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NCAA Division I Subdivisions and the Background of Athletic Academic Advisors

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The present study examined the relationship between the background of NCAA Division I athletic academic advisors and the subdivision of their athletic department (Power Five, FCS, etc.). Previous research has focused on the educational background and occupational experiences of athletic academic advisors (Rubin, 2017). In addition, research has found that a school's NCAA subdivision is significantly associated with other factors, such as athletic academic support budget, the years of experience held by their directors of academic support and the gender of their athletic academic advisors (Judge et al., 2018; Lumpkin et al., 2014). The present study examined the relationship between membership within four NCAA Division I subdivisions, "Power Five", "Group of Five", FCS and "non-football playing", and the work conditions, educational backgrounds, gender, race and occupational backgrounds of athletic academic advisors. The researchers distributed a questionnaire through the National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals (NAADP), and 413 athletic academic advisors were included in the sample. The results indicated that some work conditions and occupational experiences were significantly associated with NCAA Division I subdivision. These findings imply that the backgrounds of athletic academic advisors provide another example of a gap in resources between NCAA Division I institutions.

Keywords: athletic academic advising, NCAA, NCAA subdivisions

NCAA Division I athletes face challenges to achieving academic success, which may include spending 21 to 42 hours per week on their sport while in-season, missed classes due to travel for competition, coping with stress, and feeling socially alienated during class (Hatteberg, 2020; Kidd et al., 2018; NCAA Research, 2020). Athletic academic advisors can help college athletes overcome these obstacles by teaching them new study strategies, explaining how NCAA academic eligibility regulations are enforced, and providing career counseling (Fererea, 2017; Menke, 2016; Paule & Gilson, 2010; Rubin, 2017). Moreover, some athletic academic advisors work in “hybrid roles,” which means they perform other job duties besides advising, such as coordinating a life skills program (Steinberg et al., 2018). They also collaborate with faculty and other academic advisors on campus, manage the private information of college athletes, establish relationships with strategic partners and communicate with athletes’ coaches (Case et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2017; Rubin & Lewis, 2020; Thompson et al., 2012).

Former NCAA Division I football and men’s basketball athletes have described athletic academic support as a benefit of competing in college athletics more frequently than other forms of support, such as access to superior food services, receiving an athletic scholarship, opportunities to travel and informal support from their teammates (Menke, 2016). These athletes claimed that academic counselors and tutors made them more successful academically (Menke, 2016). According to a survey of athletes who had reached their senior year, one researcher described their responses as evidence that these athletes perceived athletic academic support as “more of a necessity than a luxury,” (Ridpath, 2010, p. 265). Minority athletes were more likely to perceive these services as necessary to remain eligible to compete in athletics and graduate (Ridpath, 2010). In addition, athletic academic advisors have played a significant role in whether college athletes perceive their academic support services as beneficial (Hazzaa et al., 2018; Otto et al., 2019). Due to these challenges and the variety of responsibilities that athletic academic advisors have, members of the National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals (N4A) have depicted the profession as challenging and potentially rewarding (Rubin, 2017).

According to Rubin (2017), “No single pathway or training regimen leads directly to a position in the field” of athletic academic advising (p. 45). Due to the demands of the profession, it is important to understand what educational backgrounds, previous internship(s) and/or work experiences, and involvement in extra-curricular activities athletic academic advisors acquired before starting their career. The purposes of this study are to provide additional information about the backgrounds and work conditions of athletic academic advisors at NCAA Division I institutions, and determine whether there are significant differences in the backgrounds of these advisors based on the subdivision of NCAA Division I institutions, including Power Five, Group of Five, Football Championship Subdivision, and NCAA Division I No Football (NF).

The NCAA split its member institutions into three divisions during 1973 (NCAA, n.d.). NCAA Division I institutions typically maintain a larger athletic department budget and student body relative to the institutions in Division II and III. The present study will compare the backgrounds of athletic academic advisors among the four subdivisions within NCAA Division I. One, known as the Power Five, includes the Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big 12, Pacific 12, and Southeastern Conferences, which compete at the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level (Walker & Misawa, 2018). The second subdivision, Group of Five, consists of five athletic conferences which also compete at the FBS level. These include the American Athletic Conference,

Conference USA, the Mid-American Conference, the Mountain West Conference, and the Sun Belt Conference. The rest of the NCAA Division I institutions with football programs compete at the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) level (Sherman, 2021). Institutions which belong to Division I but do not compete in football will be described as Division I No Football, or NFs.

Previous studies have examined the differences between FBS, FCS, and NF institutions, but not Power Five and Group of Five (Judge et al., 2018; Lumpkin et al., 2014). Several stakeholders could benefit from data which shows the pathways or training regimens that have made it possible for aspiring athletic academic advisors to obtain a full-time position. College students at the undergraduate level, as well as those considering graduate programs, could benefit from information to help them decide which majors to select and types of graduate assistantships or internships to pursue. Faculty and academic advisors who give their students career advice could also use this information to mentor them. Others who work in different careers, but are considering switching to athletic academic advising, could also compare their work experience to current athletic academic advisors. Moreover, current athletic academic advisors who are considering working in a different NCAA Division I subdivision, such as switching from a NF institution to a Group of Five institution, could compare their backgrounds and current workloads to advisors at other types of institutions. Athletic department administrators could also use this information when hiring athletic academic advisors to evaluate applicants for their openings and compare them to current athletic academic advisors.

