An Evaluation of the Impact of Academic Policies and Athletic Procedures for Student Athletes

Seanta Cleveland

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AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC POLICIES
AND ATHLETIC PROCEDURES FOR STUDENT ATHLETES

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DEDICATION

To my family, friends, co-workers, and colleagues who have moved mountains, been patient with me, and helped me with encouraging talks. I would also like to thank Crimson for being super patient while many days I was unable to play fetch because I had to finish my writing. I would like to give a special thanks to my grandmother in heaven, who, before this journey even began, prophetically called me “doctor.”
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I would like to extend thanks to my chair, Dr. Terrance McAdoo. I appreciate your support, encouragement, and guidance throughout the program and the dissertation process. To my committee members, Drs. Yasha Becton, Elizabeth Currin, and Leo Eyombo, thank you for your interest in my study and your suggestions for revisions. Your feedback and guidance have been much appreciated. Special thanks to Dr. Engrid Roy for the time and effort you put forth to contribute to my final product, I can’t thank you enough.

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.
Zora Neale Hurston
ABSTRACT

The current study is an evaluation of the ways academic policies and athletic procedures can impact learning for student athletes as inconsistent practices regarding athletic travel and make-up work can have negative effects on learning for student athletes. A total of 11 participants (i.e., 8 student athletes, 3 faculty members) participated in this qualitative phenomenological study. Chickering’s student development theory and Kolb’s learning theory framed the current inquiry into (1) the needs of student athletes and the ways they process important information (e.g., policies and procedures) and (2) related faculty guidance, student affairs, and the governing body for athletics, practices, and policies that impact student athletes’ learning.

Several themes emerging from the data, including impact/motivation, process/policy, lack of communication, and course difficulty for student athletes and policy, process, and knowledge and understanding for faculty. The themes detected in the data were used to create an intervention that can be used to govern the make-up work process for student athletes, faculty members, athletic administrators, and student affairs professionals.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Student athletes face unique challenges as they confront pressures to compete both athletically and academically on college campuses (Sloan, 2005). The term “student athlete” refers to individuals who are students first and athletes second (Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). Ferrante et al. (1996) argue that “student first and athlete second” creates a trickle-down effect of inconsistencies that affect both teams and individual athletes. Student athletes are often held to National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) standards as well as university standards, and they are affected by a myriad of policies imposed by the NCAA, their institution, the athletic department, and their respective teams. Understanding the requirements of these systems and the way these systems affect student athletes is one of the first steps in conceptualizing student athletes’ issues and planning interventions (Fletcher et al., 2003).

Practitioner research aims to solve practice and enhance practice. It is a way for the researcher to bridge the gap between educational theory and professional practice. An important component of practitioner research is the doer of the research, by evaluating problems within their own classroom setting as opposed to being the outside researcher in traditional research. This study will look at the impacts of policies and procedures on student athletes within the context of the health science department at a DMV University. This is a setting that the researcher has been an instructor and has seen the effects of student athletes try to balance the duality of academics and athletics. Practitioner research
also aims to inform policy through providing insights with the dynamics of the classroom and those most concerned with the classroom. A significant feature of practitioner-based research and the significance of practitioner-based research is the ability to collaborate with teachers, administrators and other stakeholders involved. Through practitioner-based research, the researcher can improve practice and have their voice heard by systematically and collaboratively providing evidence from the experience in the classroom (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The components of learning for college students include cognitive functions such as critical thinking and communication skills; affective dimensions that involve managing emotions and dealing with newfound independence; and lastly, psychomotor dimensions that include sustaining an exercise regimen and operating sophisticated technology (Hamrick et al., 2002). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that learning orientation is measured by openness to diversity and challenge, learning for self-understanding, internal locus of attribution for academic success, and preference for higher order cognitive activities. Kuh (1996) concluded that a seamless learning environment (e.g., in-class and out-of-class, academic, nonacademic, curricular, cocurricular, or on-campus and off-campus experiences) is characteristic of an institution that fosters student learning and personal development.

The theoretical framework guiding the current study includes student development theory (Chickering, 1993) and Kolb’s (1984) theory of learning, which validates student athletes’ competence and understanding of the policies and procedures surrounding make-up work (e.g., missed assignments, exams) related to athletic travel as well as their development of appropriate relationships with faculty and instructors while
they are on athletic travel. In the learning process, the continuum of student development is essential. Kolb’s (1984) theory of learning contributes to an understanding of the ways that student athletes may process important information (e.g., policies and procedures related to make-up work related to athletic travel) that requires clear explanation as opposed to just a practical opportunity through the assimilation portion of the four-part learning cycle.

According to Evans et al. (1998), research in student development theory justifies the profession of student affairs and legitimizes the relevance of student affairs professionals in college environments. In addition, the literature surrounding student development theory does include qualitative data, which helps us understand where students are and where they are going along the human development continuum (Evans et al., 1998). According to Fletcher et al. (2003), some institutions have task forces of faculty and staff, some of who may not even understand the unique concerns of student athletes, to serve as advisors in the development of policies and procedures that address issues specific to student athletes.

**Understanding the Differences between Process, Policy, and Procedure**

In the student handbook, there is a policy for student athletes to submit their travel note to their faculty instructors. Student athletes are held to reinforcement by Academic Advisors in the event that their instructors give them a hard time regarding their absence and make up work. With faculty, there is a vague policy on student-athlete travel, however, there is no process for faculty to allow student-athletes to make up work. Thereby, Faculty create their own processes for how they allow their student-athletes to make up work. In a handbook, a written document that outlines the rules and guiding
principles is a policy. For the context of this study, the process is the interaction between student athletes and faculty that includes a travel note being exchanged and communication between the two parties. For the context of this study, procedures are described as the way athletics conducts business with their student-athletes (submitting their travel note and how student athletes notify their faculty instructors of athletic practices).

At the site of the research, there is a clause in the policy in the student handbook that also makes way for some ambiguity and may lead to the persistence of inconsistent faculty practices even when there is an institutional policy. The student handbook acknowledges that all professors may not follow the same process and that each one will determine the way make-up work is completed in their particular courses.

**Statement of the Problem**

Student athletes are expected to function in a multilevel system that includes rules and regulations imposed by the NCAA, university policies, athletics department standards, and team dynamics (Fletcher et al., 2003). Student athletes are held to both academic and athletic standards, two institutional systems with incompatible requirements. Some of the academic expectations for student athletes include regularly attending classes, studying, and maintaining the GPA (grade point average) they need to compete athletically (Hodge, 2015). Some of the athletic expectations include attending practice, competing, watching competition film, treating injuries, attending team events, and traveling for athletic competitions (Fletcher et al., 2003). Such requirements or restrictions often differ from requirements for students who are not athletes (Fletcher et al., 2003). For some student athletes, learning can be impacted by the imbalance between
academic policies and athletic procedures. Student athletes are charged with the expectation to be model citizens and role models—both on and off the field—with an emphasis on “off field,” which represents both personal and academic accountability for student athletes (Charlton, 2011, p. 136).

Student athletes may frequently miss class as they travel for and participate in scheduled sporting events and are required to make up missed assignments and exams. According to Simiyu (2010), institutions should have policies that govern the processes that student athletes should follow to make up these missed assignments. Fletcher et al. (2003) shared that colleges and universities develop and adopt their own policies, procedures, and philosophies for student athletes. Policies are designed to guide students through academic benchmarks and understand organizational seriousness regarding academics via the gravity of the noncompliance consequences (Charlton, 2011). The absence of such policies can be both confusing and frustrating for student athletes that have dual university roles (Fletcher et al., 2003). Interestingly, some institutions have no policies that protect student athletes from being penalized for missing assignments and exams although their participation in university-based sports necessitates their absence (Simiyu, 2010).

Penalties for student athletes missing assignments and exams sometimes involve deficient grades that lead to declines in their grades overall. According to Sloan (2005), the NCAA passed rules to guide the minimum academic requirements that student athletes must meet to remain eligible to compete in their sport(s). A failing grade affects a student athlete’s overall GPA, sometimes rendering them ineligible for sports participation. During the first year of ineligibility, student athletes are put on academic
probation. If the student’s GPA does not meet NCAA standards during that one-year period, then the student athlete is at risk of losing his or her scholarship.

According to NCAA guidelines, the initial penalty for student athletes being academically ineligible is their ineligibility to compete or practice in intercollegiate sports in the semester that follows the grading period during which the student athlete became ineligible. If a student athlete is still deemed academically ineligible by the end of the second semester, then he or she is placed on academic suspension and the athletic scholarship is taken away. When the athlete is considered academically eligible again, according to the NCAA and institutional standards, he or she may be reinstated to participate in sports and receive the scholarship award (NCAA, 2020).

Key institutional resources are necessary to aid in the success of student athletes, these resources including academic support and a supportive teaching environment that is conducive to learning (Kuh, 2007). According to Parsons (2013), a problematic perception shared by professors is the student athletes’ constant need for special accommodations to leave class early, attend class late or not at all, and make up missed work due to sports obligations. Other problems may also occur if faculty members have limited knowledge of policies related to travel for student athletes and the processes by which student athletes can make up missed work (Fletcher et al., 2003). The observed absence of consistent practices surrounding student athletes and make-up work and the impact of such inconsistencies on student athletes’ learning serves as an impetus for the current study.

Charlton (2011) noted that policies enforced via academic services ensure that classroom success and athletic success are equally as important. When thoughtful
consideration is given in creating cultural content, especially in policy and ritual, it can significantly contribute to an overall positive academic culture. Therefore, policy development should encompass interactions between staff (i.e., faculty, student support services), student athletes, and coaches to ensure that student athletes’ adherence to academic expectations (Charlton, 2011).

**Review of Relevant Studies**

Student athletes may sometimes face difficulty when attempting to manage their time and meet sports or athletic demands. Athletic demands include training, practices, team meetings, position meetings, film study, treating injuries, team dinners, and athletic travel (Fletcher et al., 2003). Previous studies (Fletcher et al., 2003; Long, 2012; Parsons, 2013; Simiyu, 2010) show that there are conflicting messages in institutional policies and athletic procedures for student athletes regarding missing classes, assignments, and exams due to sports travel. Further, student athletes may be a bit slower to develop basic fundamental skills due to the consuming nature of athletics.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), exploring the influence of academic and nonacademic experiences on cognitive and psychosocial outcomes for first-generation students versus student athletes, found that sports participation had a significantly negative impact on science reasoning for first-generation students. Other nonacademic involvements, such as intercollegiate athletic participation, had either a significantly larger negative impact or a significantly smaller positive impact on outcomes for first-generation students than for other students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
Deficiencies in the Literature

Institutions that offer both academic and athletic programs should have the necessary institutional frameworks for student athletes to excel in both academics and athletics. Further, institutional environments that are perceived by students to be inclusive and affirming and where expectations for performance are clearly communicated are important to student learning (Simiyu, 2010). Issues surrounding academic policies and athletic procedures continue to be a problem on college campuses and have lasting effects on a student athletes’ academic performance (Horton, 2011; Forster, 2012).

Athletic policies in collegiate sports have been discussed in the literature (Charlton, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2003; Parsons, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Simiyu, 2010). However, the impacts of academic policies and athletic procedures on learning for student athletes is yet to be explored. Missed assignments and exams have been described from the perspective of absent policies (Charlton, 2011), and external factors affecting student athletes have also been acknowledged (Simiyu, 2010). Yet, no one has explored (1) the process by which student athletes are allowed to make up missed work (e.g., assignments, exams) due to sports travel, (2) the ways faculty knowledge and understanding of current university policies can affect student athletes’ ability to complete delinquent assignments, or (3) the way the absence of a policy or lack of enforcement contributes to faculty creating and enforcing their own policies, all of which can negatively impact student athletes learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study is to evaluate the ways academic policies and athletic procedures can impact learning for student athletes. Specifically, this study will
include an attempt to uncover whether or not faculty knowledge and understanding of the
current policy in the student handbook, allowing for faculty to enforce their own policies
and procedures, can impact learning for student athletes. Inconsistencies in faculty
knowledge and understanding of associated university policies are expected, and the
findings of this study could confirm the existence of a disruption in the learning process
for student athletes, stemming from the absence of a universal policy governing the
make-up work process for student athletes. At the same time, there is an intent to raise
awareness around incompatible academic and athletics policies with the ultimate goal of
faculty having a firm policy that guides their decisions and overall improves learning for
student athletes.

