraints, some studies recognize student-athletes perform at a higher level than non-student-athletes. However, Bell (2009) found that this is not true for all student-athletes. Bell’s qualitative study focused on in-depth interviews with student-athletes from Division-I football and men’s basketball teams. It was identified that the subpopulation of football and men’s basketball players within the student-athlete population performed far below other student-athletes as well as the rest of the campus when comparing their academic aspirations and intentions of attending the campus with the focus on athletics first. The focus on athletics first has been identified as the intention to go professional in the National Football League (NFL) or National Basketball Association (NBA). Bell (2009) explained that there is a difference in academic success when it comes to high
profile sports. High profile sports are referred to as football and men’s basketball (K. Martin & Christy, 2010), as these are the sports with the highest spectators.

In the high-profile sports like football and men’s basketball, concluding thoughts as to why the student-athletes are relying heavily on academic resources to support them on being academically successful is due to the amount of time spent preparing for their athletic requirements. The requirements the participants identified as taking their focus away from academics included 20-30 hours a week of practice, film review, strength training, and competition (Bell, 2009). When the results were compared to previous literature, Bell (2009) found that this subpopulation within student-athletes benefitted from their collegiate experience and relied heavily on their athletic-academic advisors to support and guide them through their experience. These findings suggest that student-athletes view campus support as individuals who help them to be more successful in achieving greater academic success than without their support and guidance. Hendricks and Johnson (2016) identified the dilemma between the time constraints student-athletes have with athletics and academics. Student-athletes are expected to perform high in both areas and always pulled from one area to the other (Bell, 2009; Hendricks & Johnson, 2016).

The expectation to perform academically, but more importantly, to win is the added pressure that comes from coaches and administrators (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2015). With the amount of so much pressure on student-athletes’ success in athletics, and differing academics aspirations, universities and athletic departments should be moving in the direction of considering non-cognitive skills besides GPA and SAT scores for admission. In a research study by Kyllonen (2012), data from surveys of educators were analyzed by comparing the information to previous prediction research studies. Kyllonen (2012) found that
using noncognitive assessments was likely to lead to better student performance prediction and less attrition than when just relying on GPA and SAT scores. These noncognitive assessments include self-assessments, placement exams, and student development programs to understand where students are currently cognitively for academic success. Recognizing the assessments for admission standards are changing, Kyllonen (2012) suggested using a holistic review of admission decisions, as do Cliff and Hanslo (2010). In an assessment study, Cliff and Hanslo (2010) used a theoretical perspective to compare whether using regular admission decisions with the use of SAT and GPA or using a holistic and noncognitive approach would lead to better indicators of higher academic success. After the study, Cliff and Hanslo (2010) identified that using noncognitive measures is a strong complementary measurement to the traditional admission standards and that using both would give universities the best measurement of success at the higher education level.

The development of a different admission model by using a holistic or different measurement of success rather than only using high school GPA and SAT scores to admit student-athletes through the special admission process is a reliable indicator of academic success (Cliff & Hanslo, 2010; Kyllonen, 2012). However, when admitting student-athletes through a special admissions process, universities should analyze the risk versus reward for admitting lower academic students to their institution. Johnson J. (2013) conducted an evaluation of more than 43 academic and non-academic variables with the Graduation Risk Overview (GRO) model to incorporate the most powerful factors found to affect academic performance and graduation. Johnson J. (2013) recognized through a purposeful criterion sampling approach while using a GRO that not completion of a degree has three risk categories, which include academic, personal, and sport. These three
risk categories are likely indicators from high school of academic risk as it relates to future college academic performance. Understanding the risks associated with a student-athlete and knowing what the university has established as support resources should help in deciding if an individual student-athlete is worth the risk and will be successful at their institution.

**Collaboration with Athletics and Campus**

Relationships amongst departments should have a collective understanding that individuals need to work together and collaborate in order to build trust. An organization needs to work as a team. It is the relationship between athletic departments and the entire university, which helps the overall success of the student-athlete. The neoclassical organization theory supports this concept in that organizations cannot act as a self-contained island isolated from other environments (Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2015). Together universities and athletic departments can focus on the overall success of the university instead of individual departments. As Bolman and Deal (2013) explained, a successful organization is one in which members of the group have an understanding of their roles and other members’ roles. Through the trust and cooperation amongst individuals and departments, a university is more likely to be successful. The neoclassical organization theory supported this. According to Shafritz et al. (2015), an organization could not exist as a self-contained environment. The athletic department relies on the university, and the university relies on the athletic department for success.

The organizational structure of a university is that the athletic department is part of the many different subdivisions which comprise the entire university organization. The athletic department's image is publicized more often than any other subdivision, or even the university, and commonly is referred to as the front
porch to a school (Hodes, James, Martin, & Milliner, 2015; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Knight Commission, n.d.). Since athletic departments represent the university, they are what others view and perceive the school to be. The collaboration between athletics and the university needs to be active in order to assist in building support units and developing an influential culture of academic success, as Knight Commission (n.d.) recognized this as the foundation of the understanding of an alliance. The foundation and establishment are necessary for reliable support systems for academic success, especially for student-athletes admitted through the special admissions process (Hodes et al., 2015).

Remembering the student-athlete is also considered part of the university’s culture should be kept in mind in considering the reliable academic support systems.

The university has its own culture, and each department has one as well. The athletic department’s culture as an organization has had little research conducted on it. Schroeder (2010) has supported this notion as they found there was little research and few frameworks available to analyze athletic departments as organization cultures. Since it is different from other departments at the university, the culture is different, which is why Schroeder (2010) developed a qualitative model looking at four elements. The four elements identified as the crucial elements of an athletic department are institutional culture, external environment, internal environment, and leadership or power. The specific four elements are to ensure the overall success of the athletic department, and each element or component works in collaboration with the other elements. After the study, Schroeder (2010) explained that athletic departments have outside views that directly impact internal operations, as well as culture, and are intricately connected with leadership within the athletic department and overall university. The four essential elements are present in each athletic department. Then there
may be sub-elements depending on the organization of the specific athletic department; however, Schroeder (2010) explained using these elements should be the foundation of further research in the success of the athletic department.

Campus leaders are in charge of ensuring there are equitable resources for all students on campus. McNair, Bensimon, Cooper, McDonald, and Major (2016) explained that it is the campus leadership who carries the implicit belief in the student’s ability to learn and should create an environment that supports this understanding of academic success. Goldrick-Rab (2010) supported this idea but took it one step further to explain that policymakers should be held accountable for the decisions made on the type of resources available, and academic reform is happening as it directly impacts student success. Just as Goldrick-Rab (2010) explained that when policymakers serve all kinds of students while achieving higher levels of success, Pluut, Curseu, and Ilies (2015) suggested that it is more than just one group of decision makers. In addition to the decision makers, the strategies to promote academic success comes from a variety of support systems. Pluut et al. (2015) conducted a study to analyze the stressors that students get while trying to achieve high expectations in academics. At the conclusion of their study, it was recognized how leadership should realize that establishing one form of support does not equally support the diverse student populations on campuses. As the expansion of higher education becomes more attainable, university leadership and policymakers need to step up and provide more opportunities to assist the students in their academic studies.

**Academic Support Services**

The availability of academic support services for student success is directly linked to leadership and the policymakers at each institution and the decisions they make on fund allocation. By looking at studies from social science, education, and
policies over the last 25 years, Goldrick-Rab (2010) found that the lack of academic preparation does not lead to a lack of success. Through their research, it was identified that it is more about the culture on campus, and available resources presidents have determined as necessary for the student’s success. As Goldrick-Rab (2010) explained, the students’ outcome of success is mostly how the administration makes decisions. Goldrick-Rab (2010) recognized the need for established academic support resources but took it further by explaining campuses should understand the specific support needed while taking into consideration the diversity of the students and their individualized needs.

The establishment of best practices for assisting the students’ academic aspirations is the responsibility of the university to ensure there are support systems to support challenges faced by student-athletes of all ethnicities. Student-athletes experience a different, or more heightened academic adjustment, from high school to college, when compared to other students at the universities (Ting, 2009). A better understanding of all the established support systems available for admitting special admit students will be crucial in knowing what is available for their optimal success, as Hendricks and Johnson (2016) suggested. It is the responsibility of the institutional leaders to know what is available for academic support resources.

There is a balance of understanding available resources and admitting academically underprepared students (Hodes et al., 2015). This balance within the university and athletic departments occur at the leadership level with the expectation of winning. The entire organization has specific goals for the overall success of each department. Within these department roles, it is the relationships and actions that set in motion the steps to attain the common goals and success of the organization. Rifenburg (2016) used a social constructionist theory frame and
conducted a case study to emphasize the importance of the relationship between the athletic department and the university support system. After the study, it was identified that since athletic departments have different regulations set by the NCAA, they are more hyper diligent and need to have more control over the support services the student-athletes receive. However, it has been noted in the findings that there could be a collaboration amongst support services for just student-athletes and the support systems available on campus. Viewing the available resources as separate does not help any student to be academically successful. Comeaux (2013) suggested that there is a need for educational reform in higher education when it comes to academic support. It is the stakeholders of the athletic departments and the universities who need to come together to mitigate the divide between the two and focus on shared goals of the student-athletes overall experience, well-being, and academic achievement. These shared goals should include what is in the best interest of student-athlete success.

There is a necessity of collaboration within the university and athletic department when it comes to making decisions that directly impact the university, athletic department, and the wellbeing of the student-athlete (Gaston-Gayles 2003; Hodes et al., 2015; Woods, McNiff, & Coleman 2018). Gaston-Gayles (2003) conducted a mixed-methods study on the importance of the relationship between student-athletes and their advisor. Once admitted, Gaston-Gayles (2003) found the relationship a student-athlete has with their academic advisor directly impacts their academic experience as they are the support individual who reminds them of the importance of academics in college while continuing to earn their college degree. Through the study, the academic advisor participants expressed the need to stress academics to student-athletes as soon as they arrive on campus, as some student-athletes focus more on athletics. With the direct correlation between academic
success and the trusted relationship between the student-athlete and their academic advisor, Gaston-Gayles (2003) has recommended universities and athletic departments need to collaborate more efficiently for the greater success of student-athlete academic achievement.

To assist in the academic success of student-athletes, universities should be collaborating and establish academic support resources. Harper (2016) explained that student-athletes must believe in the established academic support initiatives campuses have placed in order for academic success and experiences, and this comes from alumni support and current student-athletes. Some of these support services include testing and assessment, new-student orientation, learning-skill development, reading and writing skill development, tutorial assistance, career counseling, and general counseling (Gurney & Johnston, 1986). Even with the commonly established initiatives, Harper (2016) recommended that it is the responsibility of the athletic departments and universities to encourage academic engagement from the student-athletes and to support their academic success. Gurney and Johnston (1986) supported this idea and explained the importance of the academic advisor is to assist the student-athlete to be more academically engaged. Through their research, Gurney and Johnston (1986) also found that to promote academically engaged student-athletes, the coaches also need to support the student-athletes academic identity equally as their athletic identity. Student-athlete engagement with their academic experience can be contradictory from what coaches are telling them, as some are told to focus more on their athletic identity than their academic identity.

When coaches tell student-athletes to focus more on their athletic identity versus their academic identity, the student-athlete misses being part of a campus culture. Beron and Piquero (2016) found this when they identified coaches
pushing academic paths so the student-athlete could focus more on the athletic identity. Campus culture is an integral component of a collaboration between athletics and the university for student-athlete success (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). With a strong and established culture of academic success, student-athletes are more accomplished in the classroom. Rubin and Moses (2017) interviewed student-athletes in focus groups with specific questions regarding how they felt about campus culture. By using a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, they identified a subculture within athletics that determined viewpoints and aspirations of academic success. It is within these established subcultures where student-athletes are socialized into their understanding of the campus culture of academics and how they want others to view them when it comes to academic accomplishments. Even with academic support established on campus, it is within their subcultures that student-athletes will utilize and appreciate what is available for them to be successful. Rubin and Moses (2017) found that even though advisors provide advice and suggestions to student-athletes, ultimately, this subculture within athletic department teams is how student-athletes make their decisions when it comes to academics. Understanding different levels of academic goals and aspirations of incoming student-athletes could help the subculture at the university to encourage a stronger academic understanding of success.

