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## *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*

### **The Relationship of Residence to Academic Performance in NCAA Division I Freshman Athletes**

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*Numerous studies have been completed examining academic ability of student athletes. Since the mid 1980s, the NCAA has emphasized the importance of academics and mandated more stringent requirements for participation in intercollegiate athletics. These initial-eligibility standards have been successful in increasing overall graduation rates of student-athletes, but a number of concerns remain. The purpose of this study was to determine if a NCAA Division-I freshman student athlete's place of residence on campus, as opposed to off campus, during his/her freshman year had a statistically significant relationship to academic performance. The participants of this study (N = 205) were surveyed individually to determine their place of residence and preference of residence during their freshman year. Academic performance at the end of the freshman year was obtained via the school's database of academic records (Access Banner). Based on the results of this study, it was concluded that living in an on campus or off campus environment had no statistical relationship with how the NCAA D-I freshman student athletes performed academically. There were however, significant differences between gender. The findings warrant further discussion and continued research.*

### **Introduction**

**D**uring the early 1980s, increased controversy arose about the perceived lack of academic preparation and educational achievement of college student athletes (Benson, 1994). The most recent attempt to combat this problem occurred in 2004 when the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) developed an academic reform program called the Academic

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Performance Rate (APR). Despite the APR, lack of academic preparation and educational achievement is still an issue at the forefront of athletic departments across the United States and remains an important focus for the NCAA, and athletic administrators, as well as future athletes beginning their collegiate careers.

During the 2006-2007 school year, approximately 75,000 student athletes participated in NCAA Division I (NCAA D-I) competitions (NCAA, 2009a). A recent survey of 21,000 NCAA (this includes Division I, Division I-AA, Division II, and Division III) athletes reported that most athletes spent close to 40 hours per week participating in their sports; D-I football players reported spending 44.8 hours a week on their sport (Wolverton, 2008), and most athletes stated they spent more time on their sport than on their academic work (Wieberg, 2008). Statistics from this survey indicate that NCAA D-I sports like football, basketball, softball, and baseball all require more than 40 hours of participation a week (Wolverton, 2008). These statistics suggest that participation in a NCAA D-I sport may create more of an academic detachment for freshman student athletes than incoming freshman who are not involved in university athletics. This detachment could be related to many issues including: expectations of coaches, fatigue, pressures of the games, difficult academic work, ethnic background, gender, college preparation, socio economic status and place of residence. The purpose of this study was to determine if a NCAA D-I freshman student athlete's place of residence on campus, as opposed to off campus, during his/her freshman year had a statistically significant relationship to academic performance. This study also investigated the differences in residence and academic performance between gender and ethnicity of the NCAA D-I student athletes.

The design of this study was unique in nature. Little information has been collected on National Collegiate Athletic Association D-I freshman student athletes' academic performance in relation to their place of residency. In recent years, schools across the country have implemented a requirement that freshman student athletes live on campus their freshman year (based on a web search of selected NCAA D-I schools). Utah State University, a primarily residential campus, is considering this option to help their athletes perform better in the classroom (for example 2004-2005 graduation rate for football players was 55% compared to the general student body graduation rate of 73%) as well as improve retention.

### *Residency and Academic Achievement*

Currently, there are two main housing options offered to Utah State University NCAA D-I freshman student athletes. The options include: on-campus residence halls (i.e., living learning centers, regular student dormitories) and off-campus commuter housing. In completing a thorough literature review, we are unaware of any published research relating a freshman student athlete's place of residence to his/her academic performance. The literature review in this section was related to the general freshman student population, not specifically NCAA D-I freshman student athletes.

Numerous studies have been completed on the academic achievement of entering freshman students living on campus. Past research examining the general student population indicates that living on campus can positively impact retention, graduation rates, and academic performance (Astin, 1973; Riker, 1993; Thompson, Samiratedu, & Rafter, 1993). Researchers have shown that residence halls were a powerful vehicle for incorporating students into college life (Pike, Schroader, & Berry, 1997). Blimling (1989) examined the effects of on-campus versus off-campus living on general student academic performance, academic progress, and retention

revealed that living on-campus positively affected academic performance. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicated that living on campus can positively impact retention and graduation rates for the general student population.