This study is also considered action research, which allows us to make meaning of
problems in the classroom, workplace, or community (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The
action research process is cyclical or spiral and integrates action and critical reflection
(Dick, 2015). The current study is an investigative approach to assess (a) the challenges
faced by student athletes who have attempted to make up work they missed due to sports
participation and (b) faculty members’ knowledge and understanding of sports-related
travel policies at their institution. Study participants include both student athletes who
have missed work due to sports travel and faculty members with student athletes enrolled
in their courses with delinquent assignments and exams due to sports travel. The site of
the study was a Division I institution in the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and
Virginia) area with an intercollegiate program that does have an identified academic
policy for athletic travel.
Research Questions

Two research questions guided the current study:

**Research Question 1:** How does the lack of a universal policy to make up missed assignments and exams due to athletic travel impact learning for student athletes?

**Research Question 2:** How does faculty knowledge/understanding on student athlete travel affect student athletes’ ability to make up missed assignments or exams?

Upon completion of this study, we will have more insight into the ways in which faculty instructors accommodate student athletes who need to make up delinquent assignments and exams due to sports travel, and we will also better understand the impact of faculty members’ knowledge of student athletes’ sports travel obligations (or lack thereof) on students’ opportunities to make up missed work. The research questions were structured to provide a straightforward assessment of the ways academic policies and athletic procedures can impact the learning process for student athletes.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Chickering’s student development theory published in 1969 and later revisited in 1993 with Reisser and Kolb’s (1984) learning theory. Chickering’s student development theory is based on seven vectors of student development: (1) developing competence, (2) managing emotions, (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (5) establishing identity, (6) developing purpose, and (7) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Kolb’s learning theory sets out four distinct
learning styles based on a four-stage learning cycle that involves accommodating, diverging, assimilating, and diverging.

Chickering’s student development theory provides validation for student athletes developing the competence to understand the policies and procedures in place for them to make up missed work due to sports travel and to develop mature relationships by communicating with their faculty instructors about their status while on sports travel as well as the importance of student development along a continuum in the learning process. Kolb’s theory of learning (1984) provides validation in understanding the way student athletes may process important information (e.g., policies and procedures related to making up missed work due to athletic travel) requiring clear explanation rather than a practical opportunity through the assimilation portion of the four-part learning cycle. Student athletes excel at understanding a wide range of information and organizing it in a clear, logical format.

**Research Design**

A qualitative research design integrating features of phenomenology was employed in this study to address the research questions. Phenomenological studies allow for the illustration of bracketed prereflective experiences, and the way individuals may experience life on a day-to-day basis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study captures the “essence” of the phenomenon, making it possible for the reader to have a better understanding of what it’s like to live the same experience (p. 62). Phenomenologists paint pictures of life experiences while exploring their own experiences to avoid *epoche* so that researchers can examine consciousness or the essence itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26–27). This study will offer a
comparison of student athletes’ lived experiences and the ways incompatible academic policies and athletic procedures can impact their learning.

**Significance of the Study**

As Sloan (2005) notes, student athletes are held to the duality of academia and athletics. The potential significance of practitioner-driven research in this area would be to highlight the organizational culture of academics and athletics and aid our understanding of the ways incompatibilities between these two institutional systems can impact learning for student athletes. This study will add to the scholarly literature by addressing the importance of collaboration between personnel and teams in student affairs and athletics departments to improve the overall success of student athletes. In education institutions/organizations, individuals should be constantly challenged to become the best possible versions of themselves as students and as athletes. To develop this type of culture, institutions, athletic programs at these institutions, and student athletes must all be committed to working together (Horton, 2011).

This study will also improve practice as it will (1) highlight the need for a universal policy to guide faculty in supporting student athletes, (2) include recommendations of an optimal learning environment for student athletes, and (3) improve interaction between faculty members and student athletes to help mitigate the academic and athletic divide. Finally, this study may improve policy by identifying expectations for academic performance and increasing the understanding that learning for student athletes is an important responsibility of not just teaching faculty, but also of other stakeholders at the institution, including those in the office of student affairs.
(Simiyu, 2010). It is important that policies between academics and athletics are aligned to improve learning outcomes for student athletes (Hamrick et al., 2002).

**Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations to the current study should be noted, all of which may offer direction for future studies. One limitation of the study was the sample size; a larger, more diverse sample population could have provided a different type of insight into the issue being explored. A second limitation is that participants were associated with a single Division I institution. This means that the findings may have differed if the student athletes and faculty members were selected from universities in other divisions, since institution size, department funding, and academic services may vary by athletic division. The limitations of the current study limit its generalizability as is the case with most research.

**Summary**

This chapter contains an introduction to issues surrounding academic policies and the impact of athletic participation on academic performance. The purpose of this study was to evaluate academic policies and athletic procedures and their impact on student athletes’ learning at Division I institutions, who are held to the duality of academic and athletic expectations. Specifically, this study will offer an attempt to link these issues with faculty knowledge and understanding of current policies in the student handbook, which allows faculty members to enforce their own policies and procedures and can impact learning for student athletes. Definitions for key terms used throughout this study were also given in this chapter.
Study findings will offer suggestions about better communication between student athletes and their instructors as well as suggestions for faculty and administrators working with student athletes to create policies and procedures to better guide their decisions on accommodating student athletes. A review of relevant literature will be presented in Chapter Two, the methodology and research design is covered in Chapter Three, results are presented in Chapter Four, and the study will conclude in Chapter Five with a discussion of the results and a response to intervention.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

Several terms, some of them more common in athletic and collegiate sports communities, will be used throughout this study are defined as follows:

**Academic advisor:** An integral player in a student athlete’s success who ensures that the student athlete meets and/or exceeds the NCAA’s academic requirements.

**Athletic travel:** Also referred to as “sports travel” throughout the paper, this term refers to the travel required for student athletes to participate in sporting events that occur at off-campus locations and may require that student athletes miss a class or classes.

**Division I:** A division of colleges that are the most competitive athletically, can offer full and partial athletic scholarships (partially funded by the NCAA), and have academic eligibility requirements.

**Grade point average:** Commonly referred to as GPA, a measure of a student’s academic achievement at a college or university that is calculated by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number attempted.

**Institutions of higher education:** Academic institutions within the level of education offered by universities and colleges.
**Intercollegiate athletics:** Sports played at the collegiate level.

**Make-up work:** Refers to missed assignments and examinations due to a student’s absence from a class during which the assignment or examination was given that have been or need to be completed by a student to earn a grade; used synonymously or similarly to “missed work” throughout this study.

**National Collegiate Athletic Association:** A member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes.

**Policy:** Information included in the student handbook or in other official university documents that offers information or governs activities, procedures, or processes at the institution.

**Process:** The manner in which something is done in the presence or absence of a governing policy.

**Student athlete:** A student who is also a participant in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the educational institution at which the student is enrolled.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many factors, both internal and external, contribute to the success of student athletes at Division I universities. Therefore, to better understand the dynamics of sports and athletics within the organizational culture of academics, both the internal and external factors that affect student athletes must be explored. For institutions that offer both academics and athletics, one of the primary goals is to graduate student athletes who will positively impact our society (Charlton, 2011; Hyland, 2008).

As a written argument to support the research thesis, the process of writing a literature review requires critical thinking to form a new thesis based on existing evidence. Complex literature reviews are essential in doctoral dissertations, and building the review involves in-depth analysis of previous scholarship (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The information presented in the current literature review directly relates to learning as a process, a continuum of student athletes’ interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, the systems and culture of academics and athletics, expectations from each system, and identification of the variables that may disrupt learning for student athletes.

The current study serves to bridge a noticeable gap in literature, specifically the absence of literature regarding the ways academic and athletics policies pertaining to student athletes, sports travel, and make-up work can impact student athletes’ learning. The current policy, according to the student handbook for the university serving as the context of the current study, was updated in 2019 and reads as follows:
At times, official team travel and athletic events may conflict with your academic classes. In general, faculty members are understanding, provided that students inform them prior to travel and as early as possible about anticipated absences.

Communication from the student athlete to the faculty member is key.

During your competition season, each student athlete will be provided a travel schedule to provide each faculty member, along with a form letter that details future travel. It is very important that the faculty member receives the travel schedule as this form letter will require the faculty member’s signature. This form will be returned to your academic advisor/learning specialist.

Schedule a time to review the course schedule with your professor and discuss any possible conflicts with exams, projects, or papers. Make sure you understand your professor’s requirements. Each professor will determine how you will make up missed work. Do not assume that all professors will follow the same make-up policy. If you experience any difficulties in working out a schedule for make-up work, contact your academic advisor/learning specialist immediately.

If your professor requires additional documentation of your team travel, request a letter from your academic advisor/learning specialist at least one week in advance of the trip. You should also reconfirm your absence with your professors at least a week prior to departure. At that time, arrange to make up missed coursework that results from traveling with your team.

Please note:

1. There is no official university travel policy at for student athletes.
2. Not all professors will accommodate athletic travel
3. It is best to arrange to take exams and submit assignments prior to team travel.

**What Learning Is and Does**

In terms of learning, Kolb (1984) described it as the process by which knowledge is created via the transformation of experience. Hamrick et al. (2002) identified the components of learning for college students as cognitive functions of critical thinking and communication skills; affective dimensions that involve managing emotions and dealing with newfound independence; and lastly, psychomotor dimensions that include sustaining an exercise regimen and operating sophisticated technology. Further, Kolb (1984) considered learning an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of
and feeding into the next. An individual can enter the learning cycle at any stage and logically transition through the sequence. Kuh (2007) identified some of the internal factors influencing a students’ learning as peer engagement, relationships with faculty, and motivation toward academic pursuits. Simiyu (2010) identified the external factors as part of the institutional structure including policies and procedures, funding, incentives, and resources extended to student athletes.

In *Points of View* (American Institutes for Research, 1989), it was noted that student learning is affected by both physical circumstances and the out-of-class environment, suggesting a more central role for student affairs in student development. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) examined the effects of attendance for undergraduate students, concluding that students become better learners from their freshman year to their senior year. Kuh (1996) added that a seamless learning environment (e.g., in-class and out-of-class, academic, nonacademic, curricular, cocurricular, or on-campus and off-campus experiences) is one characteristic of an institution that nurtures students’ learning and personal development.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) acknowledged the cohesiveness (by Clyde Parker in 1970) between in-class and out-of-class experiences that maximize a student’s experience, since the academic and the cocurricular, which are separate entities, continued to separate the two realms of learning. The American Association of Higher Education (as cited in Hamrick et al., 2002) also emphasized that student learning should be an important responsibility not only for teaching faculty, but for others in the institution, including those working in student affairs.
Ayers et al. (2012) argued that participation in athletics can cause emotional turmoil and physical fatigue, both of which impact student athletes’ ability to maintain their GPAs, engagement in nonathletic activities, social lives, and peer and professor relationships. In higher education, special emphasis is placed on athletic success versus academic success, where student athletes get greater reinforcement for athletic behaviors than academic behaviors (Hodge, 2015).

**Organization of the Review and Literature Search Strategies**

The literature reviewed for the current study is presented in this chapter and contains sections on Chickering’s student development theory and Kolb’s learning theory, both of which establish the framework of the study. The student development theory informs the research via the seven vectors of student development to explain student athletes’ interpersonal and intrapersonal competence of student athletes. Kolb’s learning theory informs the study via the cycle of learning through four separate learning styles. This chapter also covers the role of learning in student development, organizational expectations for student athletes, academic-athletic role conflicts, the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), academic support for student athletes, student athlete outcomes, and historical perspectives that can contribute to emotions and behaviors associated with academic and athletic challenges.

Literature was probed using the University of South Carolina’s Thomas Cooper Library and through the interlibrary loan (ILL) system. The following topics were searched using single key words or key words/terms and term connectors (e.g., and, or, not): student athlete, student-development theory, identity salience, student athlete travel, policy on athletic travel, NCAA, student affairs, Division I, and role conflict. Full-text,
peer-reviewed articles published in scholarly, academic, and professional journals as well as books published from 2004 to 2021 were located using the library’s electronic database, and some of the search engines used include ERIC and PsycINFO, Education Source, TDNet, and the Encore article search engine were utilized. Hard copies of books were obtained from the University library, and material that was not readily available was requested via the ILL system.

**Student Development Theory**

Student development theory refers to the body of knowledge in which the developmental process of learning, developing, and growing at the postsecondary level of education is recognized and described (Evans et al., 2010). Student development theories are focused on the interpersonal and intrapersonal changes that students experience during college and the factors that contribute to these changes (Hamrick et al., 2002). Chickering’s student development theory was originally published in 1969 but revisited in 1993 alongside the ideas of Reisser. Collectively, Chickering and Reisser (1993) offered seven vectors of student development: (1) developing competence, (2) managing emotions, (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (5) establishing identity, (6) developing purpose, and (7) developing integrity.