Having an understanding of their identity on academic and athletic success could help drive the student-athlete with their aspirations. In a descriptive investigation study with triadic reciprocity of social cognitive theoretical perspective, Yukhymenko (2012) identified that student-athletes do put greater importance on their identity of athletics rather than academics as they spend more time on their sport than in their classes. Supporting both identities or roles are
imperative for the overall positive experience student-athletes will have. Just as Harper (2016) concluded, it is the overall experiences of the student-athlete that impact academic success, D. Horton (2009) found the majority of student-athletes look back on their academic college careers as a positive experience when it comes to their time at the university. The study was conducted with one-on-one interviews at a community college to understand the experiences the student-athletes reflected on while attending the institution. After systematically coding the responses, D. Horton (2009) found that student-athletes enjoyed their time on campus and viewed it as a valuable learning opportunity to grow as individuals. Through established academic support systems, which include the student, the athletic department, and the university will achieve success. D. Horton (2009) argued that each role an individual has on campus, regardless if it is the coach, advisor, or admissions officer that has a direct impact on the success of the student-athlete. Resources available to student-athletes for academic success need to be established through a collaboration of efforts with the university and athletic department.

**Student-Athletes Dual Identities**

Student-athletes have different identities they refer to; one is their athletic identity, which is the more public persona, and the other is the student identity. Beron and Piquero (2016) understood there are two identities associated with a student-athlete, and the pressure to perform at higher levels in both areas that have been placed on them. The presumption is that student-athletes focus more on their athletic identity than their academic identity. Beron and Piquero (2016) conducted a quantitative analysis of data collected from a survey the NCAA sent to student-athletes, and it revealed there is no evidence that the more a student focuses on their academic studies, the less they focus on their athletic competitions. Student-
athletes view their separate identities as different and feel they are working to be successful in both. Interesting findings that Beron and Piquero (2016) identified in their research was that professional academic personnel and not coaches should be involved in academics. However, it was identified that student-athletes chose an institution first on athletics and second on academics. As Beron and Piquero (2016) found, even though student-athletes chose a university based on athletics, there is still a need to have academic personnel involved. Having academic personnel indicates how a campus environment structure should be organized for athletic and academic success.

Having a supportive environment on campus is needed; however, Hildenbrand et al. (2009) found that there are misunderstandings of the student-athlete identities on campus. At the conclusion of their research on student-athlete status and academic performance on campus, Hildenbrand et al. (2009) acknowledged a more positive reaction to the academic identity or role than the misconceptions which suggest student-athletes are only on campus for their athletic identity. The conclusion of the study found the opposite of misconceptions on collegiate student-athletes, and that most student-athletes are performing at a higher rate academically when compared to their non-student-athlete colleagues and earning higher grades (Hildenbrand et al., 2009). Bell (2009) supported these findings with the exception of football and men’s basketball. Research conducted just like Hildenbrand et al. (2009) and Bell (2009) supported the awareness that there are more benefits to athletics than negatives when it comes to academic success. That being said, even with positive benefits, there are still challenges of the balance between the different identities of self with athlete and student.

The identity of self plays into how a student-athlete views the more important role: academic or athletic. While in high school, most student-athletes
are revered for their athletic role and relatively ignored for their academic role from teachers, students, community, and even family (McGee, 2017).

Understanding if there is an internal positive attitude of academics and an external view of undermining academic performance is the base outcome of the research of Levine, Etchison, and Oppenheimer (2014). Levine et al. (2014) identified that student-athletes had a high expectation and care for academic success but believed others did not think they did. Comeaux (2012) suggested the majority of student-athletes had either positive or neutral experiences with the campus but acknowledged that there were a small number of student-athletes who had negative experiences when reflecting on their time as a student-athlete.

Looking at what the student-athletes distinguish from their experiences gives insight into what image the campus community and faculty had of the student-athletes and what stereotypes were related to their academic ability and motivation. Some of these negative experiences include the existence of insensitive and demeaning behaviors directed at them when the faculty questioned their intellectual abilities and academic motivation at the university based on the perception faculty have of student-athletes (Comeaux, 2012). These experiences that student-athletes felt was described by Comeaux (2012) as athlete microaggression, where it validates the existence of insensitive and demeaning behaviors directed at student-athletes. Establishing social norms with student-athletes reinforces the idea of keeping the importance of academic success internally instead of outwardly. A recommendation of Levine et al. (2014) was for universities to understand this phenomenon and build a culture and support environment for student-athletes to express their desire for academic achievement.

The balance of the dual identity of student and athlete is what non student-athletes and faculty are curious about and encourages further research. Comeaux
(2012) developed a study in order to have a better understanding of experiences with professors between Division-I student-athletes and non-student-athletes in the classroom. The study was to look at specifically what student-athletes perceive forms of discriminatory acts from others. The study was conducted with an online questionnaire sent to 122 student-athletes. After the data were collected and evaluated, Comeaux (2012) found that the majority of student-athletes reflected on their experiences with professors on campus from a positive point of view. However, Comeaux (2012) noted that further research is needed to comprehend the student-athletes negative experiences with their faculty.

**Campus Belonging**

Having an identity on campus as an athlete is one aspect of identity; however, another aspect of identity includes their ethnicity. B. Martin, Harrison, Stone, and Lawrence (2010), used a phenomenological approach while conducting interviews with high achieving African-American student-athletes. The research was done to have a better understanding of the viewpoints of their academic experiences and confidence in their academic achievements. Four themes were identified by B. Martin et al. (2010) at the conclusion of their research on the viewpoints of African-American student-athletes. These four themes included having to prove themselves worthy, feeling they are perceived as a threat to society, time management, and the feeling it is about pride and hard work. The participants felt a need to perform at a high level academically to be a role model for other African-Americans. The findings that B. Martin et al. (2010) found supported the idea that student-athletes feel more pressure than other students on campus but really do want to be part of campus.

With the collaboration of the university and athletic department, ensuring the culture of the campus supports the academic needs of all students, including
the student-athlete, should be the common goal. In a study on faculty perceptions of African-Americans and academic ability, Comeaux (2010) used the critical race theory framework to analyze faculty members’ perceptions about African-American and White student-athletes. Data were collected through a photo-elicitation method where participants responded to a photo of a student-athlete by race. Comeaux (2010) found that faculty had different viewpoints on academic aspirations of African-Americans and White student-athletes. Their findings implicate the need for discussions amongst student affairs leaders, faculty, and coaches to create a more equitable educational environment for all students. Just as Comeaux (2010) identified a need amongst leadership to provide more equal education, Woods et al. (2018) looked at how universities support their African-American student-athletes. Through their study, Woods et al. (2018) ran a statistical analysis of data collected from the National Survey of Student Engagement. Just as Comeaux (2010) presented after their study, Woods et al. (2018) found that to engage African-American male student-athletes in more educational activities, campuses must begin with providing focused support systems. The findings also found that support systems in place to assist them with psychological coping mechanisms may contribute to an increased rate of academic achievement for college completion. Woods et al. (2018) found there were significant differences between the student academic engagement among African-American male student-athletes and the support they have been provided on their campuses. The results indicated there is a direct link between the quality of support given to African-American male student-athletes and the likelihood of graduation. These results are why Woods et al. (2018) suggested after their findings that there is a need for discussion on academic reform on university campuses regarding quality support for success.
The discussions of educational reform to establish academic engagement of African-American students on campus will begin to lead to academic success. To better understand the differences between academic engagement, Harper (2016) analyzed data with information from the NCAA on African-American student-athlete graduation success rates from 65 Division-I institutions. When compared to their White teammates, there was a discrepancy of academic assistance and engagement with African-American student-athletes on campus. In order to establish a support program, an emphasis needs to be made to focus more on the African-American academic role (Harper, 2016). The data provided by the NCAA was a limited due to a focus only on student-athletes with scholarships. Another limitation is that the data for the research did not include any student-athletes who transferred away and potentially graduated. One of the suggestions Harper (2016) identified is to have universities with significant discrepancies between graduation rates to analyze other universities with lower discrepancies as an excellent model of practice.

The image and role that student-athletes have begins when admitted to the university and becomes part of who they are on campuses. Just as Comeaux (2012) studied the image and role of student-athletes on campus, whether it is perceived as positive or negative, Bimper, Harrison, and Clark (2013) conducted a study to fully understand the role of African-American student-athletes in their academic and athletic identities. Bimper et al. (2013) used the critical race theory framework as a base of their study to understand further how African-American student-athletes balance their roles or identities of student and athlete. After their research, it was found there is an importance of how student-athletes feel involved in the community and welcomed on campus. This relationship directly impacts the success of the student-athlete, and Bimper et al. (2013) reinforced the importance
of developing a campus culture that supports the diversity of ethnicities that exist amongst student-athletes. The more the student-athlete feels comfortable and welcomed on campus is a direct correlation with how successful academically the student-athlete will be.

**Racial Equity**

As student-athletes are a sub-culture on university campuses, on predominantly White campuses, the isolated environment is smaller, and African-Americans student-athletes do not feel included. Carter-Francique, Hart, and Steward (2013) and Comeaux and Harris (2011), through their respected research, acknowledge the difficulty African-American student-athletes have on campuses feeling invited and supported. Through the development of a conceptual model to understand and explain the process and characteristics that influence student-athletes on college campuses, Comeaux and Harrison (2011) found that campuses are not supporting African-American student-athletes when compared to other student-athletes. Through the literature, it became evident that there are universities that were not supporting African-American student-athletes. These universities had a campus culture with the belief that African-American student-athletes do not have academic aspirations and thus should not be taken seriously (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Carter-Francique et al. (2013) identified this same notion after using a critical race theory lens. Carter-Francique et al. (2013) qualitatively analyzed responses from nine African-American student-athletes on their perceptions of academic goals and support. After the research on how social support impacted their academic support emerged, Carter-Francique et al. (2013) acknowledged there is a direct link for the need of social support with African-American student-athletes and their academic success.
Experiences of African-American student-athletes at predominantly White university institutions should make campus leaders evaluate the campus culture. Sato, Hodge, and Eckert (2017) conducted a multiple-case analytical study using the positioning theory to understand the academic challenges African-American student-athletes have on predominantly White campuses. The findings met the goal to be able to provide campus leaders an understanding of how to better support African-American student-athletes concerning their identities, socio-economic backgrounds, and cultures of diversity. African-American student-athletes on predominantly White campuses could be experiencing racism, and there should be a policy in place for these students to feel comfortable to speak out and say they are being targeted. Sato et al., (2017) identified that African-American student-athletes could be experiencing racism, which Miller, Guida, Smith, Ferguson, and Medina (2018) supported. Smith et al. (2018) explained that there had been an increase in racial tension on college campuses and explained the need for a bias response team. As the tension increases on campus, leaders should consider how student-athletes feel and make sure they know how and whom to speak to if they feel uncomfortable.

**Conclusion**

Student-athletes are a unique population on university campuses as they are recruited first based on their athletic ability. If their academic ability does not grant them admissions into the university, then a special admissions process is available at a majority of campuses. The special admissions process allows student-athletes to be admitted at lower academic requirements when compared to their non-student-athlete peers while still being expected to perform at the same academic level. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) concluded with their literature review that further research needs to be conducted regarding student-athlete
academic success and how universities can establish set programs. In order to understand and identify if a student-athlete will be successful academically, the university should take into consideration how the university and athletic department collaborate for student success. By using different non-cognitive measures to understand more holistically if a student is projected to be successful, and how the student identifies their roles of academics and athletics.

Through this literature review, as previous research indicates, there are other opportunities for universities to use as indicators if student-athletes are successful academically. Ting (2009) studied other non-cognitive indicators besides SAT and GPA as successful measurements of academic success. The data were collected through a Non-Cognitive Questionnaire survey administered to first-year student-athletes, which was then reviewed with stepwise multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that using traditional measurements to indicate success in math was most reliable in the traditional way; however, noncognitive measurements are reliable in other areas of academic success. Shuman (2009) explored the phenomenon of academic aspirations to understand better the admission status of the relationship between academic performance and motivation of the student-athlete. The data collected from a survey, sent out to 287 student-athletes, were statistically analyzed, and found there is a direct correlation between high academic motivation and academic success. Just as Shuman (2009) found a correlation with academic motivation and success, a study by Yukhymenko (2012) found a link of previous experiences impacted the student-athlete’s motivation. The research conducted by Yukhymenko (2012) was based on the social cognitive theory, with over 1,000 Division-I student-athletes. The findings found that the level of motivation a student-athlete has based on previous factors they have experienced.
The time is now to reform how student-athletes are supported academically and understanding the diverse subcultures that exist within college athletics is the first step. Van Rheenen (2013) explained there is a need for reform on college campuses for student-athlete value, just as Comeaux (2015) suggested there is currently not enough done on university campuses to support the student-athletes admitted. The NCAA and its institutions focus on achieving benchmarks set as measurements of success. However, the focus has been steered away from what resources are needed to support all student-athletes (Comeaux, 2015). More can be done to help the student-athlete transition through college and afterward, if academic professionals begin to fight for proper support for their student-athletes actively.