Literature Review

Prospective and current athletic academic advisors may decide to apply for positions at institutions that compete in a certain NCAA subdivision due to the gap in resources between them. During 2014, the average athletic department budget of Power Five institutions totaled \$96.2 million, while the average for Group of Five institutions was \$33.9 million (Walker & Misawa, 2018). The athletic academic support department budgets at FBS institutions are also significantly larger than those at FCS and NF institutions (Judge et al., 2018). Moreover, FBS athletic academic support departments typically have about 10 full-time employees, where FCS and NF institutions only have around three (Judge et al., 2018). The directors of FBS athletic academic support units are also older and have more years of experience than those at the FCS level and NF institutions (Judge et al., 2018). The resource gap between athletic departments is also apparent in the work environment of learning specialists at NCAA Division I institutions at the FBS level (Steinberg et al., 2018). Learning specialists typically work individually with “at-risk” college athletes to develop learning strategies and supervise study sessions (Steinberg et al., 2018). They reported that their work environment varies by the athletic conference that their institution competes in (Steinberg et al., 2018). The Pacific 12 Conference, which reported the highest number of learning specialists per institution, had significantly more learning specialists than two other Group of Five athletic conferences (Steinberg et al., 2018). Learning specialists in the Southeastern Conference, a Power Five conference, indicated that they had a lower number caseload of students compared all other FBS conferences (Steinberg et al., 2018). This allows their learning specialists to devote more time to each athlete (Steinberg et al., 2018). In addition to having superior resources in their athletic academic support units, athletic departments that compete at the Power Five have more prestige than those at the Group of Five level, which also have more prestige than FCS athletic departments (Sherman, 2021). This factor could also make Power Five institutions attractive to potential advisors. While some athletic academic advisors

may prefer to work at institutions with more resources, other administrators prefer to work for NCAA Division II athletic departments instead of those that compete at Division I due to their organizational structure and/or philosophy towards college athletics (Agha et al., 2020). Therefore, some athletic academic advisors at FCS or NF institutions may prefer to remain at their current institutions instead of pursuing jobs with FBS athletic departments.

One difference between the athletic academic advisors in the four NCAA subdivisions may include their educational backgrounds. Previous research has shown that most athletic academic advisors have earned graduate degrees (Gerlach & Gibson, 2020; Rubin, 2017). Since athletic departments that compete at the FBS level hire athletic academic support directors with more years of experience (Judge et al., 2018), it is possible that Power Five and Group of Five institutions also attract athletic academic advisors with a graduate degree at a higher rate. Another aspect related to the educational background of athletic academic advisors is whether they are more likely to select certain academic programs as undergraduate or graduate students. For example, Kirkpatrick (2018) observed that athletic directors employed by Power Five institutions were most likely to pick a major related to business at the undergraduate level, and also frequently selected sport management programs at the masters level. Rubin (2017) found that a noteworthy number of athletic academic advisors had majored in sport management, higher education, and counseling. In addition, Gerlach and Gibson (2020) recommended that athletic academic support departments consider hiring candidates with a graduate degree in counseling based on interviews with athletic academic advisors who earned degrees in counseling, and were employed by college athletic departments that competed at FBS, FCS, and NF institutions. These athletic academic advisors indicated that their counseling coursework prepared them to apply counseling strategies and build relationships with athletes (Gerlach & Gibson, 2020). Also, these advisors believed that their coursework taught them when and how to refer athletes to other university services, such as career development. Athletic academic advisors with a high level of education, or a particular major, may benefit when pursuing jobs at the Power Five or Group of Five institutions. Previously, Rubin (2017) conducted a study which looked at the educational level of athletic academic advisors, but not at whether their education level or academic major varied by level of NCAA subdivision.

Another aspect of a prospective athletic academic advisor's educational background is whether or not they competed in collegiate athletics, and at what level they played their sport. According to Rubin's (2017) study, about half of athletic academic advisors competed in college athletics. The majority played at the NCAA Division I level, and one third participated in NCAA Division II or III (Rubin, 2017). The level of NCAA competition that an athletic academic advisor competed in may be more relevant to athletic academic support departments which belong to institutions in certain NCAA subdivisions. For example, since NF and FCS institutions typically have a smaller student body than Power Five or Group of Five institutions, they may be more willing to hire former college athletes from NCAA Division II or III, whose institutions typically have less students than Division I institutions (Judge et al., 2018; NCAA, n.d.).