The University of California at Irvine Office of Research and Evaluation (2007) reported that living on campus promoted better social integration which impacted retention rates of freshman college students. Astin (1993) found that when compared with commuter students, those living on campus reported more satisfaction with their overall college experience. Astin also discussed the direct benefits of living on campus that included: leadership skills, interpersonal abilities, job skills, and cultural awareness. Astin measured three residency options for college students: at home, in a college residence hall, and in a private room or apartment. The mitigating factor was the distance of the residence from the university. His findings suggested that the most direct effects on students' academic performance were associated with living at home and the distance from home to the university. The greater distance students had to travel from their residence to the university had a negative effect on attainment of a bachelor's degree, satisfaction with faculty, and their willingness to continue at the same university.

A student's experience and support system within a residential environment influences first year student learning and academic success (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The place of residence of first-year students can significantly influence the overall quality of their collegiate experience. According to Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, and Associates (2005), the place of residence will influence the likelihood of making an easy transition into the campus environment, succeeding academically, matriculating through to graduation, and having a fulfilling educational experience. Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling (1994) compared on-campus and off-campus students and found on-campus students had a significantly higher level of peer support, greater academic success and social experiences, and greater satisfaction and commitment to their overall educational experience.

Conversely, the research concerning the effects of off campus living on achievement provided mixed results. Blimling (1989) found that residence hall students have a slight grade advantage over commuter students. However, within the study, Blimling discussed how the results may not be generalized to all universities because of the small number of institutions included in the study. The mixed results were also prevalent in the literature because of the wide variety of housing options that were offered to students. Blimling (1993) discussed three studies reporting that students who lived in freshman only halls performed better academically than those assigned to a hall with a combination of students (i.e., all grade levels). Other studies controlling for self selection factors indicated that residence hall students obtained significantly better grade point averages than off-campus students (Blimling & Alshuler, 1996; Welty, 1976).

The educational and social benefits of living on-campus during a student's freshman year were well-documented (Blimling, 1989; Chickering, 1974; Inkelas, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Contrary to on-campus housing, students who lived off-campus during their freshman year were often at a disadvantage from their peers (Upcraft et al., 2005). Students living off-campus often have family and work responsibilities while attending school and do not have the luxury of living on-campus and attending the institution full time (Upcraft et al.). Off-campus students were more likely to be first-generation and low-income students, both of which have been found to pose a number of challenges to a student's ability to persist to graduation (Strange, 1999).

The differences in personal development outcomes exhibited by on campus and off campus students have been credited in part to the limited number of opportunities off campus

students have to interact with new acquaintances that have different attitudes, values, and social skills (Kuh et al., 1991). Peer groups of precollege acquaintances or new friends who resist adapting to challenges inherent in the university environment can inhibit a student's academic and social integration into the university community, a situation that was often associated with dissatisfaction, poor academic performance, and departure from the university (Tinto, 1987).

Demands and professional career aspirations associated with college sports can cause failure because of the lack of balance between academics and athletics (Adler & Adler, 1991). When dealing with athletes, Adler and Adler (1991) established that athletes who manage to balance their athletic and academic lives usually had an encouraging group of parents and friends who actively support academic success within the university.

### *Academic Achievement and Gender*

An accumulation of research has been completed analyzing the different intellectual abilities between gender in academia. When studying the differences between an athlete's gender and academic performance, the literature tends to find larger gaps in smaller, hand selected populations. Female student athletes traditionally graduate at a much higher rate than their male counterparts (Benson, 1991). Overall, female student athletes focus more on graduating from college, do not aspire to professional sports careers, and see college athletics as more of an extracurricular activity than their male counterparts. According to Coakley (2008) the odds for women to become a professional in some sports are zero because the lack of women's events, teams, or leagues. Miracle and Rees (1994) found that the female athletes who make it into professional athletics usually average a 5-year career.