One question the literature review did not answer was: when a student enrolls at the university after being admitted through the special admission process, what is the chance they will be academically successful and engaged in the process? It is essential for further research to be conducted to look more in-depth on the special admission process and how universities are admitting student-athletes. Do universities focus on the student’s athletic talent more than if the student is capable or has the academic motivation to be successful? These questions reference the need to further research the process and foundation of how universities make admission decisions when it comes to student-athletes who are not regularly admitted to helping ensure there is a balance with available resources.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the similarities and differences of academic aspirations between regularly and specially admitted student-athletes at NCAA Division-I universities. Universities have established a special admission process for student-athletes not regularly admissible. The special admissions process varies from university to university; however, it allows the institution to admit student-athletes based on their special talents of athleticism if they did not meet the regular admission standards. Currently, universities are using a variety of measures to predict if a student-athlete will be academically successful and make the decision of whether or not to admit a student-athlete to their university. Some of these predictive measurements may include high school GPA, SAT or ACT scores; a letter provided by the student-athlete; or recommendations from coaches and high school administrators.

The focus of this research was to examine the academic aspiration similarities and differences between student-athletes admitted through the regular admission process and those admitted through a special admission process and how it relates to their academic identity and commitment to earning a degree. The findings may help universities further understand student-athletes’ academic and athletic aspirations.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How are student-athletes defined as specially admitted at the institutional level?
RQ2: Are there significant differences between student-athletes who met the university’s admission criteria and specially admitted student-athletes on transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?

RQ4: Are there significantly differences between specially and regularly admitted student-athlete in academic intentions to leave, degree commitment, and institutional commitment, after controlling for student-athletes’ perceptions of transition from high school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student-staff engagement?

**Research Design**

The research consisted of a mixed-methods research design. Part of the research was a quantitative analysis of the participant collected data. The construction of the quantitative data analysis used what Johnson B. (2001) described as a quantitative cross-sectional nonexperimental design. This type of data analysis is when the research area studied has a relationship of cause and effect, and the researcher does not control the independent variables. Using a quantitative nonexperimental design as the foundation of the research design, a positivist worldview will be incorporated. Using a positivist worldview is research that studies a problem that reflects the need to identify and assesses possible causes that influence the outcomes (Cresswell, 2014). By using a positivist worldview as part of the research, the design allows the development of relevant statements that can assist in explaining the relationship of academic aspirations of
student-athletes when it comes to their athletic and academic identity with their commitment to completing their degree. Using the research survey in a quantitative research cross-sectional design allows the study of a sample of opinions and attitudes of a larger population (Cresswell, 2014). The study sought to understand how the participants view themselves and how they believe others view them when it comes to academic aspirations towards degree commitment and the sense of identity within their roles of athletics and academics.

**Personal Reflexivity Statement**

The researcher has previous experiences in this subject matter as it relates to regularly and specially admitted student-athletes at Division-I universities. With a lengthy career of working with student-athletes and their academic aspirations and degree commitment, the researcher has formed an interest as it relates to the data and results in answering the research questions. Creswell (2014) explained that the researcher's own experiences could influence their choice of research and research questions. From the researcher's own experiences, there is a need to understand better the similarities and differences between regular and special admitted student-athletes when it comes to academic aspirations and commitment to earning a degree.

**Data Collection**

The data were collected from a survey (Appendix A) consisting of previously validated and reliable scales. The survey was administered by the institutions’ Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services (or designee) as the means of data collection. To identify the universities to participate in the study, the researcher began with an email (Appendix B) as the primary form of communication. The email contained a participation request and a detailed
description of the research. The explanation of the research included a description of the study, the necessity of the research, and an opportunity for universities to opt-in to receive an executive summary with the concluding findings. The initial email of communication requested participation prior to gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, as it was essential to know which universities may have needed their institution to approve through their IRB. A database of universities that agreed to be part of the study was tracked through an excel spreadsheet document, along with their institution required IRB approval prior to participating.

Since the researcher’s experiences are in Division-I universities, the focus will be on that level versus the other divisions. The NCAA is comprised of three different levels, Division-I, Division-II, and Division-III (NCAA, n.d.-a). Along with the three different levels within NCAA, there are also different levels of Division-I universities, major and mid-major are conferences in football that have an automatic bid in Bowl Championship Series (Mahony, Gladden, & Funk, 2003). It should be noted that there are universities at the NCAA Division-I level that are classified as either Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) or Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) (Peachey & Brueing, 2011). The difference is that FBS offers scholarships that cover 100% of college tuition, room, and board while FCS scholarships are not (Peachey & Brueing, 2011). Not every Division-I institution received a request to participate in the study as the researcher communicated with professional colleagues who work within the student-athlete academic field. The researcher targeted 20 Division-I universities and invited them to request their student-athletes to participate in the research. For a valid representation of Division-I student-athletes, 10 universities agreed to participate in this research.
To ensure sufficient university participation, the researcher began with 20 universities to participate. After a week, the universities Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services (or designee) who did not respond received another request to participate. The initial request to participate in the research with the first 20 universities did not produce enough participation, so the researcher extended the request to an additional 30 universities to participate.

Understanding the correct response rate will ensure that there will be a valid representation of student-athlete participants. Nulty (2008) suggested a 20% response rate as adequate when the researchers are requesting participation from over one-hundred individuals. In order to have a substantial sample size for this study, the researcher identified that seven universities were needed to agree to participate, so that if there is a 20% response rate from the student-athletes at each university there would be enough participation for the validity of the research.

After three weeks of requesting universities to participate, the researcher received confirmation of participation from 10 universities. Of the 50 universities who were requested to participate, five responded that their university has a policy to only participate in research associated with their university, and three responded their athletic department does not participate in surveys that are not associated with the NCAA. One university provided further information on why they made this decision of only participating in surveys from the NCAA as to the number of requests they receive and are cognitive of the multiple surveys student-athletes are requested to participate in.

Once the researcher received approval from the IRB, an email (Appendix C) was sent to the universities Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services (or designee) who agreed to participate. The email included the following information: a reminder of the research, an explanation of approval from IRB, and
the email to be sent to their student-athletes, which included the link to the survey. The email sent from the universities Director of Student-Athlete of Academic Services (or designee) to the student-athletes included: an explanation of the research, whom to contact with questions, the IRB approval, and a link to the survey that includes the informed consent form, which will be administered through Qualtrics. The researcher felt the responses may increase if the potential participants recognized the name of who was requesting their participation in the survey.

Before the student-athletes began the survey, they were provided information about what it meant to consent to participate in the survey and that the responses are confidential and would not be provided to any staff member or coach at their university. Throughout the data collection, the researcher monitored the response rate of the participants. After a few weeks, a significantly low participation rate was noted. The researcher sent a follow-up email to the universities who agreed to participate requesting to send the survey one final time to their students in hopes of higher participation. From the initial request to students to the second request, the participation quantity went from 20 to 184 participants.

Universities that chose to participate in this research were requested to answer questions as it related to their university regarding how the special admission process is organized at their institution. The questions were sent through email (Appendix D) to the Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services (or designee), who responded to the request of participation in the research. The universities who responded were kept confidential, and there is no identifying information linking their responses to the questions.
Before beginning the study, the researcher applied for IRB approval through the university of research. The researcher understands the sensitivity that surrounds Division-I student-athletes and the high level of confidentiality that must occur through the research process. During the data collection, analysis, and reporting of information, the participants' information was not divulged.

Participant data were kept confidential. Since the researcher requested the university to email the link to the survey, the researcher did not have access to the names associated with the collected data. The universities will not be able to see the data collected as the researcher will have the only access to the completed survey data in Qualtrics. Five years after the research has concluded, the responses from the participants will be erased to ensure that confidentiality has remained. The findings from this study are to give helpful insight for academic professionals into student-athletes own ideas of academic aspirations and degree commitment with their roles of academic and athletic identity.

**Instrumentation**

The data were collected with a survey administered through Qualtrics, which consisted of five sections: Transition from School to University, Academic Intentions, Academic and Athletic Identity, Academic Support, and Academic and Sports Background. This research included instruments from four previous valid studies. Using instrumentation that has been proven reliable from previous research studies will support the reliability and validity of this research. The validity of the results will be important as it is the strength of knowing the findings are accurate (Creswell, 2014). The five sections of the survey consisted of various instrumentations, specifically: (1) Transition from School to University section included transition engagement scale; (2) Academic Intentions section included degree commitment, institutional commitment, and intention to leave scales; (3)
Academic and Athletic Identity section included the academic and athletic identity scales; (4) Academic Support section included student-staff engagement scales; and (5) Academic and Sports Background section included several questions pertaining to backgrounds of students.

The Transition from School to University section was designed to measure how the respondent views their transition from high school to the university level by using the Transition Engagement Scale (TES, Krause & Coates, 2008) which had seven items on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability estimate for TES was reported above 0.70 in most scales.

The Academic Intentions section was designed to measure institutional commitment designed by McEwan (2013) and degree commitment designed by Davidson, Beck, and Grisaffi (2015). The institutional commitment consisted of five items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The degree commitment had three items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very strong). The reliability estimate for institutional commitment was reported to be 0.80; the reliability estimate for degree commitment was reported to be 0.764. Additionally, intention to leave scale created by Dewberry and Jackson (2018) was also included, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability estimates for intention to leave was reported to be 0.83.

The Academic and Athletic Identity section of the survey measured using the Academic and Athletic Identity Scale (AAIS) designed by Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2014) was designed to measure academic identity (5 items) and athletic identity (6 items) on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not central) to 7 (the central core). The reliability estimate for academic identity was reported to be .93; the reliability estimate for athletic identity was reported to be .93.
The Academic Support section of the survey used the Student-Staff Engagement Scale (SES) created by Kraus and Coates (2008) with 11 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability estimate for SES was reported to be 0.70.

At the conclusion of the survey, the academic and sport background had seven items requesting information of: the participant’s sport, if they have received an athletic scholarship, gender, year at the university, if they were specially admitted, the position on the team, and if they intend to go professional in their sport. In this section, there were also two questions requesting the participant to self-identify what they remember their high school GPA was and what their current college GPA is. The participant chose from the following options for both GPA requests; below 2.0, 2.01-2.5, 2.51-3.0, 3.01-3.5, and 3.51-4.0. The final question asked the reason for attending college, which the options were: mostly academic, mostly athletic, both academic and athletic, and other.

The student-athletes or participants of the survey provided their answers as it relates to the questions from their own understanding of academic aspirations from high school, college, and post-college as well as how dedicated they are to each identity between the athlete and student role. The survey was field-tested before administrating to participants to ensure the appropriateness of the questions used worked towards the focus of the study.

**Participants**

The participants of this study were student-athletes who were enrolled at Division-I universities. The study was reliant on creating a diverse but purposeful collection of participants to respond to the survey. The researcher used purposeful sampling as they used their network of former colleagues to participate in the research. The universities that agreed to participate in the research were sent the
survey to send to the participants. Participation in the survey was voluntary but strongly encouraged. The answers that the participants provided was analyzed as a sampling size of the representation of Division-I student-athletes.

The required sample size was determined using G*Power. G*Power is a power analysis program used for statistical analysis in determining participant sample sizes in research studies (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). For independent samples t-test, to achieve an effect size of .50 with power of .80 and alpha of .05 using a two-tailed test, a sample size of 128 is required (64 participants in each group). For correlations, to detect a correlation of .50 with power of .80 and alpha of .05, a sample size of 29 is required. To detect a correlation of .50 with power of .80 and alpha of .05, a sample size of 29 is required. To detect a correlation of .50 with the same other parameters, a sample size of 84 is required. Finally, for multiple regression, to achieve rho-squared of .30 with power of .80 and alpha of .05 using five predictors (i.e., transition engagement, academic identity, athletic identity, student-staff engagement, and special admittance), a sample size of 45 is required. With six predictors (i.e., transition engagement, academic identity, athletic identity, student-staff engagement, special admittance, and gender), a sample size of 48 is required. For this research, the sample size was 184 student-athletes responded to the survey request.

**Demographics of Participants**

The NCAA sponsors 24 sports (NCAA, 2018). Of the universities who agreed to send the survey to their student-athletes, 22 of the 24 sports were represented (see Table 3.1). Of the 22 sports represented, the 184 respondents identified they participated in a collective of 15 different sports.
Table 3.1

Gender Reported by Sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Country</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Hockey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming &amp; Diving</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track and Field</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrestling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
<td><strong>127</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents identified their high school GPA: 2.3% (n = 3) selected 2.00-2.5, 6.1% (n = 8) selected 2.51-3.00, 22.9% (n = 30) selected 3.01-3.5, and 68.7% (n = 90) selected 3.51-4.00. Reasons for attending college were reported as 7.9% (n = 11) mostly academic reasons, 22.9% (n = 32) mostly athletic reasons, and 69.3% (n = 97) both academic and athletic reasons. In the sample, 42.1% (n = 59) student-athletes reported that they have a full scholarship, 32.1% (n = 45) reported they have a partial scholarship, and 25.7% (n = 36) reported they do not have a scholarship. Student-athletes reported their gender as 30.2% (n = 42) male and 69.8% (n = 97) female.