Another potential distinction between athletic academic advisors, based on NCAA Division I subdivision, may be their occupational experience. Previous research has provided evidence that practitioners in college athletics are more likely to have held certain job duties prior to working in their career field. Before becoming an athletic director, several of them obtained experience in fundraising, as well as other areas (Dickman et al., 2021; Kirkpatrick, 2018). Other athletic directors have claimed that working as a coach before pursuing an administrative career helped them learn how to cultivate working relationships with the coaches

they supervise (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Also, females are more likely to work as a coach before working in college athletics than males (Lumpkin et al., 2015). Several athletic academic advisors have worked as graduate assistants or in internships related to athletic academic advising, while others had experience with advising colleges students who did not compete in athletics, although the latter was less common (Rubin, 2017). Institutions that compete in different NCAA subdivisions could be more likely to hire athletic academic advisors with a specific occupational background. For example, Power Five institutions, with their larger athletic academic support budgets, may find it easier to hire candidates with direct athletic academic support experience as graduate assistants than institutions with less resources (Judge et al., 2018).

In addition, the work conditions of athletic academic advisors could vary by level of NCAA subdivision based on how frequently athletic academic advisors work in hybrid roles. According to Steinberg et al. (2018), athletic departments who may not be able to afford a full-time learning specialist have chosen to hire an athletic academic advisor to also work as a learning specialist. The researchers pointed out that these institutions felt the need to hire learning specialists so that they could offer similar services compared to other institutions, and avoid falling behind in their recruitment of athletes (Steinberg et al., 2018). Athletic academic advisors could psychologically benefit from working in hybrid roles (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). The roles of athletic academic advisors can be highly specialized, and they have claimed this creates the perception that it could be exceptionally challenging for them to progress in their career, or change career paths (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). Working in a variety of roles may help athletic academic advisors feel as if their abilities are more fully utilized (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). The present study attempts to expand on the literature about the occupational experiences of athletic academic advisors in two ways. First, it examines whether the occupational experiences of athletic academic advisors vary by NCAA Division I subdivision. Second, the study focuses on the work conditions of athletic academic advisors, such as the extent to which they work in hybrid roles.

Racial minorities may also be more likely to work as athletic academic advisors in certain subdivisions. Black Americans held 10.4% of the professional administrative positions at NCAA Division I institutions, while Hispanics held 3.6% and Asians held 1.3%, and previous research has identified barriers for racial minorities who attempt to gain employment in intercollegiate athletics (Lapchick, 2021; Smith et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). Unlike most career fields in college athletics, however, a higher percentage of racial minorities and women work in athletic academic support staff positions (Howe & Rockhill, 2020; Lumpkin et al., 2014). Senior level administrators and athletic academic advisors have identified structural limitations that contribute to racial minorities being well represented in athletic academics while being underrepresented in high level administrative positions (McDowell et al., 2008). Administrators have claimed that athletic academic advisors experience more difficulty in obtaining administrative positions than other career fields in college sport because they have a high level of specialized knowledge in their field instead of a general understanding of many tasks (McDowell et al., 2008). The social networks of athletic academic advisors may also harm their ability to move into administration, since they typically network with fellow NCAA members from other institutions instead of senior level administrators or staff members from other areas of athletics (McDowell et al., 2008). As previously mentioned, a higher percentage of racial minorities work in athletic academic advising compared to other fields that are perceived better preparing employees for administrative positions.

Also, the use of informal hiring practices, such as employee referrals, instead implementing formal hiring practices that maximize applicants to an open position, such as posting a job opening on multiple outlets, can also contribute to a lack of racial diversity in administrative positions (McDowell et al., 2008). Athletic departments may value the ability of minorities to help recruit other minority athletes during on-campus visits, to the point where some advisors have felt “paraded out” (Cunningham, 2012). Moreover, these groups may be able to relate to college athletes more easily when providing advising (Cunningham, 2012). If athletic departments value racial minorities as athletic academic advisors, they may be able to obtain positions at the more prestigious subdivisions of NCAA Division I institutions at a higher rate.

Similarly to racial minorities, women are underrepresented in professional administrative positions within college athletics (Lapchick, 2021). Also like racial minorities, a higher number of women are employed in athletic academic advising compared to other career fields in college sport (Lumpkin et al., 2014). Previous research had indicated that this trend may occur due to the preferences of females who are interested in working in college sport. Female graduate assistants, as well as Black athletic academic advisors, have indicated that they were interested in athletic academic support because it provided the opportunity to work directly with college athletes (Cunningham, 2012; Smith et al., 2017). Another study, however, noted that a “glass ceiling” still exists for females in the field of athletic academic support at FBS institutions (Lumpkin et al., 2014). Compared to other NCAA Division subdivisions, as well as Division II and III, females in athletic academic support are significantly less likely to hold administrative positions (Lumpkin et al., 2014). This study seeks to add to the literature by examining the relationship between race and NCAA subdivision, as well as whether there is a significant difference between the rate of female athletic academic advisors at Power Five and Group of Five institutions.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework which has analyzed why individuals select a certain profession, as well as a position with a particular employer, is occupational choice theory, and researchers have provided multiple explanations for why individuals pick their professions (Ireh, 2000). Ginzberg, Ginzburg, Axelrad & Herma (1950) suggested that adults select a career based on their education, such as their highest level or choice of academic major, and previous experiences, like competing in college athletics. Tiedeman and O’Hara (1963) argued that individuals use differentiation and integration to determine whether a job fits their psychological needs or identity (Tiedeman & O’Hara, 1963). For example, some individuals value independence, and as a result, select an occupation that is compatible with that value. In addition, they claimed that this process continues throughout an individual’s career since their involvement in new experiences can shape their psychological needs. Super (1953) also noted that individuals, such as athletic academic advisors, make efforts to demonstrate competency in their career path. One way an athletic academic advisor could attempt to demonstrate competency in their profession could be to accept a hybrid role.