Developing competence encompasses intellectual, physical, manual, and interpersonal qualities. Managing emotions is important so that feelings such as anxiety, anger, depression, desire, guilt, shame, and embarrassment do not reach extremes to an extent that they interfere with a student’s pursuit of education. Autonomy refers to dependence on others while interdependence refers to dependence on oneself. The fourth
vector, developing mature interpersonal relationships, consists of two facets: (1) appreciating and tolerating differences and (2) the capacity for intimacy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Establishing identity refers to the formation of one’s identity, which leads to a sense of contentment with oneself and the way that self is seen by others. Developing purpose addresses a college student’s acknowledgment of the reasons for pursuing a degree. Finally, integrity development involves a student’s ability to assemble and practice the values that are actually consistent with their own beliefs (as cited in Hamrick et al., 2002).

Student development theory emerged from the disciplines of sociology and psychology as student affairs became a profession near the mid-20th century (Evans et al., 1998). Chickering (as cited in Hamrick et al. 2002) first used the term vectors because the term seemed to have both direction and magnitude. Chickering (as cited in Hamrick et al., 2002) further provided the developmental base for issues faced by students in college and factors in the college environment that affected student outcomes (as cited in Hamrick et al., 2002). Perry (as cited in Hamrick et al., 2002) provided a theory base for college students’ cognitive development. Then finally, Kohlberg’s theory of moral development became the base for theoretical examinations of young adult development that guided student affairs practices through the 1980s. According to Hamrick et al. (2002), Kohlberg’s theory added that college students’ development is enhanced if they are exposed to situations that require high level thinking, barring cognitive conflict. Chickering, Perry, and Kohlberg were together known as the forefathers of student development theory.
In the framework of the current study, key concepts of cognitive development in the student development theory that explain the way student athletes process information and further legitimizes the relevance of student affairs in the college setting (Evans et al., 2010) are identified. According to Evans et al. (2010), during the late 1960s and 1970s, the role of student affairs in higher education was being reconceptualized, requiring colleges and universities to “assume responsibility for the human development of their students” (p. 11). Rodgers (1989) shared that student development is what student affairs professionals do to encourage learning and student growth.

Student development theory can be used by student affairs professionals to guide the development of practices and policies that impact student learning as well address the needs of students within an institution (Long, 2012). Student athletes comprise a unique population of marginalized students who possess a variety of academic and athletic skills and are required to handle the stressors of competing both academically and athletically (Sloan, 2005). Due to the incompatibilities of academic and athletic requirements, Division I institutions have acknowledged the need for special services to accommodate the conflict between athletic and academic obligations. Consequently, institutions have developed offices particularly designed to support student athletes (Sloan, 2005).

**Kolb’s Learning Theory**

Kolb (1984) published a learning styles model from which a learning styles inventory was developed. Kolb’s learning theory, one of the first to be used in student affairs, involves a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles (Hamrick et al., 2002). As Kolb explained, learning involves the acquisition of abstract concepts
that can be applied flexibly in a range of situations. In Kolb’s theory, the impetus for the
development of new concepts is provided by new experiences.

Kolb’s experiential learning style theory is typically represented by the following
four-stage learning cycle: (1) concrete experience (CE): a new experience or situation is
encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience; (2) reflective observation (RO):
of particular importance are any discrepancies between experience and understanding;
(3) abstract conceptualization (AC): reflection gives rise to a new idea or a modification
of an existing abstract concept (the person has learned from their experience); (4) active
experimentation (AE): the learner applies his or her idea(s) to the world around them to
see what happens. Hamrick et al. (2002) noted that the four models of Kolb’s learning
theory fall along two dimensions: CE and AC are *means of taking in information* while
RO and AE are *means of processing* it.

This framework identifies the key concepts of effective learning observed when a
person progresses through the four-stage cycle as Kolb (1984) considers learning an
integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive and feeding into the next.
An individual may enter the cycle at any stage and logically cycle through it; however,
effective learning only occurs when a learner can execute all four stages of the model.
Therefore, no one stage of the cycle is effective on its own as a learning procedure.

Four distinct learning styles, based on the four-stage learning cycle, comprise
Kolb’s learning theory (1984), and various factors (e.g., social environment, education
experiences, the individual’s basic cognitive structure) influence a person’s preference.
The two continuums include the east-west axis, called the *processing continuum* (i.e.,
how we approach a task), and the north-south axis, called the *perception continuum* (i.e.,
our emotional response or how we think or feel about it). Kolb did not believe that both variables can be performed simultaneously on a single axis (e.g., thinking and feeling), but that our learning style is a product of choosing between the two. Kolb’s learning styles are best visualized via a two-by-two matrix.

Additionally, each learning style represents a combination of two preferred styles. The four learning styles are labeled diverging, assimilating, and converging, and accommodating. Knowledge of a student’s learning style enables learning that is orientated toward the preferred method. Students react to the stimulation of all forms of learning styles to varying degrees—the only question relates to determining the type of focus most appropriate for the specific scenario and a person’s learning style preferences.

The first learning style, diverging, is a combination of feeling and watching that involves two learning styles, CE and RO, as previously described. These students can see things from different perspectives, are sensitive, and prefer to watch rather than do, leaning toward information gathering and using imagination to solve problems. Such students are best at viewing concrete situations from different points of view. Kolb called this style diverging because these individuals perform better in situations that require idea generation, for example, brainstorming. Students with a diverging learning style have broad cultural interests, are interested in people, are imaginative and emotional, and are artistically inclined. They also prefer to work in groups, listen with open minds, and receive personal feedback.

The second learning style, assimilating, refers to watching and thinking and involves AC and RO. Assimilating involves a concise, logical approach, and ideas and concepts are more important than people. These people prefer clear explanations over
practical opportunities, and they excel at understanding a broad range of information and organizing it in a clear, logical format. People with this style are more attracted to logically sound theories than practical value. This learning style is essential for learners interested in information and science careers. In formal learning situations, people with this learning style prefer written materials, lectures, analytical models, and ample time for information processing.

Converging, doing and thinking, is the third learning style that involves AC and AE. People with a converging learning style can solve problems and will use their learning to find solutions to practical issues. They prefer technical tasks and are less concerned with people and interpersonal matters, and they are best at finding practical uses for ideas and theories. They can solve problems and make decisions by finding solutions, and they are more attracted to technical tasks and problems than social issues. A converging learning style enables abilities in becoming “specialists” and technological aptitude. People with a converging style also like to experiment with new ideas, simulate, and work with practical applications.

The final learning style is accommodating, which is doing and feeling, and involves CE and AE. The accommodating style is hands on, with more emphasis is placed on intuition than logic. These people use other people’s analysis and prefer to take a practical, experiential approach. They are attracted to new challenges and experiences and to carrying out plans; they also commonly act on “gut instinct” rather than logical analysis. People with an accommodating learning style tend to rely on others’ information than their own analysis. This is a prevalent learning style among the general population.
The Role of Learning in Student Development

Though learning encompasses many aspects of human development, learning styles are typically associated with learning in the cognitive realm. Cognition refers to the ability to store, manipulate, memorize, recall, and use information. Therefore, an individual’s cognitive style is multidimensional, with each layer focusing on the way one stores, processes, and uses information over time. With learning style being part of one’s cognitive style, learning style incorporates a variety of human factors such as the way one thinks, learns, solves problems, and perceives the external environment. In the literature, both brain function (cognitive psychology) and physiology to learning preferences have been connected. Physiology, as described in Kolb’s model, refers to the ways individuals retain or receive information (Skipper, 2005).

Sanford (1967) was one of the first scholars to consider the way college influences college students’ development, advancing the idea of human development being related to one’s environment and the environment playing a role in individual development. One of Sanford’s major contributions was the concept of challenge and support. Sanford discussed the idea of readiness, acknowledging that students cannot exhibit certain behaviors—or develop—until they are ready to do so. Two factors can enhance readiness: (1) internal dispositions and maturation as the student might find it possible to be ready through internal reflection, and (2) environmental factors influencing the student, related to challenge and support.

Environmental stimuli create disequilibrium for a student, which necessitates a response. This process is termed differentiation, referring to the manner in which the student connects with the campus stimuli that cause him or her to develop new ways to
Similar to Mezirow’s disorientating dilemma, students must find different ways to interact with their environments that they did not have before in order to thrive. If students are not ready to face the challenge, or if too much of a challenge is present in the environment, then students will typically (a) regress to an earlier state of development or being, (b) solidify their current state of development and stagnate, (c) retreat from the challenge, or (d) ignore the challenge. Too little of an environmental challenge may also cause stagnated student development due to excessive safety and security.

**The Role of Student Affairs in Student Learning**

The concepts of *learning*, *personal development*, and *student development* are inextricably intertwined and inseparable. Higher education has traditionally organized its activities into “academic affairs” (i.e., learning, curriculum, classrooms, cognitive development) and “student affairs” (i.e., cocurricular, student activities, residential life, affective or personal development). According to Hamrick et al. (2002), learning is the basis of the undergraduate experience, and it has cognitive dimensions, affective dimensions, and psychomotor dimensions. Learning that results from a student’s in-class experience includes a variety of experiences and settings that enhance the development of critical thinking and cognitive and intellectual development (Hamrick et al., 2002).

Student affairs professionals and other educators can provide support to help balance challenges in the environment. The amount of challenges a student can face is considered to be a function of the amount of support provided. Similar to challenges, if too much support is provided, then students are enabled and may struggle to develop into self-sufficient, autonomous adults. At this point, the goal is to find the optimal amount of
dissonance, or disequilibrium, that a student can tolerate. Too much or too little of either challenge or support may stunt student development.

A rubric for understanding cognitive learning, known as Bloom’s Taxonomy, emerged in 1956, was updated in 2001, and is now called the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (RBT) (Sanford, 1967). The RBT has six levels of cognitive complexity, starting with lower-level cognition and moving to higher levels of mental ability. According to this theory, as students develop, they are more prepared for higher levels of learning and understanding. Also, good assignments and evaluations should incorporate multiple levels of understanding, not just basic remembering. Bloom’s work can also be applied to affective (attitudinal) and psychomotor (skills) learning (Sanford, 1967). Hamrick et al. (2002) discussed a 1937 publication that was used by practitioners to inform faculty in preparing information and making it available for instruction improvement and curriculum flexibility. As student affairs activities began to stir on college campuses, it attracted individuals with academic backgrounds rather than backgrounds that would be considered student affairs or higher education. Another resource that directly addressed student learning, called Involvement in Learning (as cited in Hamrick et al., 2002), supported the idea of more faculty and student contact to strengthen intellectual dialogue.

Institutional environments that students consider affirming and inclusive and where expectations are clear are critical to student learning (Kuh, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Astin (1993) concluded that specific learning experiences could be tied directly to student learning outcomes. Kuh (1996) further deemed the ability to exercise “independent judgement” (p. 25) though interacting with faculty and peers an important
part of student learning. Additionally, Astin (1993) acknowledged that some experiences, such as participation in intercollegiate athletics, can have negative effects on student athletes, for instance, by interrupting their critical thinking and cognitive development.

Student affairs departments govern athletics and associated practices and policies that may impact student learning. Sloan (2005) notes that student affairs offices are also the source of policies dictating the ways in which student athletes are expected to make up missed assignments. In many cases, offices designated for student services for athletes are funded by athletics departments as athletic directors are the ones who oversee such offices. However, they can also be part of the institution’s academic or student affairs structures (Tovar, 2011). There is little to no literature that provides explorations of the origins of student athlete services or organization or the way such services became subsidiaries of student affairs (Sloan, 2005). However, Hamrick et al. (2002) points out a series of important principles focused on student learning for student affairs practitioners.

Communication in Learning

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded that students made gains from their first year of college on through their senior year, these gains in areas such as communication, quantitative skills, and critical thinking. Based on Chickering’s (1993) student development theory, the developing competence vector involves communication skills that help college athletes build interpersonal competence that helps them become better citizens. According to Horton (2011), student athletes should keep open lines of communication with faculty so that instructors are able to identify if these students may be struggling academically and provide assistance. Raunig and Coggins (2018) add:

Clarity of written communication should also be considered in the context of assignment, assessment, and feedback. Faculty who attends to the broad aspects
of communication and awareness of how both verbal and nonverbal communication affect the reception will likely be more effective than those who do not attend to these aspects. (p. 121)

**Motivation in Learning**

While motivation comes in many different variations, Filgona et al. (2020) share that it is motivation that causes a person to want to know, act, understand, believe, or gain particular skills. Bakar (2014) argued that motivation is a complex part of human psychology and behavior that influences individuals’ time investment, the amount of energy they exert toward a task, the way they think and feel about the task, and the amount of time they persist in the task. Hadre et al. (2007) further argued that for a learner to attempt something, there must be a motive, or more simply a desire, need, urge, or drive to achieve a certain goal. Bakar (2014) added that motivation can be seen in a students’ choices of learning tasks; the time, effort, and persistence they dedicate to the task; and the way they handle the obstacles they encounter during the learning process.