Respondents stated their current academic year at the university as 30.7% (n = 43) in their first-year, 25.7% (n = 36) in their second-year, 17.9% (n = 25) in
their third year, 19.3% \((n = 27)\) in their fourth-year, 2.9% \((n = 4)\) in their fifth-year, and 2.7% \((n = 5)\) as a graduate student. If the student-athlete was a specially admitted student, 12.9% \((n = 18)\) responded yes, 76.4% \((n = 107)\) responded no, and 10.7% \((n = 15)\) did not know. The respondents selected their participation level on their team as 45% \((n=63)\) a starter, 42.9% \((n = 60)\) a contributor, 8.6% \((n = 12)\) does not participate, and 3.6% \((n = 5)\) not eligible to play. For intentions to go professional, the respondents identified that 16.4% \((n=23)\) has intentions to go professional, 26.4% \((n=37)\) may go professional, and 57.1% \((n=80)\) does not intend to go professional.

**Validity and Reliability**

The researcher understands the importance of the data collected and analysis was valid and reliable to ensure accuracy. Creswell (2014) suggested that using a pre-existing instrument for assessment assists with drawing from using statistical analysis in the validity of the survey. The researcher used established instruments of AAIS (Yukhymenko-Lescoart, 2014), TES and SES (Kraus & Coates, 2008), and Institutional Commitment Scale (McEwan, 2013). Using the four established instruments supported the validity of the research and data that was collected and analyzed. The instruments that were used have been tested by the researchers and have been reported to be reliable. Using the pre-existing instruments in this study was also to establish further validity of the researcher’s developed instruments (Yukhymenko-Lescoart, 2014).

**Measures and Data Analysis**

The data were collected using a survey (Appendix A), administered through Qualtrics. Before IRB approval, the researcher requested participation from selected Division-I universities. The reason the researcher did this prior to IRB
approval was to understand if their institution required IRB approval or if the researcher’s IRB would be sufficient. The initial number of universities the researcher requested to participate was 20; however, after 2 weeks and a follow-up email request, the researcher did not have an adequate number of universities to participate. To move forward to IRB approval, the researcher identified that seven universities needed to agree to participate. In order to meet this number, the researcher emailed an additional 30 institutions to request their participation. After another 2 weeks, a follow-up email was sent to request participation by the researcher. The researcher secured the participation of 10 institutions to agree to participate in the study by sending the survey to their student-athletes for voluntary participation. Once the researcher had confirmation from a sufficient amount of institutions to participate with an understanding of their university’s expectation of IRB approval, the researcher submitted for IRB approval.

As soon as the IRB approved the study, the researcher sent an email (Appendix C) to the universities that agreed to participate. The email was sent to the institutions’ Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services (or designee) with an email to send to their student-athletes with the survey link. The initial email with the survey link was sent, and after a significant amount of time, there was an extremely low participation rate. After some time, the researcher sent out a follow-up email (Appendix E) with a request for the institutions to re-send the survey link again due to low participation with the initial request. The survey was open again for 14 days to optimize participation from the participants. At the conclusion of the 14 days, the participation amount went from 20 to 184.

Once the time period for survey participation completed, the researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for data analysis of the data collected to answer the research questions. The data analyzed were collected from
a survey administered through Qualtrics. The universities that agreed to participate by sending the survey to their student-athletes were all from institutions from Division-I universities. Universities participating in the study were located in eight different states located from the west coast to the east coast in the United States. The universities that agreed to send the email to their student-athletes to participate are from institutions ranging from large public institutions with 30,000 students to private institutions with 5,000 students.

Research Question 1 was answered through qualitative content analysis by identifying categories from the responses of the universities. Common categories were identified from the responses to have a better understanding of how universities define student-athletes in the special admission process.

Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 were answered through a quantitative analysis. Analysis of the quantitative data were conducted with SPSS and used to run various statistical analysis on the data collected from the surveys as it related to the research questions. For Research Question 2, the data analysis included an independent sample t-test. For the independent t-test, the dependent variables or test variables were; the transition from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. The group variable or independent variable was whether a student-athlete is or is not specially admitted to the university.

Answer Research Question 3, the researcher used the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient as a measurement of the strength between two variables of a linear association as data analysis in SPSS explained by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). The variables used were academic identity and athletic identity as it relates to the transition from school to university, academic intentions, degree commitment, institutional commitment, and student staff engagement. Research
Question 4 was answered by running a separate univariate analysis that was conducted for each dependent variable of academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, and institutional commitment.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to be able to provide universities another resource to understand further where incoming student-athletes view themselves on academic aspirations as it relates to the commitment to earning a degree. This information could assist universities in ensuring proper resources for academic success are organized and established to assist student-athletes. Understanding what necessary resources for academic success are needed, the student-athletes will have a stronger opportunity to perform academically.

The goal of this research was to be able to provide universities another tool to more accurately measure if student-athletes have the academic aspirations to be successful if they are admitted through the special admission process.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter will explore the results from the research and data collection as described in Chapter 3. The results and outcomes will be explored as it relates to understanding the similarities and differences of academic aspirations between regularly and specially admitted student-athletes at NCAA Division-I universities. An independent t-test, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, and an ANCOVA analysis were conducted through SPSS to analyze the data collected from the survey the participants responded to. The following will be presented in the chapter: research questions, a review of methodology, descriptive analysis, a preliminary analysis, main analysis, and a summary.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How are student-athletes defined as specially admitted at the institutional level?

RQ2: Are there significant differences between student-athletes who met the university’s admission criteria and specially admitted student-athletes on transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?

RQ3: Is there a correlation between transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?

RQ4: Are there significantly differences between specially and regularly admitted student-athlete in academic intentions to leave, degree commitment, and institutional commitment, after controlling for student-athletes’ perceptions of
transition from high school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student-staff engagement?

**Review of Methodology**

The collection of the data for analysis came from 10 Division-I universities with an initial request to participate in this research. For Research Question 1, data were collected through email and phone calls for a qualitative content analysis from responses of two questions (Appendix D). For Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 data were collected with a survey (Appendix A). The survey requested participants to answer questions from five instruments from previously valid studies: (1) Transition from School to University, (2) Academic Intentions, (3) Academic and Athletic Identity, (4) Academic Support, and (5) Academic and Sports Background. The instruments used questions on a 5-point Likert scale or a 7-point Likert scale, with the academic and sports section having specific questions as it relates to their academics and sports.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Survey data were collected from 184 participants. Eighteen \( n = 18 \) participants identified as they are specially admitted student-athletes, 107 \( n = 107 \) identified they were not a special admit, 15 \( n = 15 \) did not know if they were or were not, and 44 \( n = 44 \) declined to answer. A descriptive analysis (see Table 4.1) shows the descriptive statistics for each of the seven scales of (1) Transitions from School to University, (2) Academic Intentions to Quit, (3) Degree Commitment, (4) Institutional Commitment, (5) Academic Identity, (6) Athletic Identity, and (7) Student-Staff Engagement.

The descriptive results for transitions from school to university reported on a 7-point scale, from respondents of \( n = 160 \), the minimum response as 3, and the
Table 4.1

*Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of Scales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th># of items</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>Response Scale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Transitions from School to University</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic Intentions to Quit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Degree Commitment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Commitment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Academic Identity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Athletic Identity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Student-Staff Engagement</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

maximum response as 7 ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 0.22$). The descriptive results for transitions from academic intentions to quit on a 5-point scale, from respondents of $n = 147$, the minimum response as 1 and the maximum response as 3.33 ($M = 1.26$, $SD = 0.47$). The descriptive results for degree commitment reported on a 5-point scale, from respondents of $n = 148$, the minimum response as 3.33, and the maximum response as 5 ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 0.45$). The descriptive results for institutional commitment reported on a 7-point scale, from respondents of $n = 149$, the minimum response as 3, and the maximum response as 7 ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.00$). The descriptive results for academic identity reported on a 7-point, scale from respondents of $n = 145$, the minimum response as 1, and the maximum
response as 7 ($M = 5.40, SD = 1.27$). The descriptive results for athletic identity reported on a 7-point scale, from respondents of $n = 145$, the minimum response as 2.67, and the maximum response as 7 ($M = 6, SD = 1.08$). The descriptive results for institutional commitment reported on a 7-point scale, from respondents of $n = 140$, the minimum response as 1.73, and the maximum response as 7 ($M = 5.28, SD = 0.92$).

**Preliminary Analysis**

In order to ensure the data were reliable and valid, a preliminary analysis was conducted on the four instrument scales used in the survey. The importance of conducting a preliminary analysis is to obtain statistical insight into the analyzed dataset (Galáž, Mekyska, & Smekal, 2015). The instruments used from the survey that were analyzed included (1) Transition from School to University section included transition engagement scale; (2) Academic Intentions to Quit section included degree commitment, institutional commitment, and intention to leave scales; (3) Academic and Athletic Identity section included the academic and athletic identity scales; (4) Academic Support section included student-staff engagement scales. The first analysis was an exploratory factor matrix or pattern matrix to examine how many factors emerged on each scale used in the survey to the participants (Appendix A). The second analysis was a reliability analysis on each factor or subscale.

The first step of this preliminary analysis included a series of exploratory factor analyses. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) explained the importance of conducting an exploratory factor analysis as it will assist in reducing a set of variables into smaller sets of factors. A series of exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the items from the transition from school to university scale, academic intentions scales, academic and athletic identity scale, and student-staff
engagement scales. Exploratory factor analysis used principal axis factoring extraction method. Direct Oblimin rotation was used when more than one factor was expected to be extracted.

The transition from school to university section attempted to measure how student-athletes felt orientation programs and the institution welcomed them to the university. First, the items of the transition from school to university were submitted to exploratory factor analysis, showing that a total of 39.81% of the variance was explained by one factor. The percentage of the variance is lower than the recommendation of 50% as explained by Tabachnick and Fidell (2019). The eigenvalue-over-one criterion and the scree plot both suggested one factor. As shown in Table 4.2, the factor loadings of items of transition from university to school scale ranged from .56 and .70. The factor loadings were within the recommended range because they all were above .40 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The orientation programs helped me feel like I belong to this university</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university orientation programs helped get me off to a good start</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really like being a university student</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was given helpful advice when choosing my subjects/units</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the range of subjects/units from which I could choose this year</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University has lived up to my expectations</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, three items of the intentions to quit scale were submitted for exploratory factor analysis. The intentions to quit scale included data from instruments institutional commitment and degree commitment instruments. The eigenvalue-over-one criterion and the scree plot both suggested one factor. Results showed that a total of 61.26% of variance was explained by one factor. Table 4.3
shows factor landings on the academic intentions to quit scale. As shown in Table 4.3, the items of intentions to quit loaded between .55 and .91, which was within the recommended norm, because all loadings were above .40 (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2019).

Table 4.3

*Factor Loadings for Items of the Academic Intentions to Quit Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not expect to leave college before my studies are completed</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am quite likely to quit college before my studies are finished</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am quite likely to leave college voluntarily before completing my studies</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, three items of the degree commitment scale were submitted for exploratory factor analysis. The degree commitment scale included data from the degree commitment survey that measured how strong they were committed to earning a degree. One factor emerged based on the eigenvalue-over-one criterion, which was also confirmed by the scree plot. Results showed that the items of the scale explained a total of 43.74% of variance. Factor loadings are shown in Table 4.4, ranging from .51 and .81, which is within recommended norms (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2019).

Table 4.4

*Factor Loadings for Items of the Commitment to Earning a Degree Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At this moment in time, how strong would you say your commitment is to earn a college degree, here or elsewhere</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this moment in time, how certain are that you will earn a college degree</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of degree, here or elsewhere</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fourth, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the five items of the commitment to the institutional scale. The institutional scale included data from the institutional commitment survey that measured how strongly they were to their institution. One factor emerged based on the Eigenvalues-over-than-one criterion as well as the scree plot criterion. The five items in the commitment to the institution scale explained a total of 33.30% of the variance. Examination of factor loadings showed that one item had a loading that was below the recommended norms (i.e. <3.2), as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2019). Therefore, this item was removed, and the exploratory factor analysis was re-run without this item. When the analysis was performed without the last item, one factor emerged based on the eigenvalues-over-than-one criterion. The scree plot supported this with one factor as well. The one factor with four items explained a total of 40.65% of the variance. The factor loadings are shown in Table 4.5 and, ranged from .46 to .78, which is within the recommended norms.