When individuals identify specific differences within a career or organization, they are utilizing differentiation (Tiedeman & O’Hara, 1963). The environment that surrounds an individual can cause them to use differentiation (Tiedeman & O’Hara, 1963). In the context of athletic academic advising, the work environment of an athletic academic advising department, such as an athletic academic advisors awareness of being expected to advise a higher caseload of

students at an FCS institution than a Power Five institution due to having less resources available, would be an example of how they use differentiation. Tiedeman & O'Hara (1963) also claimed that individuals use integration after making multiple distinctions through differentiation. Integration occurs when an individual has considered all of an occupation's and/or organization's characteristics through differentiation, and uses more than one of these specific differences that they have identified (Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963). Therefore, when an athletic academic advisor weighs multiple factors while considering a certain position, such as how many teams they will advise, they use integration. Moreover, Holland (1959) argued that personality type can shape an individual's preferred environment, such as working at a Power Five or FCS institution. While integration could be considered to be another form of differentiation, Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963) pointed out that individuals must use differentiation to use integration, where using differentiation does not require integration.

Previous research has made it apparent that athletic academic advisors could make distinctions between athletic departments based on their level of NCAA subdivision (Judge et al., 2018; Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018; Steinberg et al., 2018;). Identifying the previous experiences, characteristics and work experiences of athletic academic advisors by level of NCAA subdivision that their athletic department competes in could provide insight on how they choose which institution to work for. Finally, further insight on the characteristics of athletic academic advisors could suggest that they make differentiations between athletic departments when they choose where to work. Institutions from certain NCAA Division I subdivisions could benefit from these distinctions being made by athletic academic advisors if they are able to obtain athletic academic advisors with more years of or more relevant previous work experience.

Research Questions

- RQ 1: What are the work conditions (total years of experience, number of teams advised and number of hybrid roles per advisor) for athletic academic advisors at NCAA Division I member institutions?
- RQ 2: What is the educational background (highest degree completed, undergraduate major, graduate major and college athlete experience) of NCAA Division I athletic academic advisors?
- RQ 3: What are the race and gender of NCAA Division I athletic academic advisors?
- RQ 4: What were the occupational experiences of NCAA Division I athletic academic advisors prior to obtaining their position?
- RQ 5: Is there an association between the work conditions, educational background, occupational experience, race, and gender of athletic academic advisors and NCAA Division I subdivision?

Method

The researchers received clearance from the N4A research committee and contacted NCAA Division I athletic academic advisors through the organization's listserv. The athletic

academic advisors were instructed to complete a survey about their personal history, which included previous work experience, education, experience as a college athlete, current job title, sports advised, job duties performed, and demographic information. The researchers received 440 responses. The total sample included 413 responses after eliminating duplicates and incomplete surveys. Since the N4A listserv has approximately 2,000 registered members, the survey had a response rate of 20.6%, which is similar to the response rate in a previous questionnaire of athletic academic advisors (Rubin, 2017). Moreover, Fosnacht et al. (2017) found that a 20% response rate was sufficient for this sample size. The demographics of the sample ($N = 413$) included females ($n = 302$), males ($n = 110$), and non-binary ($n = 1$). The reported race of the participants within the sample included White ($n = 302$), Black ($n = 76$), Asian ($n = 2$), American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 3$), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ($n = 2$), Two or more races ($n = 16$), Other ($n = 7$), and declined to say ($n = 5$).

To answer the research questions, the researchers conducted statistical analyses with the SPSS software package, version 28. First, the researchers collected descriptive and frequency statistics to understand the work conditions, educational background, occupational, race, and gender background of athletic academic advisors. To determine the association between work conditions and NCAA subdivision, the researchers used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA is an appropriate statistical test because it is used to examine the relationship between continuous and categorical variables to determine if different data sets have significant mean differences based on a dependent variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Secondly, to determine the association between educational background and occupational background with NCAA classification, the researchers used a chi-square test for independence. The chi-square test for independence is suitable to answer these research questions because the test determines if nominal variables are independent or related to each other (Franke et al., 2012).

Results

Work Conditions

The researchers examined the working conditions of current athletic academic advisors at NCAA Division I institutions. These included the years of full-time experience and number of teams advised by athletic academic advisors, as well as hybrid roles that each athletic academic advisor had. The researchers further examined the effect of NCAA subdivision within Division I on these working conditions to determine if there was an association between them. The descriptive statistics of the working conditions can be found in Table 1.