Student motivation is an essential element of quality education. Learners may have more than one motive for attending classes. However, the basic motive of a learner is the need for achievement and reward (Raunig & Coggins, 2018). Student motivation to learn can be detected in their behavior. Students who are highly motivated to learn will diligently work on tasks, are resilient in the face of adversity, show interest in a variety of problems, prefer to work independently, and are not bored by such tasks (Bakar, 2014).

**Student-Faculty Relationships in Learning**

Kuh (1996) argued that students who develop relationships with faculty members outside of routine involvement report greater cognitive gains. In healthy institutional cultures, the demarginalization of student athletes is critical to changing the negative
perceptions that faculty and students/peers may have about student athletes as related to their academic abilities. Despite the academic support services a college may offer, student athletes still struggle to compete academically, showing a disconnect between faculty and athletic departments (Gaston-Gayle, 2014). Faculty members with limited understanding of student athletes’ unique needs tend to have negative responses to these students’ needs (Fletcher et al., 2003). Faculty beliefs may lead to constructive athletic policy reform; unfortunately, these opinions may also fuel negative stereotypes about student athletes (Tovar, 2011).

**Organizational Expectations for Student Athletes**

The focus of collegiate athletic programs is to graduate student athletes who will make a positive impact on society (Hyland, 2008). Organizational culture includes considering the needs of student athletes to ensure their success (Forster, 2012; Horton, 2011). An institutional organization should challenge individuals to become the best versions of themselves as athletes and as students. Yet, student athletes are expected to be model citizens and role models both on and off the field, with special emphasis on “off the field,” since it represents an expectation of personal and academic accountability for student athletes (Charlton, 2011, p. 136).

According to Wendling et al. (2018), student athletes have cumbersome duties that include attending practices and games, physical conditioning, weight-lifting, and compliance meetings; traveling for athletic competition; reviewing game film; completing rehabilitation training and duties when injured; participating in community service and booster events; and also hosting incoming recruits. Horton (2011) believes that exemplary athletic programs are committed to educating the whole student, and
academic and athletic environments are equally regarded in such programs. However, Horton (2011) also acknowledged that the institution, athletic programs, and student athletes have to work in harmony to truly develop this type of culture.

**Institutional Policies**

Fletcher et al. (2003) noted that policies are in place so that students not only meet but exceed academic expectations while also accepting the seriousness of the academic performance illustrated via the consequences of noncompliance. In lieu of using NCAA requirements, colleges and universities may establish their own policies, procedures, and philosophies for student athletes, further complicating student athletes’ understanding of these expectations. Although participating in sports sometimes requires that a student athlete misses classes (Fletcher et al., 2003), some institutions lack (clear) policies that prevent student athletes from being penalized for sports-related absences. Often, institutional policies state that athletes are “students first and athletes second,” but the trickle-down effects can create a type of inconsistency that may affect both the teams and individual athletes (Ferrante et al., 1996).

As Fletcher et al. (2003) shared, some athletes may hear “mixed messages” when their sports/athletic teams discuss priorities that position academics as secondary to practice and competition. At some institutions, special groups may be assembled develop policies and procedures specific to the needs of student athletes. However, the boards and people who set these policies may have limited understanding of student athletes’ unique concerns as well as their psychosocial needs (Fletcher et al., 2003). Yet, institutions should still have policies that govern the process by which student athletes are allowed to make up missed work due to travel (Simiyu, 2010). Charlton (2011) argued that
academics-related policies are supposed to ensure that classroom success is equally as important as athletic success.

Policies being implemented by academic centers and coaches contribute to socialization (NCAA, 2016), and Marx et al. (2008) refer to socialization as the process of interaction where members of a group are taught the values, skills, knowledge, characteristics, and norms affiliated with being a part of that group. An example of formal socialization, according to Weidman (1989), are written academic standards and policies. According to Horton (2011), when parents, student athletes, and athletic staff have an opportunity to discuss program goals and expectations, student athletes have better outcomes and greater success.

Coaches contribute to the academic culture by ensuring the success of their athletes via implementation of their own academic expectations. In the classroom, if students are unsure of the expectations, then assessments to determine their competency may come as a surprise. Rosenthal and Jacobsen (as cited in Raunig & Coggins, 2018) explored the effects of expectations on assessment outcomes in the 1960s and 1970s, finding that teachers’ expectations for their students—regardless of their backgrounds—can have profound effects on the outcomes of student assessments. To support the success of student athletes, it is necessary for institutions to provide resources for this marginalized group, including student support services, academic support, and teaching environments that are conducive to learning (Kuh, 2007). Student athletes who have more access to resources at the start of their academic pursuits may perceive academic demands as less taxing than those with access to fewer resources. Thus, the resources available, such as student support services and academic advisors, may help student
athletes better cope with the burdens of incompatible obligations in their athletic and academic roles (Wendling et al., 2018).

**Academic-Athletic Role Conflict**

In higher education, more emphasis is placed on athletic success than academic success (Hodge, 2015). Extreme athletic obligations can prevent student athletes from fulfilling their academic commitments to the university, leading to an academic-athletic role conflict (Adler & Adler, 1987; Wendling et al., 2018). According to Ayers et al. (2012), athletic participation can contribute to emotional turmoil and physical fatigue on student athletes, who may be trying to maintain NCAA GPA requirements, their social status, their personal lives, and exchanges with their professors. Student athletes may even fear the loss of their athletic scholarships if they find themselves unable to reconcile the incompatibilities of athletic and academic demands (Wendling et al., 2018). Wendling et al. (2018) suggest that reconciliation of the athletic-academic conflict may lead to poor academic outcomes for student athletes and may vary from sport to sport, as contact versus noncontact sports indeed have different demands, especially true in Division I intercollegiate athletics.

Oftentimes, student athletes choose majors as well as classes with lighter academic demands so that they can focus mainly on their athletic pursuits (NCAA, 2016). Typically, such conflicts can be avoided when there are limits on the number of days a student athlete is required to travel for competitions that take place away from the campus and when efforts are made to ensure that competition does not interfere with student athletes’ academic schedules (Ayers et al., 2012). Although new legislation was introduced to the NCAA in 2017 to address concerns about student athletes’ time
demands, limiting athletic participation hours to 20 per week, some coaches found loopholes and required that student athletes to complete individual workouts outside of the team setting (NCAA, 2017).

**Marginalization of Student Athletes**

Establishing an institutional culture built on excellence is significant to the demarginalization of student athletes and changing the negative perceptions of faculty and students as related to their academic abilities. According to Kagan et al. (2004), “marginalized people or groups have little to no say over their lives, resources available to them; and somehow are on the receiving end of negative public stigma” (p. 2). Additionally, student athletes may be confronted with layered marginalization due to their status as community college students and/or members of under-represented ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic groups (Horton, 2011). Marginalization typically occurs via microaggressions, which Sue (2010) refers to as “hidden demeaning messages that often lie outside of the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrators” (p. 4). For example:

- Coaches might encourage athletes to enroll in a course that is not listed on his degree program of study but will ensure an ‘A,’ rather than to enroll in a more rigorous course on the student’s degree program plan of study that could impact his athletic eligibility if he does not successfully complete the course. The hidden message here is ‘I do not believe you are smart enough to successfully pass this course and your athletic eligibility is more important than your academic studies.’

- Or a faculty member might say, ‘Don’t worry about doing your homework for my class this semester because I know you have a busy athletic schedule.’ The hidden message: ‘No matter how hard you try; you will never pass my class so don’t
waste your time or mine. It is probably better to focus your time and attention on your athletic future.’ (Horton, 2011, p.29)

These subtle and not-so-subtle messages reinforce the idea that student athletes are neither capable nor interested in their academic studies, further reinforcing negative stereotypes.

**The National Collegiate Athletic Association**

Under NCAA guidelines, four-year institutions with athletic programs should abide by specific policies, procedures, and bylaws (Fletcher et al., 2003). Thus, the NCAA has mandates in place to ensure student athletes’ academic preparation, success, and persistence. According to Davis (1996), a significant function of the NCAA is to promote rules and regulations to which member institutions must adhere, and institutional control is assured by placing the responsibility on member institutions. With respect to education value, the NCAA considers intercollegiate athletics programs as vital components of a university’s education programs; thus, the NCAA’s constitution states that intercollegiate athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner that protects and enhances the physical and educational welfare of student athletes (Davis, 1996; NCAA n.d.).

In the intercollegiate setting, academic advisors act as integral parts of student athletes’ success by ensuring that they meet the NCAA’s academic requirements (Tashenberg, 2016). According to the NCAA, it is up to an institution’s compliance office to ensure student athletes’ eligibility. According to the NCAA’s (2020) academic requirements:
By the START of sophomore year, athletes must have a cumulative GPA of 1.8 and have completed 36 units and by the END of sophomore year, athletes must declare a major. By the START of junior year, athletes must have a cumulative GPA of 1.9 and have completed 72 units (40 percent of total degree requirements). By the START of senior year, athletes must have a cumulative GPA of 2.0 and have completed 108 units (60 percent of your degree requirements). By the START of a fifth year, athletes must have a cumulative GPA of 2.0 have completed 144 units (80 percent of degree requirements) (para. 4)

The institution must report any information discrepancies regarding a student athlete’s initial eligibility to the NCAA’s Eligibility Center (NCAA, 2020). Discrepancies include but are not limited to corrections, additions, potential academic misconduct with regard to high schools attended, grades, completion of coursework or test scores. An institution must immediately refer to applicable rules and also remove the student athlete from all competitions if he or she is ineligible under the provisions of the constitution, bylaws, or other NCAA regulations (NCAA, 2020).

Each NCAA institution has its own policies regarding athletic scholarship loss due to academic ineligibility. The initial penalty for academically ineligible student athletes, according to NCAA guidelines, is ineligibility to compete or practice in intercollegiate sports the semester following the grading period for the semester that the student athlete became ineligible. If, by the end of the second semester of ineligibility, the student athlete is still academically ineligible, he or she is then placed on academic suspension and loses any athletic scholarships. Whenever the athlete becomes
academically eligible again, according to NCAA and institutional standards, then he or she may be reinstated to participate in sports and receive their scholarship award.

**Academic Support and Advisors for Student Athletes**

Academic support centers are put in place to provide students with academic counseling, tutoring services, advanced class scheduling, drug and alcohol counseling, and life skills (Naughton, 1996). Academic support services are generally more focused on athletics mainly due to the limited time student athletes may have for academics due to the athletic demands associated with participation in competitive sports (Naughton, 1996).

Specialized academic support services have been shown to increase the likelihood that student athletes graduate from college if programs are, in fact, viewed as helpful or necessary (Adler & Adler, 1991). Naughton (1996) claims that critics may argue that the necessity of these support services suggests that many student athletes, especially those in revenue-generating sports, would not succeed without the help offered in academic support centers. Previous research shows that revenue-generating sports tend to be primarily focused on winning while in sports that do not generate revenue, more emphasis is placed on academics and graduation (Ridpath et al., 2007). Those who support special services for college athletes say the general population of college students could also benefit from academic support centers and assistance programs across the campus (Naughton, 1996).

According to Petitpas and Champagne (1998), student affairs offices have also expanded to include academic advisors, or professionals who support student athletes and attempt to ensure their academic success. Most of the NCAA’s Division I institutions
offer various services and supports, such as academic advisors, tutors, and mentors, to help student athletes balance their academic and athletic obligations (Naughton, 1996). Figler and Figler (1984) indicated that academic advisors monitor academic eligibility, course selection, inventory of academic deficiencies, tutoring, and study hall with the end goal being academic, athletic, and social development.