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loadings for Items of the Institutional Commitment Scale</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important for me to graduate from this university</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident I made the right decision in choosing to attend this university</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is likely I will register at this university next semester/quarter</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing well at this university is important to me</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fifth, the 11 items of the Academic and Athletic Scale were submitted for exploratory factor analysis. The Academic and Athletic Scale included data from the academic and athletic identity survey that measured how central the identity was to them. The results based on the eigenvalues-over-one criterion showed that
two factors emerged. The scree plot also suggested two factors. The first factor explained 56.57% of the variance, and the second factor additionally explained 18.64% of the variance. Thus, a total of 75.20% of the variance was explained by the 11 items of the Academic and Identity scales. Table 4.6 shows factor loadings for items of the academic and athletic identity scale. As shown, the items of academic identity loaded between -.86 and -.91, and the items of the athletic identity subscale loaded between .78 to .90. All factor loadings were within the recommended norms (i.e., above .40).

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Loadings for Items of the Academic and Athletic Identity Scale</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a capable student</td>
<td>-.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being satisfied with my academic work</td>
<td>-.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing well in school</td>
<td>-.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting good grades</td>
<td>-.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a high GPA</td>
<td>-.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a capable athlete</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a good athlete</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being athletic</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being proud to be an athlete</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being satisfied with my athletic achievement</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing well during sport competitions</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the 11 items of the student-staff engagement scale were submitted for exploratory factor analysis. The student-staff engagement scale included data from the Academic Support survey that measures how strongly they agree with the support they receive on campus. The scree plot supported a one-factor solution. The results showed that 51.40% of the variance was explained by the items in this factor. As shown in Table 4.7, factor loadings for items of the student-staff
engagement scale ranged from .63 to .80, and all were within the recommended norms.

Table 4.7

*Factor Loadings for Items of Staff Engagement Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their work</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most academic staff take an interest in my progress</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teaching staff are good at explaining things</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching staff usually give helpful feedback on my progress</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff try hard to make the subjects interesting</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the academic staff are approachable</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff are usually available to discuss my work</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff are enthusiastic about the subjects they teach</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one consultations with teaching staff are useful</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confident that at least one of my teachers knows my name</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff made it clear from the start what they expect from students</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next step, a series of reliability analysis was conducted. Table 4.1 shows the reliability and descriptive statistics as it relates to each scale. Estimates of internal consistency ranged from .67 and .95. The degree commitment scale was the lowest with $\alpha = .67$ which represents a questionable internal consistency as explained by Deviant (2014). Academic Identity scale was the highest with $\alpha = .95$, which is considered excellent for internal consistency (Deviant, 2014). The other scales that scored within the excellent internal consistency were, Athletic Identity ($\alpha = .93$) and Student-Staff Engagement ($\alpha = .92$). Transitions from School to University reported good internal consistency for ($\alpha = .82$). The final two scales reported acceptable internal consistency with Academic Intentions to quit with ($\alpha = .77$) and Institutional Commitment of ($\alpha = .71$). Descriptive statistics showed that, on average, student-athletes reported their transition from
school to university from agreeing to slightly agree that the transition was helpful. Student-athletes reported their intentions to quit on average from strongly disagree to disagree. Commitment to earning a degree, student-athletes reported, on average strong to very strong on their commitment to earning a degree. On average, student-athletes reported their institutional commitment as neither disagree nor agree to agree. Academic identity was very central to extremely central to their core on who they are as student-athletes. Finally, student-athletes reported their athletic identity as extremely central to their core of who they are.

**Main Analysis**

Table 4.8 summarizes analytical approaches in addressing each research question. As shown in Table 4.8, Research Question 1 was answered by qualitative content analysis to identify categories from the respondents. Research Questions 2, 3, and 4 were answered through a quantitative analysis, which was conducted in SPSS.

**RQ1: How are student-athletes defined as specially admitted at the institutional level?**

RQ1 was answered by qualitative content analysis by analyzing data the institutions’ Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services (or designee) who responded to questions on how their current university identifies special admits. Information was requested through an email for the institutions’ Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services (or designee) who agreed to participate in the research with questions of: “Does your institution have a special admission process, and how does your university identify special admits?” After some time, it was determined that some universities did not wish to participate, which supports the idea of how difficult it is to identify who is considered a special admit
Table 4.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: How are student-athletes defined as specially admitted at the institutional level?</td>
<td>Qualitative Content Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2: Are there significant differences between student-athletes who met the university’s admission criteria and specially admitted student-athletes on transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?</td>
<td>Independent t-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3: Is there a correlation between transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?</td>
<td>Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ4: Are there significantly differences between specially and regularly admitted student-athlete in academic intentions to leave, degree commitment, and institutional commitment, after controlling for student-athletes’ perceptions of transition from high school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student-staff engagement?</td>
<td>Univariate Analysis Variance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

across NCAA institutions, as presented by Winters and Gurney (2012) as well as Ingram and Huffman (2017). The next step in the data collection process was to call each universities’ Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services (or designee) of the institutions who agreed to participate by sending out the survey to their student-athletes.

Of the officials from the 10 universities who agreed to participate in the study, six responded to the qualitative question of: “Does your institution have a special admission process, and how does your university identify special admits?” Based on data collected from six participant universities, the following categories
were identified through qualitative content analysis (Table 4.9). Qualitative content analysis is described by Elo and Kyngäs (2008) as aiming to build an understanding to describe an approach to a process that has not previously been defined. Using the qualitative content analysis, the researcher identified three categories of how institutions identify how they define special admits and the process of their special admission. The three categories identified include: (1) do not admit special admits; (2) admit special admits based on specific criteria related to a combination of GPA and SAT/ACT requirements; (3) admit special admits based on a review by a designated committee.

Table 4.9

**Qualitative Identifying Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Question 1: Does your institution have a special admission process</th>
<th>Question 2: How does your university identify special admits</th>
<th>Designated as Public or Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University 1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Review by Designated Committee</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University 2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Review by Designated Committee</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University 3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Do not admit special admits</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University 4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Do not admit special admits</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University 5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Admit Special Admits Based on Specific Criteria</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University 6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Do not admit special admits</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first category was that the university does not have a special admissions process. Officials from three of the universities said they do not have a special admission process, all student-athletes must go through the regular
admission process, and there are no exceptions. One response explained: “Sorry I can’t answer, but we don’t have a special admission process” (personal communication, February 2020)

The second category was that the university does have a special admissions process but has guidelines with GPA and SAT/ACT scores. An official from one of the universities said they do have a special admissions process; however, there is a pre-determined set of parameters the student-athlete must meet in order to be considered for the special admission process. Through a phone conversation, the official from the university who had a set of parameters explained the process of how their university recently went through a review of the special admission process and stated: “We realized how ambiguous the process was for our coaches and compliance staff” (personal communication, February 2020). The individual went on to explain that their university formed a committee to analyze previous special admitted student-athletes on their GPAs and SAT/ACT scores, and their success at the university.

At the conclusion of the analysis, this university official described the chart that was developed as “the chart has clean breaks so it was easier to read for everyone to understand if the student would be admitted, need to write a special admissions request, or would be definitely not admissible” (personal communication, February 2020). The official explained the chart has been beneficial as coaches know how to evaluate a potential student-athlete and if there is a chance for admission to the university. When asked further on what was included in the special admissions request, the official explained:

They must submit a letter to the committee that outlines reasons for them not meeting the regular criteria. The essay includes such things as possible learning issues, family or medical issues, motivation, etc. They also address areas in which they are interested in studying as well as what measures and
resources they will utilize in order to be successful at the institution (personal communication, February 2020).

The third category, in which two university officials explained as their special admissions process is based on a review by a designated committee. The two university officials described similar committees as comprised of members from various departments within the university. These departments include the academic advising center, career services, registrar’s office, admissions office, faculty athletic representative, or disability access services department. The acknowledgment of the committee participation from the officials of the two universities included representation from various departments, but no one from athletics participates in the committee. One official further explained that no one from athletics serves on this committee “to decide on who or who is not admitted to the university” (personal communication, February 2020). When asked to describe what is provided to the committee for reviewing to admit the student as a special admit, an official from one of the universities explained the paperwork includes the student’s transcript, personal statement, and a statement from the coach.

For the officials from three of the universities who acknowledged they have a special admissions process, all explained that once a decision is made on the student, the athletic department representative is notified: “Once the committee makes its decision, the representative from the athletic department is notified with the committee’s decision” (personal communication, February 2020). One university official said, “there is an appeal process if the athletic department does not agree with the committee’s decision” (personal communication, February 2020). The other two university officials said there is an appeal process but was not sure what it exactly was as there has never been an admission decision the athletic department disagrees with to request an appeal.
A qualitative content analysis was completed on whether a university has a special admission process, and if they do how the process is defined. At the conclusion of the analysis, data were categorized into three areas. The three categories included they do not admit special admits, they admit special admits based on specific criteria related to a combination of GPA and SAT/ACT requirements, and they do admit special admits based on a review through a designated committee. Of the officials from the 10 universities who participated in the research, only six responded with the requested information as it relates to their special admission process.

**RQ2: Are there significant differences between student-athletes who met the university’s admission criteria and specially admitted student-athletes on transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?**

RQ2 was answered by performing a series of independent sample \( t \)-tests. An independent \( t \)-test compares the difference in the means from two groups to determine if there is a significant difference statistically (University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA], n.d.). For the series of independent samples \( t \)-tests, the dependent variables or test variables were: (1) the transition from school to university, (2) academic intentions to quit, (3) degree commitment, (4) institutional commitment, (5) academic identity, (6) athletic identity, and (7) student staff engagement. The group variable or independent variable was if a student-athlete was or was not a specially admit to their university. The results of
the series of independent t-tests are shown in Table 4.10; the descriptive statistics for each scale by special admit status are represented in Table 4.11.

Table 4.10

Results of the Series of Independent Sample t-Test for Measured Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Transition from School to University</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic Intentions to Quit</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>0.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Degree Commitment</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Commitment</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Academic Identity</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Athletic Identity</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Student Staff Engagement</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics of Measured Variables by Special Admit Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Specially Admitted Student (n = 18)</th>
<th>Not Specially Admitted Student (n = 107)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Transition from School to University</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic Intentions to Quit</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Degree Commitment</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Commitment</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Academic Identity</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Athletic Identity</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Student Staff Engagement</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

The independent t-test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between specially admitted student-athletes and not specially admitted student-athletes with regards to transition from school to university, $t(123) = 2, p =$
.048. The descriptive statistics showed that students who were a special admitted reported a lower score on the transition from school to university \((M = 4.94, SD = 1.12)\) than those who were not specially admitted \((M = 5.40, SD = 0.86)\). These results suggest that student-athletes who are not specially admitted, find the university support more helpful as they transitioned from school to university than specially admitted student-athletes.

Independent \(t\)-test revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between specially admitted student-athletes and non-specially admitted student-athletes with regards to academic intentions to quit, \(t(121) = 1.59, p = .114\). Even though there were no statistically significant differences with intentions to quit between specially admitted student-athletes and non-special admitted student-athletes, it was noted there was a trend where specially admitted student-athletes reported slightly higher intentions to quit \((M = 1.44, SD = 0.54)\) then non-specially admitted student-athletes \((M = 1.24, SD = 0.49)\). These results suggest that there is no difference in intentions to quit based on if a student-athlete is a special admit or not a special admit.

Student-athletes, who were not specially admitted scored higher on the degree commitment scale, which in general asked students if they were committed to earning their degree. The independent \(t\)-test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between specially admitted student-athletes and not specially admitted student-athletes with degree commitment, \(t(122) = 3.21, p = .002\) The descriptive statistics showed that students who were specially admitted reported a lower score on the commitment to earning their degree \((M = 4.46, SD = 0.55)\) than those who were not specially admitted \((M = 4.81, SD = 0.41)\). These results suggest a student-athlete who is not a special admit reports to
be more committed to earning their degree than specially admitted student-athletes.

The independent samples t-test showed that there were significant differences between specially admitted student-athletes and those who were not specially admitted on institutional commitment, \( t(123) = 2.09, p = .038 \). Examination of descriptive statistics showed that students who were specially admitted reported a lesser commitment to their institution \( (M = 5.51, SD = 1.03) \) than those who were not specially admitted \( (M = 6.05, SD = 0.99) \). These results suggest that when a student-athlete is specially admitted to the university, they report lower commitment to their institution than student-athletes who are regularly admitted.

The independent t-test results showed that there were significant differences between specially admitted student-athletes and those who were not specially admitted on academic identity, \( t(123) = 2.58, p = .011 \). Examination of descriptive statistics showed that students who were specially admitted reported a weaker academic identity \( (M = 4.74, SD = 1.48) \) than those who were not specially admitted \( (M = 5.55, SD = 1.18) \). These results suggest when a student-athlete is specially admitted, have a weaker academic identity than student-athletes who are regularly admitted.