When investigating the effect of NCAA classification on years of experience, a one-way ANOVA showed that the effect of NCAA Division I subdivision was significant $F(3, 409) = 2.56, p = .05, \eta^2 = .018$. A second one-way ANOVA was performed and found the effect of Division 1 subdivision on the number of sports advised was significant $F(3, 409) = 21.276, p < .01, \eta^2 = .135$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that advisors at Power Five institutions were significantly more likely to advise less sports compared to Group of Five, the FCS, and NF institutions. Athletic academic advisors at the Group of Five level were significantly more likely to advise less sports than advisors at the FCS or NF institutions. The average number of sports advised, however, did not significantly differ between advisors working at FCS or NF institutions. A third one-way ANOVA was performed and found that the effect of NCAA Division 1 subdivision on the number of hybrid roles was significant $F(3, 409)$

= 25.22, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .156$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that athletic academic advisors at Power Five institutions were significantly more likely to have less hybrid roles compared to those at Group of Five, FCS, and NF Division I institutions. Also, athletic academic advisors at the Group of Five level were significantly more likely to have less hybrid roles than advisors at the FCS or NF institutions. The average number of hybrid roles worked did not significantly differ between athletic academic advisors working at FCS or NF institutions.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of the Working Conditions of Athletic Academic Advisors

NCAA Classification	Power Five (N= 137)		Group of Five (N = 86)		FCS (N = 106)		NF (N = 82)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Years of Experience*	8.5	6.8	6.7	5.0	6.5	6.1	7.6	6.0
Number of Sports Advised	2.9**	1.7	4.2***	2.9	5.7	4.5	6.3	4.6
Number of Hybrid Roles	.34**	.57	.86***	.93	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.1

*P5, G5, FCS and NF all significantly different from one another, $p < .05$.

**P5 significantly less than G5, FCS, and NF, $p < .01$.

***G5 significantly less than FCS and NF, $p < .05$.

Educational Background

Athletic academic advisors reported their highest level of completed education. If they reported being in the process of completing another degree, only the highest level of completion was recorded. Within the sample, 95.6% of athletic academic advisors had at least a masters degree. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between education level and the Division I classification. The relation between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (9, N = 413) = 7.56$, $p = .579$, $\Phi = .135$. The number of athletic academic advisors with their highest degree by NCAA classification can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Highest Degree Completed by Athletic Academic Advisors

NCAA Classification	Power Five (N= 137)		Group of Five (N = 86)		FCS (N = 106)		NF (N = 82)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Highest Level of Degree Completed								
Bachelor's Degree	7	5.1%	2	2.3%	7	6.6%	2	2.4%
Master's Degree	114	83.2%	77	87.5%	90	84.9%	73	89.0%
Educational Specialist	3	2.2%	2	2.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Doctoral Degree	13	9.5%	7	8.0%	9	8.5%	7	8.5%

The researchers also collected data on the undergraduate major and graduate program of study at both the masters and doctoral level. Since universities call majors with similar coursework by different names, the majors and academic programs were coded into 11 categories based on Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.) on their website. The researchers included a separate category for sport studies (Sport Management, Sport Psychology, Sport Communication) as those majors are directly related to intercollegiate athletics (Love et al., 2017; Watkins & Slater, 2021). The categories of academic programs and corresponding majors included *Arts and Humanities*, with majors such as Foreign Languages, Philosophy and English Literature, while *Social Service Professions* includes majors such as Criminal Justice, Public Administration and Social Work, and *Other Majors* includes majors such as General Studies, Liberal Arts, and Information Technology. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between undergraduate major and the NCAA Division I subdivision. The relation between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (33, N = 413) = 40.91, p = .162 \Phi = .315$. The results can be found in Table 3.

Table 3
Reported Undergraduate Major Categories of Athletic Academic Advisors

NCAA Classification	Power Five (N= 137)		Group of Five (N = 88)		FCS (N = 106)		NF (N = 82)	
Undergraduate Major Category	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Arts and Humanities	6	4.4%	5	5.7%	10	9.4%	10	12.2%
Natural Sciences	1	0.7%	2	2.3%	3	2.8%	2	2.4%
Physical Sciences	1	0.7%	0	0%	1	0.9%	0	0.0%
Social Sciences	25	18.2%	19	21.5%	19	17.9%	23	28.0%
Business	19	13.9%	13	14.7%	5	4.7%	5	6.1%
Communication and Media	11	8.0%	6	6.8%	16	15.1%	11	13.4%
Education	19	13.9%	13	14.7%	11	10.4%	11	13.4%
Engineering	1	0.7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Health Professions	24	17.5%	10	11.4%	12	11.3%	6	7.3%
Social Services Professions	5	3.6%	5	5.7%	2	1.9%	1	1.2%
Other Majors	6	4.4%	2	2.3%	10	9.4%	4	4.9%
Sport Studies	19	13.9%	13	14.7%	17	16.0%	9	11.0%