**Outcomes for Student Athletes**

Studies have shown that student athletes who participate in college sports tend to be less prepared for academics than nonathletes (American Institutes for Research, 1989; Sellers & Chavous, 1997). However, others have argued that although some college athletes may have performed poorly in high school, they had higher GPAs, lower attrition rates, and a greater likelihood of graduating than nonathletes because of the academic resources available to them (Ridpath et al., 2007). College athletes usually begin college with an intent to graduate and more concerned about their academic performance, yet they may not graduate due to the complexities of participation in intercollegiate athletics (Adler & Adler, 1985). Over the years, it has been concluded in several studies (Adler & Adler, 1985; Ridpath et al., 2007) that college athletes have little interest in academic pursuits and attend college primarily to make athletic advancements, resulting in lower GPAs, lower graduation rates, and higher attrition rates than other students.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) linked athletic participation with students’ satisfaction with the college experience, noting that sports participation can make students more motivated to complete their degrees. However, McMillen (1991) argues that these lower graduation rates show that institutions are not fully committed to student athletes’ success or show that student athletes have lower levels of academic
preparedness. For most university and intercollegiate athletic administrations, the phenomenon of intercollegiate athletes’ academic success and likelihood of graduation is an ongoing concern (Ridpath et al., 2007).

**Historical Perspectives**

The increasing diversity of students enrolling at higher education institutions has resulted in student development theory, used to describe the unique experiences and developmental pathways, starting to include a social justice component (for example, addressing racial, ethnic, and/or sexual identity) (Jones & Stewart, 2016). Student development theory is also being interwoven with structures of inequality to deepen our understanding of college students’ development and, more particularly, be focused more on the way campus culture affects students of color and student success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1999). Student development theory has also shifted away from psychological analyses of student development and is now more inclusive of diverse populations. Student athlete, a term the NCAA introduced in the 1950s, used to mitigate negative publicity induced by the introduction of athletic scholarships in collegiate institutions to convince institutional leaders that athletes on scholarship were like any other student on campus. However, the term is now used to describe any college student who also participates in organized university-affiliated sports (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005).

Scholars have debated the place of athletics and its role in higher education since the early 1900s (Aries et al., 2004). Despite the establishment of intercollegiate sports in colonial America, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, which later became the NCAA, was not formed until 1906, which is also when rules and
regulations for intercollegiate athletics started to develop (Flowers, 2009; NCAA, 2003). As the NCAA (2017) indicated, its main purpose was to weave intercollegiate athletics and academics into a single institutional student body. During colonial times, sports were student-run activities that Flowers (2009) said were “co-opted by the leadership of higher education for marketing purposes to increase enrollment, philanthropy, and public support” (p. 344).

Between 1895 to 1905, sports began to dominate collegiate life as student players started to emerge as player students (Lester, 1999). By the end of the 19th century, discussions of academic eligibility started to surface, taking place primarily during two conferences attended by faculty representatives. These conferences later produced the groups we know today as the “Big Ten” and the Ivy League Conference (Helman, 1989; Smith, 1988). These conferences were initially established for discussions of the balance between academics and athletics to occur and also to increase faculty oversight. Unfortunately, no strides were made in this area until the death of a football player in 1905 (Solow, 1998). This meeting of colleges later formed the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, which is known today as the NCAA (Thelin, 1994). Student athletes’ balancing act between academics and athletics continues to be a significant issue for the NCAA and its member institutions due to the incompatible obligations of each of organization and their cultural complexities (Comeaux, 2013).

**Summary**

In the current literature review, the theoretical frameworks of the study was provided along with the conflicting messages regarding institutional policies and athletic procedures for student athletes. This chapter addressed the duality of student athletes’
academic and athletic expectations, the history of the NCAA, the role and origins of student affairs and its connection to athletics, the conflict that some student athletes are faced with, and outcomes, expectations, and marginalization of student athletes. All of this information formed the basis for the current study and contributed to a more holistic view of the understudied issues concerning student athletes, athletic performance, and the effects of policies and procedures.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The current investigation probes the personal development and student development of student athletes at a Division I institution. In this exploration, there is special emphasis on institutional policies and athletic procedures for student athletes missing class, assignments, and exams due to travel for sports/athletic events (Fletcher et al., 2003; Long, 2012; Parsons, 2013; Simiyu, 2010). Action research was undertaken in the current study, allowing us to make meaning or interpret phenomena of problems in the workplace, community, and classroom (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Action research is a cyclical or spiral process that integrates action and critical reflection or, at its simplest, alternates between action and reflection (Dick, 2015). The inconsistent practices regarding student athletes, sports travel, and make-up work (e.g., assignments, exams) and the impact of such practices on student athletes’ learning led to the development of this action research study.

The current study is qualitative in nature, which was preferred due to its exploratory nature and the drive to understand a complex social phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research is also focused on the analysis of people’s behavior and language in their natural settings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Qualitative research designs are appropriate for small groups of individuals undergoing the same experiences, experiences that can be examined for more insight (Creswell & Creswell,
In addition, qualitative research methods are designed to expose a target audience’s behavior and its connection to a specific topic or issue.

A qualitative design, specifically data collected via open-ended interviews, was best for this study because it enabled the collection of data with “depth” regarding student athletes and make-up work. This chapter will include a list of the research questions for both participant groups, details of the research design, the role of the researcher, and the context of the study. Attention is also given to ethical considerations, the study setting, the participant selection process, data collection and analysis methods, the intervention, and limitations of the methods.

Two research questions guided the current qualitative action research study:

**Research Question 1:** How does the lack of a universal policy to make up missed assignments and exams due to athletic travel impact learning for student athletes?

**Research Question 2:** How does faculty knowledge/understanding on student athlete travel affect student athletes’ ability to make up missed assignments or exams?

**The Research Design**

A qualitative research design integrating features of phenomenology was employed in this study, since a bounded system was of research interest. Through phenomenology, we understand the essence of phenomena by the way it is explained via people’s experiences as well as its analysis and comparison. Phenomenological studies are researcher’s attempts to illustrate bracketed prereflective experiences and individuals’ experiences with day-to-day life (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described phenomenology as a philosophy that has made an impact on all qualitative research, but one that remains just a type of qualitative research.
According to Creswell (2018), the product of a phenomenological study captures the “essence” of the phenomenon, making it possible for the reader to have a better understanding of what it is like to live the same experience. In the current study, the “what” is the institution and the incompatibilities between academic policies and athletic procedures; the “phenomenon” are the way student athletes in the health science department can make up work that they miss due to athletic travel. The “unit of analysis,” as explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is the impact that the absence of a universal policy for make-up work can have on student athletes’ learning.

The following steps guided data collection in the current study: (1) selection of faculty advisor; (2) IRB approval process; (3) meeting with faculty advisor and researcher; (4) a QR code was generated (freeQRcode.com) for placement on electronic flyers, (5) invitation to participate sent by faculty advisor; (6) interviews were scheduled; (7) interview process occurred; (8) interview follow-ups sent to arrange discussion of interventions with study participants; and (9) interventions given to participants who responded to previous step.

The faculty advisor in the current study worked in the health sciences department with years of research experience related to sports and academics. The researcher and faculty advisor met via the Zoom platform at the beginning of the study. The IRB process in the current study was quite rigorous and took a total of three months. During this stage, the need for a faculty researcher, who would oversee the process working with student athletes and prevent conflicts of interest, was identified. The QR code used for the electronic invitation to participate was generated online (freeQRcode.com). Once this QR code was scanned, the researcher was notified of participant interest, and participants
could access interview scheduling. Due to the rampant use of technology among college students and the digital age in which we live, use of a QR code was convenient, allowing student athletes to reply directly to the researcher without going through additional steps.

**The Role of the Researcher: Positionality, Experiences, and Biases**

Given that the current investigation is a qualitative action research study, the researcher served as the primary instrument of data collection. As Creswell (2009) stated, “Particularly in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study” (p. 196). At the time of the study, the researcher was a full-time lecturer a university’s health sciences department and had over 10 years of experience working with students and student athletes. The researcher also had over 13 years of experience in healthcare, specifically sports medicine. The researcher’s interest in the current study developed from being both an educator and athletic administrator who worked with student athletes that seemed to constantly struggle with balancing the demands of academia and athletics.

Although the researcher has experiences teaching student athletes across all semesters and sports, the researcher has more experience working with student athletes participating in fall and winter sports. My experience with working student athletes and being privy to issues that surround student athletes are limited to student athletes that participate in fall sports. This may suggest a slight bias toward athletes that compete primarily during the fall seasons. As a researcher, I was more interested in the outcomes of students athletes that compete in the fall, specifically, because these are athletes that I experience in my practice yearly. In addition, the researcher’s dual professional roles—a
sports medicine professional and a faculty lecturer—also contributes to the belief that faculty members with personal knowledge and experience with sports may be better suited to serve as instructors for student athletes to ensure their success. I was once a student intern, that traveled with student athletes and understand the challenges of student athletes trying to function in a multileveled system of various policies and procedures.

The Context and Setting of the Study

According to Creswell (1998), the selection of specific participants should reflect the goals of the study and allow the researcher to find individuals with the characteristics being investigated. Hays and Wood (2011) note some of the challenges with participant selection in phenomenology: “Researchers need to carefully select participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon rather than simply those who have perspectives on the experience” (p. 291). The context of the current study is a university located in a United States region known as the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia).

This study took place at a four-year, private Division I-A institution in the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) that has offices and/or programs that provide support services for student athletes. This research site was selected for several other reasons as well: (1) the number of employees within the programs, (2) the availability of potential study participants, and (3) the availability of historical data that could be used for data analysis. (More detailed information about the research site is included in Chapter Four.) Also, due to the nature of this study, a faculty advisor with research experience at the site of study was utilized. This was done to prevent a potential conflict of interest.
The Participant Selection Process

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), sample size should vary based on the qualitative design being used; phenomenology involves a range of 3 to 10 participants. The criteria established for this purposeful sampling stemmed directly from the purpose of the study, guiding the identification of information-rich cases. In addition, snowball sampling was used to locate key participants (i.e., student athletes, faculty participants) who met the established criteria. In alignment with the literature and phenomenological approaches in general, the final sample consisted of eight student athletes and three faculty members. As Patton (2002) shared, when participants are selected according to predetermined criteria, researchers have access to more in-depth, valuable information.

Selection criteria for the student athletes participating in this study included the following: (1) student is enrolled at the institution of study, and (2) student has self-reported academic challenges due to missing assignments and exams associated with athletics/sports travel. At the time of the study, 350 students were enrolled in the health sciences department. Of those 350 students, 34 were both student athletes and sports medicine majors. The final sample consisted of 8 of these 34 student athletes, all of whom were interviewed in alignment with Creswell and Creswell (2018); interviews continued until saturation had been reached. All study participants were over the age of 18 years. Participants’ identities as well as the university serving as the site of the study will remain anonymous throughout this study. Table 3.1 shows a list of student athlete participants and provides a brief description.
Table 3.1 Student Athlete Participant Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Course load</th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>5 courses</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GM</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Men’s basketball</td>
<td>5 courses</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>5 courses</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>5 courses</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JW</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Track and field</td>
<td>5 courses</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MJ</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Women’s basketball</td>
<td>5 courses</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Men’s basketball</td>
<td>5 courses</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TK</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>5 courses</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selection criteria for faculty members participating in the current study included the following: (1) employment at the NCAA Division I institution serving as the site of the research, (2) teaching responsibilities in the health science department, (3) had student athletes enrolled in his or her course(s) who have missed classes and assignments due to athletic travel, and (4) have allowed student athletes who have missed exams or assignments due to athletic travel to make up their missed work. Faculty members were also interviewed until data saturation had been reached, resulting in a total of three faculty members being selected and interviewed based on the criteria identified by Creswell and Creswell (2018). More faculty information is located in the description of faculty participants.

**Description of Student Athlete Participants**

The majority of the student athletes (75%) who participated in the study were classified as juniors or seniors. This may be attributed to the fact that the population of students reached by the faculty advisor via the invitation to participate included very few freshman and sophomore students. As junior and senior students are more likely to be enrolled in major-specific classes, these courses have more junior and senior student athletes. The bulk of the student athletes responding to the invitation were motivated by
gaining five extra-credit points in the health sciences course in which they were enrolled. These extra points were agreed upon by faculty members who were aware of the study. Of the student athletes who participated in this study, all were African American, over the age of 18 years, enrolled in 15 credit hours, and had self-reported (via responding to the invitation to participate) missing assignments or exams due to sports travel. Three female and five male student athletes participated in this study, and their GPAs ranged from 2.40 to 3.40 on a 4.00 scale.

The sports represented in this sample include football, basketball, volleyball, track and field, and softball. All student athletes were assigned pseudonymous names, represented as initial, to maintain their anonymity throughout the study. Student athlete participants included TK, NJ, JM, AC, JW, GM, IM, and MJ. The female participants were IM, AC, and MJ, and the male participants included TK, NJ, JM, JW, and GM. The participants all had education goals beyond their undergraduate studies, and they cited various motivations for learning and attending their classes. Participant details were presented in Table 3.1, and profiles for each participant follow this table.