The independent t-test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between specially admitted student-athletes and regularly admitted student-athletes with regards to athletic identity, \( t(123) = 2.91, p = .004 \). The descriptive statistics showed that students who were specially admitted reported a weaker score on athletic identity \( (M = 5.25, SD = 1.31) \) than those who were not specially admitted \( (M = 6.05, SD = 1.04) \). These results suggest that specially
admitted student-athletes reported a weaker athletic identity compared to regularly admitted student-athletes.

Finally, independent *t*-test results showed that there were no significant differences between specially admitted student-athletes and those who were not specially admitted as it relates to scores on student staff engagement, *t*(123) = 1.97, *p* = .051. Examination of descriptive statistics showed that students who were specially admitted reported lower (*M* = 4.84, *SD* = 0.82) than those who were not specially admitted (*M* = 5.29, *SD* = 0.92). These results suggest that finding student staff engagement as helpful did not change if a student-athlete is or is not a special admit.

In sum, RQ2 was answered by conducting an independent *t*-test analysis of the data on how being a specially admitted or non-specially admitted student-athlete as how it relates to the transition from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. Through the data analysis, it was revealed there was significant differences between specially admitted student-athletes non-specially admitted student-athletes on each measured variable except for academic intentions to quit and student-staff engagement. With the transition from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and athletic identity, student-athletes who were a special admit scored lower than student-athletes who were regular admits. For academic intentions to quit and student-staff engagement, there were not significant differences between students admitted through the special admission process and those who are not.
RQ3: Is there a correlation between transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement?

RQ3 was answered using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient as a measurement of the strength between two variables of a linear association as data analysis. The data were analyzed in SPSS. Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the degree and direction of the linear relationships between each pair of the variables. The variables used were academic identity and athletic identity as it relates to the transition from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. A summary of the correlation matrix and the calculated correlation coefficients are shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measured Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Transition from School to University</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic Intentions to Quit</td>
<td>-.33***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Degree Commitment</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>-.43***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional Commitment</td>
<td>.61***</td>
<td>-.34***</td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Academic Identity</td>
<td>.45***</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>.39***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Athletic Identity</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Student Staff Engagement</td>
<td>.55***</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.18*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
There are several observations that are important to make in examining these correlations. First, academic intentions to quit was negatively correlated with all measure variables \((r\text{ ranged from -.22 to -.43, } p < .01)\). This implies that the lower scores of academic intentions to quit were associated with higher scores of degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. Academic intentions to quit had the strongest correlation with degree commitment of \(r(144) = .43, p < .001\). This suggests that student-athletes who report high intentions to quit also report low commitment to academic degree. Academic intentions to quit had the second strongest correlation with institutional commitment of \(r(145) = .34, p < .001\). This suggests that student-athletes who report intentions to quit also reported low institutional commitment. Academic intentions to quit and transition from school to university had a correlation of \(r(145) = .33, p < .001\). This implies that student-athletes who reported high on academic intentions to quit also reported low on finding transition from school to university as helpful. Second, except for academic intentions to leave, all other variables were correlated positively and significantly among each other \((r\text{ ranged from .18 to .61, } p < .05)\).

Degree commitment was positively correlated with all measure variables \((r\text{ ranged from .19 to .43, } p < .01)\). This implies that the higher scores of transition from school to university, degree commitment were associated with higher scores of intentions to quit, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. Degree commitment had the strongest correlation with academic identity of \(r(144) = .43, p < .001\). This suggests that student-athletes who report high commitment to earning their degree also report high academic identity.
Institutional commitment was positively correlated with all measure variables ($r$ ranged from .24 to .61, $p < .01$) except for academic intentions to quit which was negatively correlated ($r = -.34$). This implies that the higher scores of institutional commitment were associated with higher scores with transition from school to university, degree commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. Staff student engagement had the strongest correlation with academic identity of $r(144) = .42$, $p < .001$. This suggests that student-athletes who report high to being committed to their institution also report high engagement with staff.

Academic identity was positively correlated with all measure variables ($r$ ranged from .35 to .47, $p < .01$) except for academic intentions to quit which was negatively correlated ($r = -.22$). This implies that the higher scores of academic identity were associated with higher scores of transition from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. Academic identity had the strongest correlation with athletic identity of $r(140) = .42$, $p < .001$. This suggests that student-athletes who report a strong academic identity also report a strong athletic identity.

Athletic identity was positively correlated with all measure variables ($r$ ranged from .18 to .47, $p < .01$) except for academic intentions to quit which was negatively correlated ($r = -.24$). This implies that the higher scores of athletic identity were associated with higher scores of transition from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student staff engagement. Athletic identity had the strongest correlation with athletic identity of $r(140) = .47$, $p < .001$. This suggests that student-athletes who report a strong athletic identity also report a strong academic identity.
Student staff engagement was positively correlated with all measure variables ($r$ ranged from .18 to .55, $p < .01$) except for academic intentions to quit which was negatively correlated ($r = -.29$). This implies that the higher scores of student staff engagement were associated with higher scores of transition from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and athletic identity. Student staff engagement had the strongest correlation with transition from school to university of $r(140) = .55, p < .001$. This suggests that student-athletes who report stronger student staff engagement also report a stronger transition from school to university.

In sum, RQ3 was answered by conducting a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient as a measurement of the strength between two variables of a linear association as data analysis. Through the data analysis, it was revealed there were positive correlations with the variables of transition from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. With the academic intentions to quit was the only variable to have a negative impact on the rest of the variables of transition from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement.
RQ4: Are there significantly differences between specially and regularly admitted student-athlete in academic intentions to leave, degree commitment, and institutional commitment, after controlling for student-athletes’ perceptions of transition from high school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student-staff engagement?

RQ4 was addressed by conducting a series of ANCOVA analyses, separately for each dependent variable of academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, and institutional commitment. The covariates for each analysis were the transition from school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. Special admit status was the independent factor.

Table 4.13 shows the results for academic intentions to quit. Results indicated that after controlling for transition from school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement, there was no difference between specially admitted student-athletes as it relates to the transition from school to university. Results also showed that, after controlling whether student-athletes were a special admit, it was only transitioning from school to university that significantly predicted academic intentions to quit, $\beta = -.13$, $SE = .06$, $p = .033$, showing that student-athletes who scored higher on the transition engagement scale were less likely to quit university.

Table 4.14 shows the results for degree commitment. Results indicated that compared to regularly admitted student-athletes, student-athletes who were specially admitted reported lower degree commitment, $\beta = -.23$, $SE = .06$, $p = .033$, even after controlling for transition from school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. Results indicate that if a
student-athlete is not a special admit to a university, they have a stronger commitment to earning a degree, then if they were specially admitted. After controlling for whether student-athletes were a special admit or not, it was only the academic identity that emerged as a significant predictor of degree commitment $\beta = .11$, $SE = .04$, $p = .004$, suggesting that the stronger the academic identity the stronger the degree commitment.

Table 4.13

Parameter Estimates with Dependent Variable: Academic Intentions to Quit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>7.86</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.98-3.32</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition from School to University</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-2.16</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>-0.25-0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Identity</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td>-0.07-0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Identity</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-1.52</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>-0.16-0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Staff Engagement</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>-0.18-0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specially Admitted</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>-0.18-0.31</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.14

Parameter Estimates with Dependent Variable: Degree Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>13.14</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>3.21-4.36</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition from School to University</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>-0.01-0.19</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Identity</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.04-0.18</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Identity</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>0.651</td>
<td>-0.09-0.06</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Staff Engagement</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.793</td>
<td>-0.08-0.11</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specially Admitted</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-2.21</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>-0.44-0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, Table 4.15 shows the results for institutional commitment. Results indicated that no statistically significant differences emerged between student-athletes who were specially admitted and student-athletes who were not special admitted on institutional commitment, $\beta = -0.18$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = .421$, after controlling for transition from school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. This implies that student-athletes commitment to their institution is not defined if they are a special or regular admit. As well, after controlling whether student-athletes were specially admitted, it was only transitioning from school to university that significantly predicted institutional commitment, $\beta = 0.57$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, showing that student-athletes, who reported higher transition from school to university and student staff engagement, also reported higher institutional commitment.

Table 4.15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition from School to University</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Identity</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.205</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Identity</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>.890</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Staff Engagement</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specially Admitted</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sum, RQ4 was addressed by conducting a series of ANCOVAs for each dependent variable separately. After controlling for individual differences (i.e., transition from school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement) no significant differences emerged between specially
and regularly admitted student-athletes on their academic intentions to quit and institutional commitment; yet, specially admitted student-athletes reported lower degree commitment compared to their regularly admitted counterparts. As well, transition from school to university emerged as a positive predictor for academic intentions to quit and institutional commitment, with student-athletes who reported agreeing their transition from school to university related to being less likely to quit and more likely to be committed to an institution. For degree commitment, on the other hand, it was academic identity that was a significant variable, showing that student-athletes with stronger academic identity reported higher degree commitment.

**Summary**

In summary, this study was conducted to understand the similarities and differences between student-athletes admitted as regular and special admits to universities. The overall goal of this research was to provide information to help assist universities in their decision making when considering the available academic resources and admittance of student-athletes through a special admission process. Before the admission of too many special admit students with lower academic aspirations and commitment to earning a degree, universities need to understand what their current resources can support.

After conducting a preliminary analysis, the researcher answered RQ1 with a qualitative analysis, whereas RQs 2, 3, 4 were answered with quantitative analysis by conducting a series of independent samples $t$-tests, correlation analysis, and a series of ANCOVAs. Findings from research question one identified that some universities responded that they do not have a special admission process. The other universities who responded, identified they define a special admit as a student-athlete who does not meet the universities regular
admission process and will have to go through a process with a committee which is separate from the athletic department to decide admission. Results showed differences between the two groups of students on five of the seven measured variables of transitions from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement. Specifically, specially admitted student-athletes reported lower scores on these variables than their regularly admitted counterparts. Results from correlation analyses showed that all measured variables were significantly correlated with each other, but the direction of the correlations varied. Specifically, academic intentions to quit had a negative correlation with the other measured variables. This negative correlation suggests that the higher a student-athlete identifies with transitions from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, and student-staff engagement, the lower their intentions to quit are. All other variables, on the other hand, were positively correlated with each other. Finally, results from the series of ANCOVAs showed that, after controlling for individual differences (i.e., transition from school to university, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement), differences between specially and regularly admitted student-athletes emerged only for degree commitment. Specifically, specially admitted student-athletes reported lower degree commitment than their regularly admitted counterparts.

Additionally, academic identity emerged significant and positive in contributing to the explanation of the variance in degree commitment. In contrast, no differences were found between the two groups on intentions to quit and institutional commitment; but the transition from school to university emerged
positive and significant contributors to an explanation for the variances in these two outcomes. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of these findings.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study examined the similarities and differences between specially admitted and regularly admitted student-athletes as it relates to academic aspirations to the commitment to earning a degree. A positivist worldview contributed to the design of the study to reflect on a problem and assess possible causes that influence outcomes. The purpose of this mixed-methods nonexperimental research design was to study a problem through the identification and assessment of possible causes that influence outcomes. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, the implications from the study, identification of limitations, suggested recommendations for future research, and the presentation of concluding thoughts. The summary of findings will present how each of the four questions were addressed while connecting previous research. The implications from the study are how universities will utilize these data to form programming for student-athletes. Recommendations for future research identifies key areas where more information could support this study. The concluding thoughts will include a summary of thoughts on the study and the findings.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

A qualitative analysis was conducted to further understand how institutions define and student-athletes who are not admissible through a universities regular process. The findings support the initial research conducted by previous studies that the NCAA does not have a definition of what is considered a special admit (Ingram & Huffman, 2017; Winters & Gurney, 2012). Universities do not openly disclose if they have a special admission process or how they define a specially
admitted student-athlete. However, when institutions disclosed that they do have a special admission process, the definition given is that they are students who are not admissible through the university’s regular process. One study found that if university officials acknowledge they have a special admission process they define specially admitted student-athletes as individuals who are not regularly admissible (McCullough et al., 2019).

Of the respondents who described their institution's special admission processes, findings included that other university officials identified having a similar process. The special admission process was described as organized and established outside of the athletic department. As some respondents explained, in order to ensure that the athletic departments were not admitting students, outside individuals served on special admissions the committee to assist with the student-athlete special admission process.

Findings also identified that many universities do not have a special admission process and all student-athletes must be admitted through the regular process at the university. Having no special admission process for student-athletes lends to the idea that all students are admitted with similar academic backgrounds with the same opportunity to be successful in the classroom.