When analyzing data between genders, females tend to dominate academic performances. Female student athletes were more likely to come from the top 25% of their high school class, and perform better than males on the ACT particularly between scores of 25-30 (40% to 28.4%) and scores between 31-36 (7.2% to 1.9%) (Kane, Leo, & Holleran, 2008). The fact that female student athletes routinely outperform their male counterparts may be attributed to the fact that many males over-identify with and invest more time and effort into their athletic role often at the expense of their academics (Melendez, 2007).

In a study completed by Meyer (1990) female athletes at a large NCAA D-I university were interviewed and evaluated on their university expectations and experiences. Meyer's study focuses on female student athletes personal experiences within academics and athletics and compared the female athletes to male athletes interviewed in Adler and Adler's study (1985). The participants in the study were 10 female basketball players and 13 female volleyball players. The results of this study indicated the majority of the female athletes felt idealistic about their future academic experiences when entering the college environment. Female student athletes' views of education were more optimistic than the male athletes who tend to lose interest after one year as in Adler and Adler's study. Meyer's findings also concluded that a more positive environment existed among the women; they encouraged each other more academically than males, took active roles in course selection and program development, and frowned upon special consideration from professors and administrators because of their athletic abilities. Conversely, the men abandoned their idealistic attitudes toward academics and were content to exist in a university environment that stressed performance in the sports arena over performance in the classroom.

### *Academic Achievement and Ethnicity*

Ethnicity is a variable likely to influence a student's educational achievement and also what sport he or she participates in. The literature on student athletes of different ethnicities mainly focuses on African American athletes. This is because African American athletes still constitute the largest portion of minorities to participate in NCAA D-I athletics (NCAA Student Athlete Ethnicity Report, 2009). The NCAA Student Athlete Ethnicity Report (2009a) breaks down their studies of ethnicity by looking at American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic and White ethnic groups. However, the current research involving college student athletes seldom analyzes Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans because of the small number of participants (a factor in our study). References used throughout the remaining section of the literature review, therefore will be predominantly based upon the African American student athlete.

The challenges created by racial and ethnic diversity are among the most important issues institutions of higher education face as they work and compete against each other in athletics and academics. The 2007-2008 statistics revealed increased diversity among different ethnic student athletes participating in Division I sports (NCAA, 2009a). Hence, the augmented attention of athletic departments and universities are needed to understand and address the differences in academic success between ethnic groups.

During the 2003-2004 year, the African American male NCAA D-I athletic participation rate was 24.6%. The participation rate of white student athletes was 62.6% percent, Latinos 3.6%, Asian men, 1.6%, and 7.6% other. Women athletes differ in white participants with 70.6%, African Americans 14.9%, Latinas 3.3%, Asian women 2.1% and 9.1% other (Lapchick, 2006). These participation gaps between ethnicities have shown a change to a more diverse population of athletes according to 2008-2009 NCAA statistics on ethnicity.

Athletes of different ethnic backgrounds spend their college time much like any other athlete although social and academic integration, performance pressure in their sport, racism and sexism on campus may present issues (Person & LeNoir, 1997). The main struggle for minority athletes was in their ability to maintain a positive academic performance without affecting their athletic performance and commitments to their sport. Some minority groups, specifically African American males, suffer from an educational system that was not developed optimally for different ethnic backgrounds (Sedlecek, 2004).

## **Methods**

To obtain the data needed for the study, each athlete signed an informed consent form in regard to his/her freshman year experience prior to completing the survey for this study. Students' academic records were accessed by the researcher using USU's Banner System (i.e., an administrative software package). Information regarding the student athlete's place of residence, preference of residence, ethnicity, gender, and age during their freshman year was collected from the survey instrument.

Data were collected during the spring, summer, and fall semesters of 2009 from freshman student athletes matriculating at the institution during the academic years of 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009. The researcher used these time periods in order to include all athletes who entered Utah State University between the fall of 2005 and the fall of 2008.