**Participant 1: TK**

TK is a football player and a business major at the university. He reported that he was “cool” with his instructors and acknowledged the importance of communication. He seemed to be a serious, organized student, with a GPA lingering near a 3.00. He mentioned that part of his motivation to learn was his desire to be a role model for his younger siblings. TK also seemed to be a compliant student athlete, meaning that he appears to follow processes and procedures that aid his success as a student and as an
athlete. TK also seemed shy and appeared to be a very courteous, responsible student athlete. TK’s interview lasted from 30 to 35 minutes.

**Participant 2: NJ**

NJ is a basketball player and a junior, majoring in sports management. He seemed lively and enthusiastic during his interview, and he gave quite a bit of information in comparison to the other participants. NJ acknowledged having difficult relationships with his instructors, and he also shared that one of his instructors seemed to “not like” football players very much. In addition, NJ stated that he goes to student support services and tutoring for accommodations with a learning disability and also with time management. NJ’s GPA was a 2.40, which was the lowest GPA among the student athletes.

**Participant 3: JM**

JM is another football player and one of the two sophomores who participated in the study. JM appeared to be a very personable young man and provided more detailed information than some of the other study participants. JM discussed that regularly attending classes resulted in better academic outcomes. JM also identified one of the academic struggles that he faced as an athlete is not having connection to the internet while traveling to and from sports events. Many of JM’s responses were vague, despite his lively personality. JM also chose to skip a few of the questions asked (as all participants were allowed), shortening the duration of his interview.

**Participant 4: AC**

AC is a health sciences major and female volleyball player, and the volleyball team at this university is quite successful, which could be attributed to her coach’s
AC stated that she has a good relationship with all of her instructors, and she noted that such a relationship is important prior to starting to miss class for sports. AC acknowledged that instructors seem to perceive student athletes as “lazy,” or not very interested in their academic performance. She pointed out that retaining her scholarship was one of her biggest motivators to attend classes, and her GPA was a 3.00 on a 4.00 scale. AC also seemed quite enthusiastic about volleyball, discussing it with excitement whenever the subject arose.

Participant 5: JW

JW was a sophomore track and field athlete, and he shared that part of his motivation was to get passing grades and remain eligible to compete. JW also stated that he had to make up assignments and exams when he missed class because it was important that he graduated on time. JW shared that being a student athlete is sometimes challenging as they have more things to do than average students and that long days can make this dual role seem a bit overwhelming. There seemed to be a lack of enthusiasm throughout the course of this interview. JW did acknowledge the importance of getting his assignments submitted. His GPA was a 2.70 on a 4.00 scale.

Participant 6: GM

GM is a senior basketball player, and he had the highest GPA of all student athletes who participated in this study. GM discussed the frequent travel associated with basketball, and he feared academic failure and being “sent home” if his academic performance fell below standard. GM noted that he only established relationships with instructors in classes in which he may struggle, and he seemed to “know the ropes” of doing well in his classes and visibility with his instructors. GM also noted that the topic
of the current study is an important one due to some of the challenges that student athletes face.

**Participant 7: IM**

IM is a senior softball player and one of the three female participants. Her career goal is to become a physician, and she mentioned that class attendance is important because lack of attendance could lead to her losing her scholarship. IM was both assertive and responsible and mentioned the regularity with which she checked her grades and course syllabi, which illustrated her maturity as a student. IM also acknowledged the confusion associated with the make-up work policies for student athletes. IM was a health sciences major who hoped to attend medical school upon completion of her academic studies. IM’s interview was one of the longest interviews as she was both thorough and descriptive in her responses.

**Participant 8: MJ**

MJ is a female basketball player, and she had a 3.20 GPA on a 4.00 scale. MJ mentioned that she tried to attend all of her classes because she does not want to get in trouble with her coach. MJ had a cavalier attitude, and she chose to skip a few of the interview questions. MJ was a senior at the time of the study, and she discussed the importance of using academic technologies (e.g., Blackboard) to keep up with her assignments. She also noted that she does use the academic supports offered to student athletes at the university.

**Description of Faculty Participants**

Three faculty members, both tenured and nontenured, who taught in the health sciences department at an HBCU in the northeastern region of the United States
participated in the study. Each faculty participant was also assigned a pseudonymous name (PE, DD, and VS). One faculty participant, PE, is a tenured professor in the health sciences department who understands the importance of student athletes learning in supportive environments. PE appears to be a strict professor who is familiar with student athletes and class absences, expressing further interest in collaborating with the athletics department to make processes smoother for student athletes.

The second faculty participant is DD, a tenured professor in the health sciences department who has served as an administrator and an athletic representative to help bridge the gaps between academics and athletics. Of the study participants, DD has the most experience, and she is familiar with the policies and procedures governing student athletics at the university. DD has a leadership role in the department in which she is employed.

The third faculty participant, VS, is a nontenured professor in the health sciences department who understands that student athletes must have their instructors’ support to balance athletic and academic obligations. VS is a younger professor with an athletic background, and she has awareness of some of the challenges associated with student athletes and sports travel. VS tends to strictly adhere to her make-up work policies and had limited knowledge of the university’s policy. VS stated that student athletes should complete their assignments prior to sports travel, which is not a favorable practice.

The faculty advisor was also essential in accessing the study population. To establish the connection between the researcher and the study participants, the faculty advisor sent a message via electronic mail (e-mail) containing an invitation to participate in the study. Since faculty from the health sciences department had agreed upon a total of
five extra-credit points as an incentive to participate in the study, this incentive was featured on the invitation to participate. Embedded in this e-mail was the study announcement flyer with a QR code that prompted a response to be automatically sent to the researcher indicating the potential participant’s acceptance of the invitation to participate. The QR code also directed potential participants to a website (Calendly) on which they could schedule an interview time and date. After potential participants showed interest by scanning the QR code, a consent form was immediately sent in response (Appendix B).

The Interview Process and Guiding Questions

According to Seidman (2013), having interest in the lives and experiences of others is key when interviews are used in the data collection process. A basic requirement for phenomenological interviews is the researcher’s interest in others’ stories because they are of worth. Seidman discussed the three-stage interviewing process, which begins with establishing the context of the interviewee’s experience, followed by construction of the experience, and ending with a reflection on the meaning of these experiences.

Seidman (2013) emphasized particular interview structuring to develop this understanding while remaining open to the notion that different questions may require different ways of knowing or comprehending and different questioning strategies. As noted, meaning does not refer to “just the facts,” but an understanding of the relation between the things stated, the things the listener attempted to ask or hear, the way something was said, and the message that a speaker attempted to convey (Seidman, 2013). Interviewing grants access to the context of people’s behavior, thereby providing a
way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. Interviewing also deepens our understanding of people’s actions (Seidman, 2013).

Heppner and Heppner (2004) assert that in phenomenological studies, research questions are constructed around understanding participants’ lived experiences and the examination of the meaning of those experiences, both which provide a foundation for specific interview questions. Klein (2008) adds that developing the most appropriate interview questions is essential to obtaining credible data:

To the extent possible, interview questions need to be consistent with the research approach used to avoid the limitations of researchers’ assumptions about participants and the topic being researched. After initial data are collected and analyzed, more focused questions are acceptable (depending on the qualitative approach selected) because they can be based on participants’ responses and not on researchers’ assumptions. Later, focused questions based on data collected from participants might be used to develop more thickly described concepts.

(p. 214)

Previous research related to academic and athletic inconsistencies guided the development of the research questions in addition to informal conversations with student athletes regarding the make-up work process. Feedback from academic advisors, former student athletes, and other faculty members were also considered, as each group has brought awareness to some of their challenges while working with student athletes.

**Data Instruments**

Two researcher-developed instruments were created to guide data collection via interviews: (1) a 30-item interview guide for student athletes (Appendix F), and (2) an
11-question interview guide for faculty participants (Appendix G). These interview guides included questions that covered various aspects (e.g., process, policy, understanding of process and policy) regarding student athletes, absences, sports travel, and making up missed work. Interview questions were validated by the use of similar questions in a previous study (Ridpath et al., 2007) as well other related literature to minimize content validity issues. While many instruments have been developed with a similar goal of simply obtaining data, a more tailored, researcher-developed instrument was used in the current study.

Interviews were scheduled via the Calendly platform, a digital application that allows an individual to select an available date and time for a virtual meeting. The Calendly platform is synced with a calendar designated by the individual setting up scheduling so that meeting dates and times are automatically added. Most of scheduled interviews were conducted in late afternoon and evening time slots as this was the time during which student athletes were available due to their rigorous practice and academic schedules. All interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform to adhere to the social distancing guidelines brought forth by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that rapidly spread across the globe in 2020. In addition, Zoom interviews were more convenient for student athletes, who were often in transition during their interviews. One week after completion of all participant interviews, a follow-up e-mail was sent to arrange discussions of interventions. Only four of the eight student athletes and two of the three faculty members responded to this message. Interventions were discussed with follow-up respondents.
The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges over the course of the current study, specifically related to accessing study participants. While in-person interviews have typically been the standard in data collection for qualitative studies, video conferencing programs, such as Zoom Video Communications Inc. (commonly known simply as Zoom), provide researchers with cost-effective, convenient alternatives to in-person interviews (Gray et al., 2020). One advantage of video conferencing is that it allows researcher access to a more diverse participant population, it is more convenient, and it is safer from a health perspective (considering the current pandemic). However, some of the disadvantages of such technologies include technical difficulties and possibly additional costs. Use of the Zoom platform allowed the researcher to obtain rich interview data while also offering a convenient, positive experience for study participants.

**Ethical Considerations and Protections**

The current study was approved by the IRB (Institutional Review Board) at the University of South Carolina (USC), the board that is responsible for the review and oversight of all research involving human subjects conducted by USC faculty, students, or staff. In addition, IRB approval was obtained from the DMV-area university serving as the site of the study, allowing access to both the study participants and the research site. Additional permission was sought from the health sciences department chair and the dean of the college in which the health sciences department is situated. The approval process took approximately three months.

When providing services to student athletes, confidentiality and privacy and informed consent is also an ethical consideration. To address this, each participant was
given a consent form that included the following information: (a) the purpose of the study; (b) data collection procedures; (c) the participant’s right to refuse participation, withdraw from the study at any time, or to extract their words at any time without impunity; (d) strategies implemented to protect participant confidentiality; (e) an indication statement of known risks of participation; (f) the expected benefits of the study; and (g) permission to be audio recorded.

Participant privacy and confidentiality were reinforced via the use of pseudonymous names. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewer reaffirmed the purpose of the study, the participant’s general consent, and the participant’s consent to be recorded. Each participant was also given a digital copy of the consent form; the originals remain on file with the researcher. All audio recordings were kept in a secure folder on the researcher’s computer, and they were retained until the conclusion of the study. At the conclusion of the entire study, all audio recordings were destroyed.

Data Collection Procedures

After exploring the most common methods of data collection used in qualitative research, interviews were selected for the current study. Interviewing in phenomenological research is particularly in-depth to enable the researcher to fully describe the meaning of the phenomenon shared by study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An advantage of this type of interviewing is that it is explicitly focused on participants’ experiences and deeper meaning in their lived events (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). All participants engaged in in-depth phenomenological interviews, this interview content serving as data in the current study. Interviews were conducted over a
three-week time span via the Zoom platform, and each interview lasted from 30 and 45 minutes. Participant privacy and confidentiality were reinforced by use of pseudonyms throughout the data reporting phase. Also, at the beginning of each interview, the researcher/interviewer reaffirmed the purpose of the study, participant’s consent, and consent to be recorded.

The Zoom platform, a digital medium with audio and video capacity, allows recording (with permission), which ensures accuracy and supports later transcription (as was the case in this study). During the interviews, both student athlete and faculty participants were asked the series of questions identified earlier in this chapter. The questions for student athletes prompted them to share their experiences with making up missed work due to athletic travel. The questions for faculty participants prompted faculty members to share their understanding of any policies, procedures, and knowledge concerning student athletes and make-up work. For both groups, questions were asked during the course of the interview to ensure that they all met inclusion criteria.