**Research Question 2**

Through an independent t-test, it was determined that there are significant differences between student-athletes specially admitted and those who are regularly admitted to the university. One study identified that specially admitted student-athletes struggle with more than academic preparation but have low academic self-confidence (Petty, 2014). Based on survey data, student-athletes who identified they were regularly admitted to their university, were found to have a higher relationship with the transition from school to university, commitment to
earning a degree, commitment to their institution, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. Even though the findings suggested there are significant differences between specially admitted student-athletes and regularly admitted student-athletes in most areas, there was no difference with intentions to quit.

Furthermore, the data indicate and support one study where it was found student-athletes who were not specially admitted have a higher overall academic engagement with institutional commitment and earning a degree (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Student-athletes who were not specially admitted revealed their academic and athletic identity as central to who they are as individuals. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018) found, that the two identities of athletic and academic are the dominant social contexts that develop student-athletes’ motivation and achievement in athletics and school. Overall, student-athletes, who were admitted through a special admission process, have lower academic aspirations when compared to student-athletes admitted through the regular admission process.

Research Question 3

Correlations were revealed for student-athletes between the transition from school to university, academic intentions to quit, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. First, academic intentions to quit was negatively correlated with the transition from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. This negative correlation implies that the higher a student-athlete identifies with the other variables, the lower their intentions of quitting become. Student-athletes who identified their commitment to earning a degree, positively correlated with the
variables of the transition from school to university, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement. The highest correlation with academic identity was athletic identity, which indicates that the more a student-athlete identifies with their academic identity, the stronger they identify with their athletic identity. One study found there is a correlation with academic and athletic identity (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018). Another reliable indicator of academic identity was institutional commitment. The findings suggest that the higher a student identifies with academic identity, the more committed they are to their intuition. The lowest correlation with academic identity was with student staff engagement, which suggests the level a student-athlete identifies with their academic identity does not correlate with how they feel engaged with staff.

The research found that the highest positive correlation amongst all variables was with the transition from school to university and institutional commitment. There is a subculture within the student-athlete population as it relates to their academic identity, commitment to their institution, and dedicated to their academics (Rubin & Moses, 2017). This positive correlation indicates that the more a student-athlete feels their transition from school to university was helpful, then the more committed they are to their institution. The next highest correlation amongst the variables was with the transition from school to university and student staff engagement. This relationship suggests as student-athletes relate with the transition from school to university, then the student-athlete feels the engagement with staff is helpful as well. Other variables of degree commitment, academic identity, and athletic identity reported positive correlations with the transition from school to university. As one study found there is more to student-athletes than athletic identity and they have positive connections with other areas
as it relates to being a university student (Hildenbrand et al., 2009). Research found that student-athletes have correlations more than just their athletic identity.

Findings indicate that as it relates to the variables of transition from school to university, degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic identity, athletic identity, and student staff engagement, the only negative correlation is how it relates to intentions to quit. Research has indicated that student-athletes admitted through a special admission process have a lower sense of academic and athletic identity as it relates to institution and degree commitment. One study found there are differences of academic aspirations between special and regular admits and support systems need to be established (Ferrell & De Crane, 2016). This indicates student-athletes who report a higher intention to quit, report a lower correlation in all other variables. Intentions to quit had the strongest correlation with institutional commitment, which suggests that student-athletes who report intentions to quit also reported low commitment to their institution.

**Research Question 4**

Controlling for whether a student-athlete was a special admit does impact academic identity, athletic identity, educational aspiration, predict institutional commitment, degree commitment, and intentions to quit. Student-athletes who are a regular admit to a university have a significantly stronger academic identity, which indicates a stronger commitment to earning a degree. One study discussed how regularly admitted student-athletes have higher academic aspirations than specially admitted student-athletes (Ferrell & De Crane, 2016). Student-athletes who were a special admit reported lower in areas of degree commitment, institutional commitment, academic aspirations, and intentions to quit than regularly admitted student-athletes. However, there is no difference between student-athletes who were specially or regularly admitted to their university as it
relates to the transition from school to university. Student-athletes admitted to the university through a special admissions process do not have the same high level of indicators on commitment and academic aspirations than regularly admitted student-athletes. Not having these same indicators suggests that universities should focus on the transitions for all student-athletes to provide support for success.

**Implications**

The results of this study may be used to influence how universities and athletic departments develop programming for specially admitted student-athletes. Based on the research findings, student-athletes admitted through a special admission process do differ when compared to student-athletes admitted through the regular admission process. In almost all variables, the differences identified were in terms of academic and athletic characteristic attributes. The research found specific variables that contributed to degree commitment, intentions to quit and institutional commitment as it relates to the transition from school to university and academic identity. This was found especially with degree commitment after controlling for other variables.

With the transition from school to university, the institutions need to implement resources and programming that would provide support to student-athletes, especially student-athletes admitted through the special admission process. Institutions could design and implement programming focused on providing specific support aimed exclusively at specially admitted student-athletes as they go through the transition from high school to college. Sharp and Sheilley (2008) identified the importance of establishing meaningful support systems that support the specific needs of student populations. By implementing mandatory programming before the start of the school year with the intent to present and provide resources for student-athletes to provide a solid support system. The
implications of these findings support what Hodes et al. (2015) found the importance of establishing necessary and reliable academic support systems for specially admitted student-athletes. The support system should focus on providing the opportunity of academic success as it relates to degree and institutional commitment with lowering intentions to quit.

Institutions could design and implement programming focused on increasing the academic identity of student-athletes who were specially admitted to their university. Findings from this research indicate that an increase of academic identity would likely persist, retain, and graduate student-athletes, which supports the findings of Winter (2009) who recognized when there is a disengagement of academic identity there is a disengagement to other academic goals. The findings of this research reinforced what Shuman (2009) and Yukhymenko (2012) found there is a correlation between academic motivation and identity with success. The implications of this research found that as a student-athlete identifies with their academic identity they are more committed to their institution and earning a degree. Hall E., Walkington, Shanahan, Ackley, Stewart (2018) recommended the use of mentorship within a developmental program supporting academic aspirations. As institutions develop programing of instilling a culture of academics, it should include the use of mentorship. Using mentors within a model of developing a stronger academic identity promotes a more positive outlook in doing well in school (Hurd, Sánchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012). As institutions develop programing with the consideration of mentors within their teams could lead to an increase of academic identity and relationship to academic success. The mentor program for student-athletes admitted through the special-admission process could provide an environment to instill a culture of
academics of academic identity and relationship to their athletic identity by using peers from their team as a mentor.

Based on the research findings, as student-athletes report a higher sense of academic identity, they report a higher relationship on other variables of identity and aspirations. The findings suggest that student-athletes who were specially admitted report weaker academic identity, athletic identity, degree commitment, while more likely to quit with less commitment to their institution. As shown in Table 5.1, these research findings imply that institutions should model and develop programming that increases the academic identity of specially admitted student-athletes through the transition from high school to college, with the use of peer mentorship. Increasing a student-athlete’s academic identity would have positive outcomes with all other variables of athletic identity, institutional commitment, and degree commitment.

Understanding that specially admitted student-athletes may have lower academic identity and commitment to earning a degree should assist universities in the development of programs in academic support for degree commitment. There are academic differences between regular and special admits with academic identity and student-athletes who are special admits need more academic support to be successful (Bell, 2009). When compared to non-student-athletes, Jeske et al. (2019) discovered there were significant differences of academic aspirations between student-athletes and non-student-athletes. Student-athletes attend a university for athletic intentions primarily; however, they still aspire to be academically successful. Goldrick-Rab (2010) recommended that universities need to have established academic support resources for all students, not just student-athletes; however, the resources need to address the needs of the subculture populations which exist on campus. The support of student-athletes who were
Table 5.1

**Implications to Possible Solutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Difference Between Admission Status with Transition from School to University</td>
<td>Programing focused on providing specific support</td>
<td>Importance of establishing meaningful support systems</td>
<td>Sharp and Sheilley (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory Programing to present and provide resources</td>
<td>Establishing necessary and reliable academic support systems</td>
<td>Hodes et al. (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase of Academic Identity Correlates with Academic Aspirations</td>
<td>Development of Mentorship Program within Team</td>
<td>Promotes Positive Outlook with Academic Identity</td>
<td>Hall E. et al. (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide Environment to Instill a Culture of Academic Success</td>
<td>Correlates academic Identity to athletic identity committed to degree.</td>
<td>Shuman (2009) and Yukhymenko (2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specially admitted should include programing through the transition from school to college and with the use of mentors to establish a culture of academic success and identity.

**Limitations of the Study**

At the conclusion of the study, the researcher identified a few limitations. The first limitation was finding institutions that agreed to participate in the study. With the researcher having spent over 15 years in the career field of intercollegiate athletics and academics for student-athletes, it was believed there were enough colleagues and trusted relationships who would agree to participate. However, even as a member in the field, there was a reluctance to participate in the study. The reluctance of participation confirms how challenging researching and gaining participation from student-athletes and athletic departments. Ingram and Huffman
(2017) explained how difficult it is to get universities to participate in the research regarding specially admitted student-athletes.

Along with universities either declining to participate or failing to respond to the researcher's request, another limitation was that universities revealed there is a policy that university will only participate in survey requests for research associated with their institution or from the NCAA. Another limitation of the study was within the athletic departments' agreement to participate. Some athletic departments declined to participate in the study with the awareness of survey fatigue due to the number of requests for student-athletes to participate in research studies. These first three limitations are related to the first step of having universities agree to participate in the study.

The second limitation was obtaining actual participants to respond to the survey. Once the IRB was approved, the researcher sent an email (Appendix C) to the universities who had agreed to participate, with the link to the survey to be sent out. However, the timing of this occurred right during finals week of the fall quarter/semester. The researcher believes student-athletes were not responding to emails and focused on completing the quarter/semester. When the researcher decided to request universities to administer the survey one additional time, they chose a time when the new quarter/semester had begun across NCAA institutions. By sending out the survey one additional time within a timeframe when participants were more likely to respond led to a higher response rate to the survey.

Finally, the last limitation is regarding the identification of specially admitted student-athletes. One of the questions on the survey requested participants to identify if they were a specially admitted student-athlete. The researcher felt it was essential to keep the student-athletes’ identities anonymous
to increase the sample size of universities. However, this meant the researcher relied on student-athletes self-identifying their university admittance process. As 15 participants responded they did not know if they were a special-admit indicates not understanding the meaning of special admit and the admission process. If the researcher had administered the survey in person, an explanation or description of the special admit category could have occurred. Another limitation of having the participant self-identify their admission status means the student-athlete may not have identified they were specially admitted based on social desirability and not wanting to have what may be considered a negative label associated with them. Grimm (2010) explained social desirability when there is a bias from an individual who chooses to answer with a response that is not reflective of what is true but rather what is a societal norm. The survey requested the student-athletes to self-identify if they were a special admit, a regular admit, or were not sure. Some student-athletes selected they were not sure of their admission status, which was identified as an additional limitation due to the small sample size of specially admitted student-athletes.

Limitations of the study have been presented, which include: the agreement of universities' participation, the timing of when the survey was sent out to participants, the participant's understanding of what it is to be a special admit student-athlete, and the participant self-identifying if they were specially admitted or not. Recognizing the limitations of the study while understanding the findings after the data analysis, the researcher identified recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Taking into consideration the limitations of the research, there are four recommendations for future research. The first recommendation would include
further exploration of understanding the similarities and differences of specially admitted student-athletes and their academic aspirations as they relate to degree commitment. The research could be expanded by conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with student-athletes who have been either regularly or specially admitted to Division-I universities. Through the incorporation of qualitative analysis, a better understanding of student-athletes’ academic aspirations to degree commitment could be discovered. The themes that developed in the qualitative study could better inform universities on how to support specially admitted student-athletes who may have lower academic aspirations.

The second recommendation for future research would be to continue with Division-I universities and request participation from additional universities to gather additional information to incorporate in subsequent data analysis. The request of additional universities would provide more robust participant numbers for specially and regularly admitted student-athletes. The third recommendation for future research would be to take the same study and apply it to Division-II and Division-III NCAA universities. Understanding academic aspirations as it relates to degree commitment at each NCAA division could lend to a more in-depth understanding of NCAA student-athletes. Expanding the research to each level of NCAA division would provide additional information about the definition of specially admitted student-athletes at each level of division, and how academic aspirations are similar and different for degree commitment.

The final recommendation for future research is understanding the resources in which specially admitted student-athletes find the most helpful, and the total quantity needed for effectiveness. Universities have established academic support departments for all student-athletes, but sometimes they are not necessarily large enough to support the needs of specially admitted student-
athletes. Huml et al. (2019) and Comeaux, (2015) found that the establishment of academic resources to support student-athletes who have been specially admitted as most essential to assist their academic success. As this research has indicated, there is a need to establish resources that directly help student-athletes with their academic aspirations and academic identity for more commitment to earning a degree and less likely to quit. This research supports similar findings from Huml et al. (2009), McCullough et al. (2019), and Ingram and Huffman (2017). Having a more in-depth understanding of the necessary needs of specially admitted student-athletes will lend to adequately develop the necessary programs for more targeted resources and perhaps staff.