The population for this study included qualifying undergraduate student athletes who enrolled as a first time freshman at Utah State University. This includes a student athlete who

entered with advanced placement courses (college credits earned before graduation from high school). The first time student definition excludes transfer students. The eligible population for this study included 210 total student athletes, 107 male and 103 female. The sample used ( $N = 205$ ) 104 male and 101 female completed the survey instrument. The researcher was able to contact the five remaining student athletes, who were not included in this study, to administer the survey but was unable to actually meet with the athletes due to time conflicts.

All data gathered from the survey, along with the collection of freshman year GPA, were analyzed with the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17.0.

The statistical analyses for this research project consisted of descriptive statistics, a point biserial correlation (In SPSS, point biserial correlation is analyzed the same as Pearson product-moment correlation), ANOVA's and a t-test to further analyze the effects of gender and race to academic performance and place of residence.

## Results/Discussion

The sample consisted of 205 participants; the majority of the respondents were men (51%) and Caucasian (66%) with an average age of 18.3 years ( $SD = 0.91$ ). The student athletes who resided on campus their freshman year accounted for 79% of the surveyed individuals while the off campus student athletes accounted for 21%. The student athletes preferred on campus housing their freshman year (58.5%) in comparison to off campus housing (41.5%) which may have affected their state of mind regarding academic success. A complete list of the demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - *Student Athlete Population Profile/Frequencies*

	Frequencies	Percent
Population	205	100
Gender		
Male	104	50.7
Female	101	49.3
Race		
Caucasian	135	65.9
African American	36	17.6
Other	34	10.7
Residency		
On Campus	161	78.5
Off Campus	44	21.5
Preference of Housing		
On Campus	120	58.5
Off Campus	85	41.5

The result of the relationship between residence and academic performance appears in Table 2 as the correlation coefficient for residence. The actual computed  $r$ -value of .11 had a two-tailed probability level of .12 and was not significant. Since the computed value in SPSS.17.0 was less than that required for significance, the data supported the fact that there is no statistical relationship between residency and academic performance.

Table 2 - *Correlation Coefficient Between Residence and Academic Performance*

	$r$	$p$	$N$
Correlation coefficient	0.11	0.12	205

The independent  $t$ -test verified on campus students averaged a lower GPA ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ) than those who lived off campus ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD 0.57$ ). There was no significant difference between the two groups (on and off campus housing) and the dependent variable (GPA)  $t(203) = 1.57$   $p = 0.12$ . A lesser number of off campus students (44) versus on campus students (161) may have affected the outcome of the  $t$ -test averages.

By further disaggregating the data, an ANOVA was performed in order to examine the interaction between gender and residence. The effect of gender and residence on academic performance is shown in Table 3.



Table 3 - *GPA Scores (mean, SD) and ANOVA Results for the effect of Residence, and Gender*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>
Gender	-----	-----	11.575	.001*	205
Gender * Residency	-----	-----	5.6666	.018**	205
<i>Male</i>					
<i>On Campus</i>	2.71	.574	----	----	77
<i>Off Campus</i>	3.12	.551	----	----	27
<i>Overall</i>	2.92	.593	----	----	104
<i>Female</i>					
<i>On Campus</i>	3.26	.507	----	----	84
<i>Off Campus</i>	3.22	.608	----	----	17
<i>Overall</i>	3.24	.523	----	----	101

\*  $p < .001$ \*\*  $p < .05$ 

The ANOVA revealed that GPA scores for the male athletes were 11% lower than scores for the female athletes (Table 3). The significant interactions (Table 3) indicated that female GPA scores for on and off campus were not different; the males who lived off campus had higher GPA scores than males living on campus (Table 3).