Follow-up questions were also used when clarification and/or elaboration was needed to strengthen a response. At the conclusion of each interview, audio recordings were reviewed, and data were transcribed. To ensure accuracy of the data, several verification methods were used. One of these methods was member checking (Glesne, 2006), completed via the researcher providing participants with a copy of their respective interview transcripts and giving participants an opportunity to verify accuracy, clarify, or elaborate on anything they deemed necessary. Confirmation emails with typed transcripts were sent to participants at the conclusion of the interviews to ensure accuracy of the information received or if participants wanted to clarify or add to their comments. Of the
participants, five student-athletes responded with a “thank-you” and nothing further was needed to clarify or add to their statements. The remaining three student athlete participants did not respond at all. All faculty member participants responded with a thank you to the follow-up email and also, nothing was needed to clarify or add to the transcript of our conversation.

**Data Analysis**

To understand and interpret the data, the researcher’s experiences and biases had to be considered as he or she is the primary tool of investigation in qualitative studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). Measures were taken to account for biases and to meet the quality standards of naturalistic, qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). Data analysis in the current phenomenological study was similar to data analysis in other qualitative methods where the data can first be organized (either manually or with the use of computer software such as MAXQDA, Atlas.ti, Provalis, QDA Miner, NVivo) and then analyzed. Creswell and Creswell (2018) acknowledged Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) as an efficient means for storing and locating qualitative data. In the current study, theme deduction was done through manual coding only. The primary goal of data analysis in phenomenological studies is to make meaning of themes identified via manual coding in a five-step process that Creswell and Creswell (2018) deem vital in any phenomenological approach consisting of the following:

1. Organizing and preparing the data for analysis: This step involves transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing field notes, cataloguing visual material, and sorting and arranging the data into different types, according to the sources of
information. For this step, transcripts were reviewed for first-order themes, which were derived from and paired with the participants’ statements.

(2) Reading or looking at all the data: This early step allows one to make general sense of the information as well as an opportunity to reflect on meaning. For this study, links and connections between categories were made and established via written memos.

(3) Beginning to code the data: Coding is the process of organizing data by bracketing chunks and using particular words to represent categories in the margins. For this study, the units of analysis were grouped into categories based on similarities and differences, and those categories were divided into subcategories in a second phase of categorization.

(4) Generating a description and themes. Description involves detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events within a particular setting. Once codes are identified, it is essential to organize the data into categories. For this study, transcripts were independently reviewed after the initial clustering of codes to identify second-order themes by grouping codes that were similar in meaning.

(5) Representing the description and themes. Narrative passageway is the most popular approach to conveying the findings stemming from analysis. For this study, interpretations were made based on common patterns and themes identified in the dataset and then linked to deduce the meaning that participants attached through experiencing the phenomena.

To ensure credibility, triangulation was achieved via analyzing the data from the interviews of both faculty and student athletes, in alignment with Merriam (1998). Given the qualitative nature of the current study and the fact that it addresses a specific
population, questions were developed that were appropriate for the sample. Data triangulation is a technique whereby data from one source is validated against at least two other sources. In the process of triangulation, a piece of data or information is taken and, to test its significance or utility, verified with data from other sources (e.g., interviews, documents) or observation periods. In addition, transferability was established by “rich, thick description” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) being offered in this study as well as the context for data collection. An extensive audit trail was used to promote confirmability for the current study. Finally, dependability was provided by the research committee advisor, who served as an adversary and challenged the categories and themes that emerged from the data.

The Intervention

At the conclusion of participant interviews, intervention strategies were offered to both student athletes and faculty participants. The intervention strategies for student athlete participants included (1) for student athletes to communicate with their faculty instructors at the start of the semester about their intention to travel, (2) remind their faculty instructors of their travel date the week prior to travel, and (3) have their faculty instructors put the process in writing for how student athletes are allowed to make up missed work. Faculty putting their process in writing was a new strategy that was not previously mentioned in the student handbook. Intervention strategies for faculty included ways for faculty members to become more familiar with the policy and process for student athlete travel by reading the policy in the student handbook and putting a policy in their syllabus on how missed work could be made up. Findings from this study are intended to inform student athletes, faculty members, and administrators in student
affairs departments and athletic departments on strategies to improve student athletes’
learning outcomes. As Astin (1993) argued, involvement in intercollegiate athletics can
impact student learning, so potential problems related to this involvement should be
identified early on and minimized by those responsible for developing interventions.

**Expectations of Student Athlete Participants**

Student athletes were to submit official travel notes to their professors/instructors
at the beginning of the semester, and these notes contained the expected dates of absence
that were specific to each course as well as a request for a meeting with that faculty
member during the week of travel to remind them of the upcoming absence(s). Student
athletes were also to obtain—in writing—information about the way they could make up
any assignments or examinations they may miss upon return from athletic travel.

**Expectations of Faculty Participants and Student Affairs Professionals**

Faculty instructors were asked to allow student athletes two weeks beyond an
assignment’s original due date to make up the exams or assignments. Faculty members
were also asked to put their policies regarding student athletes and make-up work in their
course syllabi to ensure strengthen student compliance and accountability.

However, study participants were not the only ones invited for involvement in the
intervention strategies. Athletic administrators and student affairs professionals at the
institution/research site were asked to develop a policy that could be inserted into the
university-issued student handbook to guide faculty members in reasonably
accommodating student athletes who missed assignments or exams due to athletic travel.
This policy would ensure consistent practices as well as faculty accountability,
discouraging the creation of policies and processes that varied widely from one course to
another and possibly cause confusion for student athletes. This policy should require
student athletes to (1) provide faculty members with official travel notes at the beginning
of the semester, (2) remind faculty members of their upcoming absence during the week
of travel, and (3) obtain written details about assignment/exam completion upon their
return from athletic travel (via electronic mail).

Summary

This chapter included a description of the research methods and design used in
this study. Based on the objectives of this action research study, a qualitative research
design was used in which features of phenomenology were integrated, as appropriate, to
aid the current examination of student athletes. The study’s sampling methods and setting
were identified in this chapter along with the interview questions that both participant
groups were asked to answer. This chapter also addresses the use of triangulation along
with ethical considerations and participant protections.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The current action research study is an examination of the challenges faced by student athletes and faculty members related to student athletes missing assignments and examinations due to athletic travel. The purpose of the study was to probe the impact of academic policies and athletic procedures on learning for student athletes at a Division I institution as such students must meet both academic and athletic expectations. Issues concerning faculty members’ limited knowledge and understanding of current school policies as stated in the student handbook were of specific interest in this study as limitations such as these allow faculty members to develop and enforce their own policies and procedures, which can have detrimental impacts on student athletes’ learning.

Eight student athletes and three faculty members participated in the current study. Student athletes provided insight into the process by which they are allowed to make up work they miss during athletic travel. Faculty members shared their understanding of the policies governing student athletes and make-up work associated with athletic travel. Study results are provided in this chapter along with alignment of data analysis with phenomenological methodology. Two research questions guided this inquiry:

Research Question 1: How does the lack of a universal policy to make up missed assignments and exams due to athletic travel impact learning for student athletes?

Research Question 2: How does faculty knowledge/understanding on student athlete travel affect student athletes’ ability to make up missed assignments or exams?
Description of the Research Setting

At the university serving as the site of the current study, its status as a private HBCU (historically Black college and university) is important to the entire university community. At the time of study, enrollment numbers were at 7,857 students, and the university is located in an urban setting in the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia) area. A semester-based academic calendar is used at the university, and all undergraduate students are required to complete a university-wide core curriculum, which includes courses in English composition and Afro-American studies. The university has a gender distribution of 28% male students and 72% female students.

Twenty-one NCAA Division I varsity sports comprise the athletics department, and the university is part of the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, meaning that students at this university compete with students from other HBCUs throughout the region. Male sports consist of basketball, cross country, football, golf, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, and track and field. For female athletes, sports include basketball, bowling, cross country, lacrosse, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, and volleyball. At the university, there are fall sports, winter sports, and spring sports.

Fall sports include football, women’s volleyball, men’s and women’s cross country, and men’s and women’s soccer. Winter sports include women’s and men’s basketball, women’s and men’s track and field, women’s and men’s swimming and diving, and women’s bowling. Finally, spring sports include women’s softball, women’s and men’s tennis, women’s and men’s track and field, women’s lacrosse, and women’s and men’s golf. The travel seasons for each of these sports require rigorous scheduling and balance for student athletes.
There are 503 student athletes (263 male, 240 female). The average amount of scholarship aid granted to student athletes at this university per year ranges from $14,000 to $16,000, depending on the sport. The university generates approximately $16.9 million from sports each year. Some sports, like basketball and football, are the university’s primary “money makers,” meaning that they generate the most sports-related revenue.

To participate in intercollegiate athletics, student athletes must maintain athletic and academic eligibility, or remain in “good standing.” Good academic standing requires enrollment in a minimum of 12 credit hours and a cumulative GPA of 2.00 or higher. If at any time during the year a student athlete is suspended from the University for academic or disciplinary reasons, he or she is not allowed to practice or compete in intercollegiate athletics. For NCAA purposes, all student athletes must be enrolled full time each semester (i.e., minimum of 12 credit hours for undergraduate students). However, at this particular university, student athletes are required to take a minimum of 15 credit hours each semester (unless the student athlete is in the final/graduation semester).

The student record for a student athlete includes a “hold” to denote the student athlete’s status and prohibit student-initiated schedule changes. Student athletes who are not in their final semesters, but who wish to drop below the standard 15-hour course load, are able to reduce the number of credit hours in which they are enrolled. However, they must enroll in classes during the summer session to make up these credit hours. All student athletes are required by the NCAA and the university to be full-time, degree-seeking students.
Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and notes were taken by the principal researcher to supplement the recordings. Following the interviews, participants were given the researcher’s contact information in case there were any questions following the interview session. At the conclusion of all interviews, transcripts were reviewed for the identification of themes, which were derived from and paired with statements from both sets of participants. Transcripts were also reviewed by a peer who coded the statements, and these codes were later compared to those of the researcher. The peer reviewer was an editor and dissertation coach that was very familiar with the background of the study and had experience working with student athletes as well as being a faculty instructor in a higher education setting. This dual-coding process revealed similar and even some identical coding. After the first grouping of codes, transcripts were independently reviewed by the researcher for the identification of second-order themes, which was done by grouping codes with similar meaning.

Themes and Examples from the Data

During data analysis, four themes emerged for student athlete participants: (1) process/policy, (2) lack of communication, (3) impact/motivation, and (4) course difficulty. Findings from data analysis for the faculty participants resulted in the emergence of three codes: (1) policy, (2) process, and (3) knowledge and understanding. Table 4.1 connects each of the four themes associated with student athlete participants to the corresponding interview questions that yielded responses reflective of that theme.
Table 4.1 Links Between Interview Questions and Themes for Student Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interview question related to the theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process/policy</td>
<td>8. What is the process for submitting travel notes for assignments missed due to athletic travel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. What is the process for making up your missed assignments due to athletic travel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. What is the process for submitting an excuse for an exam missed due to athletic travel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. What is the process for making up your missed exam due to travel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Is the process for making up assignments/exams the same for all of your courses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. How does the process differ from each course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. What is the most important aspect in making up assignments and exams?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of communication</td>
<td>15. How often do you communicate with your instructor about athletic travel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25. How is your relationship with your instructor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31. What role does the student athlete play in the process for making up missed assignments and exams?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. What motivates you to learn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. What motivates you to attend class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact/motivation</td>
<td>24. Are you familiar with the student handbook regarding student athlete travel at your university?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28. How is your academic performance affected by athletic travel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20. Which courses have stricter “make up” policies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. Are there any courses that are harder to make up exams for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. Are there any courses that are harder to make up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course difficulty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Process/Policy**

The “process/policy” theme emerged from student participants’ descriptions of the processes for submitting travel notes for assignments they had missed due to athletic travel, the process for making up missed work, and the similarity in this process in all courses or the differences from course to course. Several participants noted inconsistencies in make-up work procedures and also pointed out the courses where they had the most difficulty when trying to make up assignments and exams. Participants’ responses are identified in Table 4.2. The interview questions associated with this theme include 8 (What is the process for submitting travel notes for assignments missed due to
athletic travel?), 9 (What is the process for making up your missed assignments due to athletic travel?), 10 (What is the process for submitting an excuse for an exam missed due to athletic travel?), 11 (What is the process for making up your missed exam due to travel?), 18 (Is the process for making up assignments/exams the same for all of your courses?), and 19 (How does the process differ from course to course? Explain the differences.).