**Conclusion**

This study began with an inquiry based on the researcher’s professional experiences with student-athletes in the collegiate setting. The study was designed to further understand how student-athletes admitted through a regular and special admission process can be similar or different. In order to further understand the population of special admit student-athletes, a large sampling from a variety of universities across Division-I institutions was petitioned to better understand the academic aspirations of student-athletes. Although the sample size of participants admitted through the special admission process was limited, the information gained from the data gives a representation of Division-I student-athletes specially admitted. The participants who identified as being specially admitted revealed a lower sense of academic aspirations than student-athletes admitted through the regular admission process. However, the admission status of student-athletes was similar to how they view transition support and staff engagement. As Winters and Gurney (2012) suggested with their research, administrators need to understand what specially admitted student-athletes need to be academically successful. This
research will help assist athletic departments in understanding additional support is needed for student-athletes admitted through a special admission process as they do report different academic aspirations as it relates to degree commitment.
REFERENCES


Jeske, D., Kress, J., & Vogel, B. (2019). Student-athletes vs. athlete-students: The academic success, campus involvement, and future goals of Division I student-athletes who were university bound compared to those who would not have attended a university had they not been an athlete. *The Sport Journal, 21.* Retrieved from https://thesportjournal.org/article/student-athletes-vs-athlete-students-the-academic-success-campus-involvement-and-future-goals-of-division-i-student-athletes-who-were-university-bound-compared-to-those-who-would-not-have-attended/


APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Study of Student-Athlete Aspirations

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Megan O’Quin, a doctoral student at California State University, Fresno.

**Purpose:** To understand your aspirations as Division-I student-athletes in the hopes of getting a better understanding of your dual identities of student and athlete.

**Time:** Approximately 10 minutes for survey completion.

**Risks:** Not greater than those encountered in your daily work as a student.

**Benefits:** Information gained will inform best practices in supporting student-athletes at Division-I universities. However, there may not be an immediate or direct benefit to you as an individual.

**Data use and confidentiality:** Information from this survey will be held in confidence and you will not be personally identified. Results will be used in publications and presentations in a manner that does not reveal your identity.

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions about this study, please contact

Megan O’Quin (Principal Investigator) meganoquin@mail.fresnostate.edu

Dr. Jennifer Watson (Faculty Supervisor) jwatson@mail.fresnostate.edu

**By providing responses below you are indicating your agreement to participate in this study.**

---

**Transition from School to University**

**Directions:** You are presented with a list of statements and you are asked to indicate responses to them. There are no right or wrong answers. All answers are right. Please indicate to what extent do you agree with each of these statements. Select answers that best represent your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The orientation programs helped me feel like I belong to this university.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The university orientation programs helped get me off to a good start.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I really like being a university student.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I was given helpful advice when choosing my subjects/units</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I was satisfied with the range of subjects/units from which I could choose this year.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. University has lived up to my expectations.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am satisfied with the subject choices I made this year.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Academic Intentions

**Directions:** You are presented with a list of statements and you are asked to indicate responses to them. There are no right or wrong answers. All answers are right. Please indicate to what extent do you agree with each of these statements. Select answers that best represent your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. I do not expect to leave college before my studies are completed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am quite likely to quit college before my studies are finished.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am quite likely to leave college voluntarily before completing my studies.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Directions:** You are presented with a list of statements and you are asked to indicate responses to them. There are no right or wrong answers. All answers are right. Please indicate to what extent do you agree with each of these statements. Select answers that best represent your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Very Weak</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Neither weak or strong</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Very Strong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. At this moment in time, how strong would you say your commitment is to earn a college degree, here or elsewhere?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. At this moment in time, how certain are that you will earn a college degree?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How strong is your intention to persist in your pursuit of degree, here or elsewhere?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Slightly agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. It is important for me to graduate from this university.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I am confident I made the right decision in choosing to attend this university.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. It is likely I will register at this university next semester/quarter.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Doing well at this university is important to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. It is not important to me to graduate from this university.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Academic and Athletic Identity

Directions: Imagine that the figure below is a diagram of you and characteristics that are central to your sense of who you are as a person.

Please think about this figure as you rate the items below. Most people will use a variety of answers, rating some qualities as very central and others as not central to their sense of self. To get a good idea of how you will compare and rate the different qualities, please read all of the items before you go back to rate each of them.

Please indicate how central to your sense of who you really are is each of the following characteristics. If a quality seems good or desirable to you but is not an important part of who you are, you should answer “Not at all central to who I really am.” (1). Circle the response that best represents your opinion about each characteristics being central to who you are.

How central to your sense of who you really are is each of these characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Not central</th>
<th>Slightly central</th>
<th>Somewhat central</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Very central</th>
<th>Extremely central</th>
<th>The central core to who I really am</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. Being a capable student.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Being satisfied with my academic work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Doing well in school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Getting good grades.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Having high GPA.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Being a capable athlete.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Being a good athlete.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Being athletic.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Being proud to be an athlete.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Being satisfied with my athletic achievements.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Doing well during sport competitions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Academic Support

**Directions:** You are presented with a list of statements and you are asked to indicate responses to them. There are no right or wrong answers. All answers are right. Please indicate to what extent do you agree with each of these statements. Select answers that best represent your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Staff make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Most academic staff take an interest in my progress.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The teaching staff are good at explaining things.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teaching staff usually give helpful feedback on my progress.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Staff try hard to make the subjects interesting.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Most of the academic staff are approachable.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Staff are usually available to discuss my work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Staff are enthusiastic about the subjects they teach.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. One-to-one consultations with teaching staff are useful.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I feel confident that at least one of my teachers knows my name.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Staff made it clear from the start what they expect from students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Academic and Sport Background

1. Your main sport (please specify):  
   - ___Yes, full
   - ___Yes, partial
   - ___No

2. Do you have an athletic scholarship:  
   - ___Yes
   - ___No
   - ___Other

3. Your gender:  
   - ___Male
   - ___Female
   - ___Other

4. Academic year at the university:  
   - ___Freshman
   - ___Sophomore
   - ___Junior
   - ___Senior
   - ___Graduate Student

5. Were you a specially admitted student:  
   - ___Yes
   - ___No
   - ___Do not know

6. What is your position on the team:  
   - ___Starter
   - ___Contributor
   - ___Does not participate
   - ___Not Eligible to Play

7. Do you intend to go pro:  
   - ___Yes
   - ___Maybe
   - ___No
APPENDIX B: EMAIL FOR REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE

2/22/2020

Fresno State Mail - Request for Participation in Research

Megan OQuin <meganquinn@mail.fresnostate.edu>

Request for Participation in Research
1 message

Megan OQuin <meganquinn@mail.fresnostate.edu> To: ccromhaw2@elon.edu

Wed, Nov 6, 2019 at 2:20 PM

Dear Colleague,

I am requesting your university to participate in a survey-based research study led by myself, a Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership at Fresno State. The research I am conducting is on Division-I student-athletes to have a better understanding of the similarities and differences of academic aspirations as it relates to regular and specially admitted student-athletes.

For the research, if you agree to participate, I will request that someone from your staff send the link to an online survey for your student-athletes to participate. The response will be voluntary and the information received will be kept highly confidential. At this point, I am simply collecting information now to prepare for the IRB proposal for my institution. Part of this research protocol is to reach out to universities for approval to participate in the research, so that I may then follow through with their institution's IRB process if needed.

As an individual who has worked in the profession of student-athlete academics for over 16 years, I understand the seriousness of keeping the information confidential. The data that is collected and the schools who participate will not be identified in my findings.

I hope you consider having your university participate in this research. At the conclusion of my research, if you would like, I will provide you my findings. If you have any questions please let me know.

Thank you for your time,

Megan OQuin
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership

The content of this email is confidential and intended for the recipient specified in message only. It is strictly forbidden to share any part of this message with any third party, without the written consent of the sender. If you received this message by mistake, please reply to this message and follow with its deletion, so that we can ensure such a mistake does not occur in the future.
APPENDIX C: EMAIL FOR UNIVERSITIES TO SEND TO STUDENTS

Good Afternoon,

Thank you again for agreeing to send out the survey link to your student-athletes to have the opportunity to participate in the study. Recently, I have been approved by the IRB to move forward with the research. Below is the information I would request you send to your student-athletes. If you or any of your student-athletes have questions, please let me know.

Thank you again,
Megan

Dear Student-Athlete,

I am inviting you to participate in a doctoral study designed to gain a better understanding of academic aspirations as it relates to degree commitment among student-athletes. The survey contains a series of questions, and you are asked to answer each question as it relates to your own viewpoints of what is being asked.

This survey is anonymous and voluntary and should take approximately 10 minutes of your time. Your answers will allow me to gain a better understanding of student-athlete academic aspirations that may be used to propose programming and academic resources to improve student-athlete academic success.

Please share with us your opinions by following this link: Student-Athlete Survey

Thank you for your time in completing this survey.

Sincerely,

Megan O’Quin
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership

The content of this email is confidential and intended for the recipient specified in the message only. It is strictly forbidden to share any part of this message with any third party, without the written consent of the sender. If you receive this message by mistake, please reply to this message and follow its deletion, as that we can ensure such a mistake does not occur in the future.
Participation in Research

1 message

Megan OQuin <meganquin@mail.fresnostate.edu>

To:

Good Afternoon,

I hope this email finds you well and your quarter/semester is going great!

Thank you for agreeing to invite your student-athletes to participate in my doctoral research on academic aspirations amongst student-athletes. As the student-athletes are responding to the survey I am requesting if you could respond to questions regarding how your university identifies special admits. Also like the student-athletes, your responses will be anonymous, and your university will not be identified and be kept confidential.

The questions are:

Does your institution have a special admission process?

If they do, how does your university identify special admits?

Again, thank you for assisting me in my research.

Sincerely,

Megan OQuin

Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership

The content of this email is confidential and intended for the recipient specified in the message only. It is strictly forbidden to show any part of this message with any third party, without the written consent of the sender. If you received this message by mistake, please reply to this message and follow with its deletion, so that we can ensure such a mistake does not occur in the future.
Good Afternoon,

I hope this email finds you well and the start of the quarter/semester is going great!

Thank you for agreeing to invite your student-athletes to participate in my doctoral research on academic aspirations amongst student-athletes. I am hoping you can help me out by forwarding the following email and survey link to your student-athletes again. I believe the reason is that the timing wasn’t right the first time, and few responded.

Thank you for assisting me in my research.

Sincerely,

Megan O’Quin

Dear Student-Athlete,

If you haven’t responded yet to the following survey, I would greatly appreciate it if you could take some time and answer a few questions on academic aspirations. Your responses will be very helpful for this study and future student-athletes. All of the responses are anonymous, and the survey should take you less than 10 minutes.

Survey Link: https://fresnostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0TF9uLqsrKQ52R

Thank you for your time,

Megan O’Quin

Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership

The content of this email is confidential and intended for the recipient specified in message only. It is strictly forbidden to share any part of this message with any third party, without the written consent of the sender. If you received this message by mistake, please reply to this message and follow with its deletion, so that we can ensure such a mistake does not occur in the future.

On Tue, Dec 10, 2019 at 6:19 AM Megan OQuin <meganquinn@mail.fresnostate.edu> wrote:

Good Morning,

Thank you again for agreeing to send out the survey link to your student-athletes to have the opportunity to participate in the study. Recently I have been approved by the IRB to move forward with the research. Below is the information I would request you send to your student-athletes. If you or any of your student-athletes have questions, please let me know.

Thank you again,

Megan

Dear Student-Athlete,
Fresno State

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If the submission is based upon work that has been sponsored or supported by an agency or organization other than Fresno State, you represent that you have fulfilled any right of review or other obligations required by such contract or agreement.

Fresno State will clearly identify your name as the author or owner of the submission and will not make any alteration, other than as allowed by this license, to your submission. By typing your name and date in the fields below, you indicate your agreement to the terms of this use. Publish/embargo options (type X in one of the boxes).

- [X] Make my thesis or dissertation available to the Fresno State Digital Repository immediately upon submission.

- [ ] Embargo my thesis or dissertation for a period of 2 years from date of graduation. After 2 years, I understand that my work will automatically become part of the university’s public institutional repository unless I choose to renew this embargo here:
  fsdr-discuss@csufresno.edu

- [ ] Embargo my thesis or dissertation for a period of 5 years from date of graduation. After 5 years, I understand that my work will automatically become part of the university’s public institutional repository unless I choose to renew this embargo here:
  fsdr-discuss@csufresno.edu

Megan O'Quin

Type full name as it appears on submission

June 5, 2020

Date