The graduate program of study for athletic academic advisors who completed masters degrees ($N = 394$) was also recorded. There was less variation of graduate programs selected by athletic academic advisors across the academic disciplines. In the present study, 76.6% of athletic academic advisors received their masters degree in either the field of Sport Management or Education. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between

graduate program of study and the Division I subdivision. The relation between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (27, N = 394) = 28.507, p = .385, \Phi = .269$. The distribution of graduate program of study by NCAA subdivision can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Reported Master's Degree Program Categories of Athletic Academic Advisors

NCAA Classification	Power Five (N= 130)		Group of Five (N = 86)		FCS (N = 99)		NF (N = 79)	
Graduate Program Category	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Arts and Humanities	2	1.5%	1	1.2%	2	2.0%	2	2.5%
Natural Sciences	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Physical Sciences	1	0.8%	0	0%	1	1.0%	0	0%
Social Sciences	2	1.5%	4	4.7%	3	3.0%	3	3.8%
Business	2	1.5%	4	4.7%	5	5.1%	8	10.1%
Communication and Media	0	0%	1	1.2%	2	2.0%	3	3.8%
Education	52	40%	39	45.3%	39	39.4%	28	35.4%
Engineering	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Health Professions	7	5.4%	6	7.0%	8	8.1%	5	6.3%
Social Services Professions	2	1.5%	2	2.3%	5	5.1%	1	1.3%
Other Majors	4	3.1%	2	2.3%	4	4.0%	0	0%
Sport Studies	58	44.6%	27	31.4%	30	30.0%	29	36.7%

As previously noted in Table 2, 36 athletic academic advisors reported that they had completed a doctoral degree. Within the sample, 63.9% of those doctoral degrees ($N=23$) were in the field of Education while 22.2% of doctoral degree were in a Sport Studies program ($N=8$). A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between doctoral program and the NCAA Division I subdivision. The relation between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (15, N = 36) = 20.867, p = .141, \Phi = .761$.

Athletic academic advisors also reported their experience with competing in college athletics. The researchers asked the participants to indicate if they played a college sport at the NCAA Division I, II, or III level, or competed at a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) institution or for an NJCAA institution. Within the sample, 54.96% of athletic academic advisors ($N=227$) reported that they were former college athletes. Within the former college athlete population, 64.9% of the athletic academic advisors who were college athletes competed at the NCAA Division I level, while 8.5% played at the Division II level and 7.8% played Division III. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between college athlete experience and NCAA Division I subdivision. The relation between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 413) = 1.385, p = .709, \Phi = .058$.

Race and Gender

As previously mentioned, the majority of the sample ($N = 413$) identified as a female ($N = 302$) and White ($N = 302$), as five participants elected to not disclose their race, 106 athletic academic advisors identified as a person of color. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between gender and NCAA Division I subdivision. The relationship between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 413) = 3.172, p = .366, \Phi = .088$. To examine the association between race and NCAA subdivision, a chi-square test of independence was performed. The relationship between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 408) = .548, p = .908, \Phi = .036$.

Occupational Experience

The investigators asked athletic academic advisors to report their previous occupational experiences before taking a position as an athletic academic advisor. Questions were posed to determine if they worked as graduate assistants (GA) in athletic academic departments, if they served as paid interns in athletic academic departments, if they had previous college coaching experience, if they had high school coaching experience, if they served as a learning assistant (e.g. tutor) for an athletic academic support department and if they had previously worked as an on-campus academic advisor outside of the athletic department. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between previous GA experience and the NCAA Division I subdivision. The relationship between these variables was significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 413) = 13.11, p = .004$ with athletic academic advisors at the Power Five or Group of Five levels being more likely to have GA experience in athletic academic support. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between previous paid intern experience and NCAA Division I subdivision. The association between these variables was significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 411) = 8.01, p = .05$ with athletic academic advisors at the Group of Five level being more likely to have paid intern experience in athletic academic support. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between previous college coaching experience and the NCAA classification. The association between these variables was significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 413) = 10.47, p = .015$. Athletic academic advisors at the FCS level were more likely to have college coaching experience. Other occupational experiences (high school coaching experience, learning assistant (e.g. tutor) experience or on-campus advisor experience) did not have a significant association with NCAA Division I subdivision.

Athletic academic advisors were also asked to indicate what they felt was the most important qualification to becoming an athletic academic advisor. The majority suggested that working as a graduate assistant or paid intern was the most important factor ($N = 262$) and the second most mentioned qualification was experience with competing in college athletics ($N = 65$). A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the association between the opinion of athletic academic advisors on most important job qualification and the NCAA subdivision. The association between these variables was significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 413) = 35.298, p = .009, \Phi = .292$. The distribution of the opinion of athletic academic advisors on most important job qualification by NCAA classification can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Most Important Job Qualification by NCAA Classification

NCAA Classification	Power Five (N= 137)		Group of Five (N= 88)		FCS (N = 106)		NF (N = 82)	
Job Qualification	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Graduate assistant or paid intern experience	101	73.7%	63	71.6%	54	50.9%	44	53.7%
Student-athlete experience	13	9.5%	10	11.4%	25	23.6%	17	20.7%
Coaching experience	2	1.5%	0	0%	3	2.8%	0	0%
Campus advising or teaching experience	9	6.6%	4	4.5%	9	8.5%	13	15.9%
Graduate Degree	7	5.1%	3	3.4%	6	5.7%	3	3.7%
Industry experience	5	3.6%	7	8.0%	7	6.6%	5	6.1%
Other	0	0%	1	1.1%	2	1.9%	0	0%