Follow-up multiple comparisons (Tukey) were performed to identify possible differences between ethnic groups, their residence, and academic performance. The results when analyzing ethnic differences in academic performance by on or off campus are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 - *GPA Scores (mean, SD) and ANOVA Results for the effect of Residence, and Ethnicity*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>
Ethnicity	-----	-----	9.390	.096	205
Ethnicity*Residency	-----	-----	.585	.558	205
White Caucasian					
On Campus	3.20	0.55	-----	-----	101
Off Campus	3.23	0.48	-----	-----	34
Total	3.21	0.53	-----	-----	135
Black African American					
On Campus	2.50	0.50	-----	-----	34
Off Campus	2.97	0.52	-----	-----	2
Total	2.52	0.50	-----	-----	36
Other					
On Campus	2.88	0.56	-----	-----	26
Off Campus	2.91	0.88	-----	-----	8
Total	2.88	0.63	-----	-----	34

The ANOVA revealed that there were no statistical differences between academic performance, residence and ethnicity (Table 4). Please note the “other” category included all other ethnic backgrounds of student athletes at Utah State (i.e., Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native American etc.) excluding White Caucasian and Black African Americans. The original analysis separated these ethnicities but found the number of individuals provided would not allow for statistical examination. However, had the “other” category been eluded, there may have been a statistically significant difference between the White Caucasians and Black African Americans’ GPA (i.e., 3.21 for White Caucasians to 2.52 for Black African American GPA’s) in relation to residence.

Thus, the key results of the study are; no statistical significance between the total population of NCAA D-I freshman student athletes residence and academic performance, however there was a statistically significant difference between gender, place of residence and academic performance.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout a collegiate career, athletes prepare their bodies and minds to meet the challenges of competition as well as their academic requirements. In large and small institutions alike, the demands for athletic performance can place academics as a secondary component of a student athlete’s college experience. This growing gap between college athletics and educational values is a major, unavoidable issue (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). The future of university athletics must require athletes, parents, coaches, and administrators to work together in providing the proper living and learning environment to meliorate a student athlete’s success. Based on the

results of this study, it was concluded that living in an on campus or off campus environment had no statistical relationship with how the total population of NCAA D-I freshman student athletes performed academically. However, there were differences between subgroups.

### *Limitations*

While we do believe this study adds to the limited research related to residence and student athletes' academic achievement, it does have certain limitations. This study was limited to student athletes within Utah State University. The uniqueness of Utah State University does not allow the study to be representative of all NCAA D-I athletes. Vigilance must be exercised in interpreting the results and applying the findings to other institutions. The findings of this study were to assist in providing a guideline or framework for incoming freshman student athletes at Utah State University and help improve the quality of education they receive.

A student athlete's experiences, such as but not limited to the use of illegal substances or influences of their peer relationships at Utah State, might impinge the student's academic performance. While the sample sizes were adequate for the type of statistical analyses used in the study, they do limit the power. The timeframe of the study examined levels of effort and achievement during the athlete's freshman year of college and does not take into consideration the student athlete's academic major (i.e., business, engineering, interdisciplinary studies) final undergraduate academic achievement, or the influence that the university may have on the athlete during this timeframe. Additional limitations included a freshman student athlete's athletic scholarship and the amount of money certain athletes received related to the affect the monetary value had on their lifestyle. However, this data was not available; therefore we cannot comment on any differences. The ability to separate data by different NCAA sports presented a problem because the sample sizes for off campus residence in each sport were not large enough to make a valid statistical analysis. Finally, the literature review shows that student academic performance was always dependent on a variety of factors; this studies result suggests residence is one of those factors.

Based on the findings of this study, the following factors may have influenced the outcome of residence not having a relationship to academic performance: frequently off campus students live with fewer people (i.e., apartments or houses which accommodate no more than three to four individuals) which could correlate to fewer distractions, students who live off-campus are more likely to have a choice in their roommates (i.e., roommate choice is usually someone with homogenous lifestyle) and in select instances (while not common) student athletes who live off campus could reside with their parents which could facilitate a better learning environment. Further research could reveal which of these factors have the most relevance thus informing university administrators of potential policies which could augment living situations for student athletes. Research suggesting reasons why on or off campus residence promotes enhanced academic performance were non-existent in the literature.