Discussion

Rubin (2017) found that 95% of athletic academic advisors had earned graduate degrees, where 95.6% in the present study indicated that they had obtained one. Therefore, it seems highly recommendable for college students who are interested in an athletic academic advising career at an NCAA Division I institution to pursue a master's degree, regardless of the type of institution they may prefer to work in. One reason pursuing a graduate degree can improve a prospective athletic academic advisor's chances of obtaining a position in the field is that 63.4% selected "graduate assistant or paid internship experience" as the most important qualification to becoming an athletic academic advisor. Although only 4.6% answered that "having a graduate degree" was the most important qualification, this may be explained by the fact that a masters degree is perceived as a bare minimum requirement instead of a factor which distinguishes a job applicant. Moreover, pursuing a graduate degree is necessary to work as a graduate assistant for an athletic academic support department because graduate assistants are generally full-time graduate students (Smith et al., 2017). Another important reason for prospective athletic academic advisors to obtain graduate degrees is that a few college athletes are graduate students, while others aspire to attend graduate school (Haslerig, 2017). Athletic academic advisors with the experience of attending graduate school may be better prepared to advise graduate students or assist undergraduate students with gaining entrance to and selecting a graduate program.

This study sought to contribute to previous research about the educational backgrounds of employees in intercollegiate athletics by examining the rate at which athletic academic advisors picked certain fields of study while in undergraduate and graduate school. While the present study found no significant association between an athletic academic advisor's field of study and the type of NCAA Division I institution that they worked for, and they chose a wide variety of fields of study as undergraduate students, 76.6% of athletic academic advisors picked a major related to education or sport studies when they pursued a masters degree. One possibility is that selecting a certain field of study at the undergraduate level does not provide prospective athletic academic advisors with an advantage when pursuing a position, but picking a sport studies or educational graduate program may benefit students since they are required to take courses related

to topics such as organizational behavior in higher education or the legal and ethical aspects of sport management. Several graduate students who are graduate assistants for an athletic department may also choose these majors because they have decided to work in college athletics, which they may not have planned to do while in an undergraduate institution. Moreover, graduate students may be more likely to surround themselves with other students who want to work in college athletics by picking these majors, and improve their social network.

Another finding was that athletic academic advisors at Power Five and Group of Five institutions were significantly more likely to have previous experience with athletic academic support units, as either paid interns or graduate assistants, where those at FCS institutions were significantly more likely to have coached at the college level. Since Power Five and Group of Five institutions hire athletic academic support directors that have more years of related full-time experience, they may also be able to attract graduate assistants and paid interns due to their previous experience more easily than FCS institutions (Judge et al., 2018). Another possibility is that since more athletic academic advisors at Power Five and Group of Five institutions indicated that these experiences were the most important to obtaining a position in their field, compared to advisors at other institutions, athletic departments place a higher value on job candidates with these experiences. Moreover, if graduate assistants and paid interns are perceived as the ideal candidates by Power Five and Group of Five institutions, the fact that a higher percentage of these athletic academic advisors choose to work at institutions in these subdivisions provides an example of occupational choice theory. Athletic academic advisors who obtain multiple job offers from institutions in different Division I subdivisions must differentiate between their prospective athletic departments to choose their employer (Ireh, 2000; Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963).

FCS institutions may have a different approach in hiring athletic academic advisors, since they are more likely to hire former college coaches. Athletic directors have indicated that working as a coach helped prepare them for their careers (Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Notably, NF institutions were not more likely to hire former coaches, despite sharing similarities with FCS institutions such as the size of their budgets and student bodies (Judge et al., 2018). Since FCS and NF institutions share some characteristics, but FCS has the distinction of competing in football, FCS institutions may value coaching experience when choosing advisors who will oversee football teams.

The results showed no significant relationship between the race and gender of athletic academic advisors and the subdivision of NCAA Division I institution that they worked for, which differs from previous research that found that women were less likely to work in athletic academic advising positions in FBS athletic departments, but more likely to do so at NF institutions (Lumpkin et al., 2014). Researchers have identified barriers for women and racial minorities who are interested in advancing to administrative positions such as being an athletic director or conference commissioner (Dickman et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2018). Other studies have also identified concerns with race and gender within athletic academic support, such as challenges to networking (Cunningham, 2012; McDowell et al., 2008). Due to these issues, it seemed plausible athletic academic advisors could also face discrimination when applying to work for Power Five or Group of Five institutions based on their race or gender, and while they may in other forms, this was not evident in the results of the study.