Although there was no statistical significance between residence and GPA, the apparent value of the mean academic GPA's presented by the t-test results could be valuable information to administrators, coaches, and parents. The NCAA (2009b) Bylaw 14.4.3.3 Fulfillment of Minimum Grade-Point Average Requirements states:

“A student-athlete who is entering his or her second year of collegiate enrollment shall present a cumulative minimum grade-point average (based on a maximum 4.000) that

equals at least 90 percent of the institution's overall cumulative grade-point average required for graduation." (p. 151)

Utah State University's minimum requirement to graduate is a cumulative 2.0 GPA which means student athletes must maintain a 1.9 GPA to remain eligible after their first year of competition. In this study, the off campus freshman student athletes GPA's were two-tenths higher than the on campus freshman student athletes GPA. An example where this difference could be important is as follows; an athlete is below the minimum requirement in order to be eligible to compete in competition (1.75 GPA), the athlete lives on campus and is distracted by the plethora of students who are making noise and interrupting his/her ability to complete assigned schoolwork. According to this research, if the student had lived off campus with a roommate he was comfortable with, he may have increased his GPA by the two tenths (1.95) making him academically eligible. This suggestion is especially important when analyzing the differences between gender and could benefit male athletes tremendously. When taking the GPA into account, it appears that the differences could be important to coaches, administrators, parents, and athletes. Thus, an athlete who resides off campus may have a better chance of maintaining their academic eligibility their freshman year.

One reason off campus students were more successful academically could be attributed to the influence of the coaching staff in whether they will continue to remain off campus if grades start to plummet. To support this situation, Utah State's Women's Basketball Program requires maintaining a certain GPA in order to live off campus. However, the female basketball players are not allowed to live off campus their freshman year. Once the athlete's GPA reaches a 3.0, the athlete is permitted to move into off campus housing. If the GPA falls below the "in house" rule, the student is moved back to an on campus living situation.

When examining why the on campus freshman student athletes at Utah State University did not perform as well academically, the following reasons should bare further investigation. The on-campus living situation could result in more distractions that interrupt valuable study time because of the proximity of a greater number of students with diverse interests. Secondly, on-campus students might assume that because they are in a natural learning environment, they will not be scrutinized by athletic authorities like off campus students. These on-campus athletes may not require as much attention in the eyes of coaching staffs and athletic student support personnel because of the rules association with on campus living arrangements (i.e., quiet hours, visiting hours, etc.).

The results of this study are consistent with previous studies which found women student athletes regularly outperform males academically (Melendez, 2007; Meyer, 1990). The female student athletes in this study consistently performed better academically regardless if they lived on or off campus. This could be credited to a number of supported reasons within the literature: female athletes are more likely to come from the top 25% of their class and female student athletes focus more on graduating from college and do not aspire to professional sports careers (Kane, Leo, & Holleran, 2008). Further examination of this issue may reveal academic guidance tactics to help improve the academic performance of both male and female NCAA D-I student athletes.

### *Future Research*

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers made the following recommendations for further study in the area of improving academic performance of NCAA D-I freshman student athletes. This study focused on residence and its relationship to academic performance but other factors could influence a freshman athlete's success in his/her first year of college.

One area of research would be to examine other NCAA D-I university freshman student athletes throughout the country; this could include a larger sample of the freshman student athletes. Also, future research analyzing the on and off campus housing variables could look at where the athletes were residing (i.e., dormitory, honors dormitory, living learning center, apartments, parent's home, or private home) and could be designed to include a longitudinal approach analyzing all years of the degree completion process (not just freshman year).

Another area of research would be to examine other components that could influence an NCAA D-I freshman student athlete's academic success. This could include a regression analysis to try to predict which variables are able to predict future academic success. The literature could include other socio-demographics such as age, ethnicity, gender, high school GPA, high school SAT or ACT, credit hours enrolled, marital status, and socio economic status. Additional information that could affect academic performance includes: formal and informal interaction with faculty, the number of excused and unexcused classes missed during the freshman year, the academic major of the student, and non scholarship versus scholarship athletes.

Lastly, a research study dealing with an athletic departments' emphasis on academic performance should be investigated. An increase in studies analyzing the perceptions of coaches, athletic administrators, athletic student service personnel, and university faculty support systems towards their athletes succeeding in the academic environment will strengthen the literature and aid in improving an NCAA D-I student athletes education.

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