One noteworthy point is that while 54% of athletic academic advisors participated in college athletics, only 8.5% competed at the NCAA Division II level and 7.8% played at the Division III level. These athletes are underrepresented, since 25% of NCAA athletes compete in

Division II, while 39% play Division III (NCAA n.d.). The experience of being a college athlete could still benefit these two groups, since they also face some of the same issues such as the time demands of playing their sport (NCAA Research, 2020). There are a few reasons why these athletes may be underrepresented. Since FCS and NF institutions typically have lower budgets and less staff members than FBS programs, this may be true to an even greater extent at NCAA Division II and III institutions (Judge et al., 2018). As a result, these athletes may have received less exposure to athletic academic support. Moreover, former Division III athletes may be less interested in working for a college athletic department because NCAA Division I and II athletes have a stronger athletic identity, and as a result, may be more interested in a sport related career (Huml, 2018). If athletic academic support directors want more former college athletes to pursue careers in athletic academic advising, they may be able to facilitate opportunities for athletes by recruiting former NCAA Division II and III athletes for graduate assistant positions.

The results of the present study also suggest that athletic academic advisors could be more susceptible to burnout based on the type of NCAA Division I institutions they are employed by. Athletic academic advisors, learning specialists, and other athletic academic support employees have described having a heavier workload as contributing to burnout (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). The athletic academic advisors at Group of Five institutions reported that they supervised a significantly lower number of teams compared to FCS and NF institutions, and had less hybrid roles. Power Five athletic academic advisors supervised less teams and had less hybrid roles than those at any other NCAA Division I subdivision. In short, athletic academic advisors at FCS and NF institutions appear to have higher workloads and support larger numbers of students than those at Group of Five institutions, while those at Group of Five institutions seem to have higher workloads than those at Power Five institutions. Moreover, previous research shows that athletic academic advisors at FCS and NF institutions have less work experience, and as a result, may be less prepared to handle a higher workload (Judge et al., 2018). Prospective athletic academic advisors that may prefer a more specialized work environment, such as not having multiple roles, advising a variety of teams, or those that prefer a more well-rounded work environment, should be aware that job duties can vary by an institution's NCAA subdivision. This provides evidence of occupational choice theory being present in the retention of athletic academic advisors (Ireh, 2000; Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963). If an athletic academic advisor leaves the profession for another career due to burnout, they have differentiated the profession with another career field. Therefore, if athletic academic advisors at FCS and NF institutions are in more danger of experiencing burnout, administrators should develop strategies to mitigate burnout to retain more employees.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited in that it did not investigate some aspects of the athletic advisor experience. First, previous researchers had described how other stakeholders on college campus hold negative perceptions of athletic academic advisors (Hatteberg, 2020; Rubin & Lewis, 2020; Stokowski et al., 2020). Second, athletic academic advisors have described the profession as lacking career mobility (McDowell et al., 2008). Third, the present study did not gauge which background characteristics of athletic academic advisors made them more effective. Also, while athletic academic advisors reported which sports they advised, there was no indication on how many students that they advised. As previous research has noted, the number of students an advisor may have varies widely (Rubin & Moreno-Pardo, 2018). Identifying how many students

each athletic advisor had, based on the type of their institution's NCAA Division I subdivision, could have provided more insight on the different work environments of these institutions. In addition, there are a handful of exceptions where the athletic advisors did not fit into the four types of NCAA Division I subdivisions explored by the authors. For example, the University of Arkansas-Little Rock competes in an FBS conference, but does not field a football team (University of Arkansas Little Rock Athletics, n.d.).

There are potential research topics for scholars to explore that could provide additional insight on the field of athletic academic advising. Scholars could investigate how the perceptions that other university staff members hold towards athletic academic advisors can be improved. In addition, research could identify which career paths athletic academic advisors have pursued and how they were able to obtain new positions, whether they rose to administrative positions in college athletics or left college sport entirely. Future research could also evaluate which educational backgrounds or previous work experiences best prepared athletic academic advisors to accomplish their job duties. Researchers could also focus on the race and gender of athletic academic advisors. While the present study examined whether athletic academic advisors were more likely to work at a certain type of NCAA Division I subdivision based on race or gender, other studies could examine work conditions such as whether athletic academic advisors are assigned to work in certain sports or with certain genders, based on their own race or gender. The backgrounds of athletic academic advisors in other NCAA divisions, or other governing bodies such as the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), could be examined. Finally, to provide more insight on the role of occupational choice theory in the job selection process of athletic academic advisors, future research could examine why individuals in this profession chose to work at their particular institutions, especially if they left an NCAA Division I institution to work at another.

Conclusion

The results of the study provide increased evidence of a gap in resources between Power Five, Group of Five, FCS, and NFs. Previous research has already observed this gap in the size of each NCAA Division I subdivisions' athletic department budgets (Judge et al., 2018; Walker & Misawa, 2018). Moreover, scholars have blamed this disparity in resources on negative outcomes, such as lower Academic Progress Rate (APR) scores (Gurney et al., 2017). According to the findings of the present study, Power Five institutions have athletic academic advisors with more years of experience, and may have an advantage in attracting employees who had obtained experience with working as a graduate assistant in athletic academic support before becoming an advisor in a full-time position. In this regard, athletic academic support services can be seen as one of the many factors that contributes to competitive imbalance in college athletics.

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