Table 4.2 Student Athlete Responses Connected to the Process/Policy Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question #</th>
<th>Student athlete responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 8</td>
<td>“Get a letter from the head coach on Sunday, submit it on the next class period.” (TK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Get a travel letter from coach once get back on campus.” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Let teacher know before travel with note from Academic Advisor.” (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Email the professor to give a heads up, give travel note upon return.” (JW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Contacting professor via email or going to office hours just to confirm your travel arrangements.” (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Give teacher travel note at the beginning of semester with travel dates.” (IM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Schedule a meeting with your teacher at the beginning of the semester, give her your travel note.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 9</td>
<td>“Share the note with the teacher next class period, try to coordinate a date that works for both of us.” (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sometimes submit a note but teacher still gives a 0.” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“4 days after emailed notification, met one time with teacher during office hours, then was able to make up the assignment.” (JM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Contacting professor beforehand so they are aware of what’s going on. Then, they will let you know if you must complete the assignment before you leave or once you get back.” (JW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Email the professor or turn in the assignment late and then remind the professor of the travel dates, then make up the assignment two weeks after returning.” (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I get a travel note from my coach at the beginning of the season and turn it in to all my professors, then I email them when I am going to be out of town and may not be able to complete an assignment on time.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview question #</td>
<td>Student athlete responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Question 10          | “Same was with missed assignments.” (NJ)  
|                      | “Pretty much the same process for assignments.” (JM)  
|                      | “Same process.” (JW)  
|                      | “Same as with missed assignments, give the teacher my travel notes via email or in person.” (IM)  
| Question 11          | “Email teacher, ask to make up exam, given a date as long as there is an excuse note.” (TK)  
|                      | “Gets a 0 for missing it and then have to email professor, still has not been able to make up missed exams, trying to get in contact with professors are hard.” (NJ)  
|                      | “One teacher did not let me make up exam, said athlete should have known beforehand what was going on.” (JM)  
|                      | “Email teacher once I return to class, try to find a date that I am available to stay after class.” (AC)  
|                      | “Received partial credit after submitting note via Email. (Teacher had set dates) No option to complete before.” (JW)  
|                      | “Contacting professor beforehand so they are aware of what’s going on. Then, they will let you know if you must take the test before you leave or once you get back.” (GM)  
|                      | “Email the professor once I am back and ask when I can make up the exam. They give me a date and then open the exam online. I then email them once its complete.” (IM)  
|                      | “Email the teacher upon returning to school, coordinate a day to take the exam within 1 week of the exam.” (IM)  
| Question 18          | “No.” (TK)  
|                      | “No, depends on professor.” (NJ)  
|                      | “No.” (AC)  
|                      | “Some teachers are stricter than others.” (JW)  
|                      | “No.” (MJ)  
| Question 19          | “Some teachers are stricter than others and tell you no.” (TK)  
|                      | “Some are easier to get in contact with others, some require multiple emails and some you have to talk to after class.” (NJ)  

**Theme 2: Lack of Communication**

The “lack of communication” theme emerged as student participants expressed the most important aspect of making up missed work. Half of the student athlete participants (50%) also mentioned the importance of faculty communication. The interview questions corresponding with this theme included 23 (What is the most important aspect in making up assignments/exams?), 15 (How often do you communicate with your instructor about athletic travel?), 25 (How is your relationship with your
instructors?), and (31) What role does the student athlete play in the process for making up missed assignments/exams? Table 4.3 includes some of the participants’ responses.

Table 4.3 Student Athlete Responses Connected to the Lack of Communication Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question #</th>
<th>Student athlete response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 23</td>
<td>“Getting a grade.” (TK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Time management is important. Need to be on a schedule” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Communication from faculty and from me and respect.” (JM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Communication and Giving your teacher a heads up as well as faculty communication in person and on the syllabus.” (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Communication and follow up.” (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Two-way communication so that we are on the same page.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 15</td>
<td>“Only when an assignment is missed.” (TK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sends them an email the Wednesday before travel.” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Only with the 2 that classes will be missed from traveling.” (JM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Only If I am going to miss class” (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“At the beginning of the semester with my travel note.” (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Any time an assignment is missed.” (IM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Every week that we travel.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 25</td>
<td>“Good, my instructors are cool.” (TK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Difficult.” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“All of them are good, developed a relationship beforehand.” (JM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Good.” (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Cool.” (JW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Honestly, I will only create relationships with instructors in classes I think I may struggle in. Making sure I’m going to office hours and communicating.” (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Cool, not much interaction with my professors because I don’t have time to socialize.” (IM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not Good.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 31</td>
<td>“Communication is important.” (TK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Have to communicate with teacher in advance, the longer you wait the longer it goes unhandled and escalates. Feels like the middleman.” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Communication and respect is important and will affect outcome of athlete.” (JM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Building a relationship with my teacher is important. Helping them to understand my position as a student athlete and that I need support.” (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Getting my work turned in.” GM- “Communication, staying on top of my grades.” (JW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Developing a relationship with my teacher so they understand how important sports is to me.” (IM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Communication is important and completing my assignments.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 3: Impact/Motivation

The third theme, “motivation,” included the way student athletes are impacted by institutional policies as it relates to making up missed work. Most of the participants shared their motivation for attending classes and their motivation for learning. Around 60% of the student athletes shared that they were familiar with the policy in the student handbook. The interview questions associated with this theme included 11 (What motivates you to learn?), 12 (What motivates you to attend class?), 24 (Are you familiar with the student handbook regarding student athlete travel at your university?), and 28 (How is your academic performance affected by athletic travel?) Table 4.4 includes some of the participants’ responses.

Table 4.4 Student Athlete Responses Connected to the Impact/Motivation Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question #</th>
<th>Student athlete response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 11</td>
<td>“Motivated academically to be a role model for my younger siblings.” (TK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivated academically by expanding my knowledge in general.” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivated academically by getting good grades.” (JM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivated academically to keep my scholarship.” (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivated academically to get passing grades to be able to compete athletically.” (JW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivated academically by a fear of failure and getting kicked out of school.” (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivated academically to become a doctor.” (IM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivated academically out of fear of not being able to play a sport I love.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 12</td>
<td>“I attend class to get the necessary information needed to succeed.” (TK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivation to attend class is to get an attendance grade.” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivation to attend class is getting good grades.” (JM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivation to attend class is to keep my scholarship so that I can attend school for free.” (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivation to attend class is to get passing grades to be eligible to play my sport.” (JW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Motivation for attending class is “the fear of getting kicked out of school and sent home.” (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview question #</td>
<td>Student athlete response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 24</td>
<td>“The information becomes available during a team meeting at the beginning of each school year.” (NJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Our academic advisor discusses this information with us during important student athlete meetings.” (GM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“While I do not remember all of the details, I know that the information is covered in a meeting with student athletes. (AC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Our Coach and Advisor talks about the student handbook rules and policies during our team meetings weekly.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 28</td>
<td>“There is no Wi-Fi on the bus, once you arrive at the location of your game, I have to prepare for game so there is no time to check emails or take exams, you are required to practice and participate in organized activities as well as go to bed early. (JW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Traveling on the bus is difficult because it’s hard to type while in motion and sometimes the Wi-Fi on the bus is not good.” (MJ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Traveling plus trying to complete assignments is time consuming and exhausting and sometimes I do not have time to complete my assignments.” (JW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Traveling takes a lot of time and I am tired when I get back from travel, so I barely have time to complete my assignments and then I get lower grades because of it.” (IM)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 4: Course Difficulty**

The final theme was “course difficulty,” which included students’ assessment of their ease in making up assignments and exams based on the subject matter of their courses. Student athlete responses to the interview questions regarding course difficulty are outlined in Table 4.5. The interview questions associated with this theme included 20 (Which courses have stricter “make-up” policies?), 21 (Are there any courses that are harder to make up exams for?), and 22 (Are there any courses that are harder to make up assignments for?).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question #</th>
<th>Student athlete responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Question 20          | “Business courses and math courses are stricter than science courses.” (TK)  
“Biology has exams due every Saturday, but that is game day so that makes it extremely difficult for me and it’s harder to make up those exams because I feel pressure to stay current in the course.” (NJ)  
“Anatomy and most of the science courses.” (JM)  
“School of Business has stricter policies, the teachers for those courses usually have a no non-sense tolerance policy for late and make-up work.” (AC)  
“English/Print Media.” (JW)  
“The business courses are typically stricter.” (GM)  
“The Math courses are stricter for me.” (IM)  
“My core classes have been stricter with make-up policies versus my elective and activity courses.” (MJ) |
| Question 21          | “Math.” (TK)  
“Science, the exams are so long.” (NJ)  
“Math.” (JM)  
“Math.” (AC)  
“Science.” (JW)  
“Yes, courses with professors who moves extremely fast with content.” (GM)  
“No.” (IM)  
“Biology.” (MJ) |
| Question 22          | “They’re all hard to make up, because I just do not have the time to keep up with the assignments.” (TK)  
“Sports Management classes work with you more; Biology and Math are more difficult. They don’t understand challenges of student athletes.” (NJ)  
“Yes, Math was harder to make up.” (JM)  
“Yes, the courses that move at a fast pace and when you miss the lecture, you have to go back and try to understand it on your own.” (JW)  
“The courses that have a ton of slides to look through and when you don’t understand it, you have to email the teacher and sometimes they take more than a day to respond, which delays my work.” (MJ) |
**Faculty Participants**

Table 4.6 connects each of the three themes associated with faculty member participants to the corresponding interview questions that yielded responses reflective of that theme.

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**Table 4.6 Links Between Interview Questions and Themes for Faculty Members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interview questions related to the theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>5. How are absences for student athletes documented in your class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. What is the timeframe a student athlete can make up missed assignments with an official excuse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>4. What is the process of student athletes submitting a travel note for absence due to athletic travel in your class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. What is the process for student athletes making up missed exams due to athletic travel in your class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. What is the process for student athletes making up missed exams due to athletic travel in your class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>3. What is your knowledge and understanding of the policy for student athletes missing class due to athletic travel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Theme 1: Policy**

The first theme, “policy,” emerged as it related to policies enforced by faculty instructors regarding the ways student athletes were allowed to make up missed assignments and exams due to athletic travel. This theme further emerged as faculty members explained the policies regarding absences for student athletes out on athletic travel and faculty member’s knowledge and understanding of the current policies and procedures according to the student handbook. Faculty responses for policy are outlined in Table 4.7, and interview questions 5 (How are absences for student athletes documented in your class?) and 9 (What is the timeframe a student athlete can make up missed assignments with an official excuse?) included responses connected to this theme.
Table 4.7 Faculty Responses Connected to the Policy Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question #</th>
<th>Faculty responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 5</td>
<td>“Absences are not counted against Student athletes.” (PE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I enter a T for travel in my role book on the dates that Student athletes will be absent for athletic travel.” (DD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Via the Blackboard gradebook as class participation grade.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 9</td>
<td>“It can range for 6 weeks, 2 days, 2 weeks.” (PE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“48 hours past the assignments due date.” (DD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“1 week after missed due date.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 2: Process**

The second theme, “process,” emerged as it related to faculty experiences with student athletes submitting their travel notes for absences due to athletic travel. The theme emerged further as faculty explained the process by which student athletes were allowed to make up missed assignments and exams. All three faculty members provided information relevant to this theme. Faculty responses to questions regarding processes are outlined in Table 4.8. Interview questions 4 (What is the process of student athletes submitting a travel note for absence due to athletic travel in your class?), 7 (What is the process for student athletes making up missed exams due to athletic travel in your class?), 7a (Does it differ from students that are not athletes?), 8 (What is the process for student athletes making up missed exams due to athletic travel in your class?), and 8a (Does it differ from students that are not athletes?) produced responses related to the process theme.
Table 4.8 Faculty Responses Connected to the Process Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question #</th>
<th>Faculty response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 4</td>
<td>“Student athletes (SA) bring in note, I sign it and keep a copy.” (PE) “SAs remind faculty when they will travel, however, not all student athlete abides by this.” (PE) “I get the travel note at the beginning of semester from student athletes, then I refer to the note when I notice a student athlete missing from class.” (DD) “Student athletes submit their note at the beginning of the semester notifying me about their absence.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7</td>
<td>“They are given a date on blackboard, and they will need to complete it within that date. The exam is set via BB. Student just has to take it. Given a 2-week extension for assignments, after that if it is not complete, they will receive a 0.” (PE) “If the assignment is provided during the week that they travel, but posted in advance, they are required to complete the assignment prior to travel.” (DD) “Student athletes have a deadline to complete their assignments via the syllabus and if they are going to be absent, they will need to complete their assignments prior to travel.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7a</td>
<td>“No, same policy for all students.” (PE) “No.” (DD) “No.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 8</td>
<td>“For an exam, they have 14 days to make up the exam. The date is already set on BB, they just need to complete it.” (PE) “Dealt with on an Individual basis, but students make up their exams via Zoom. They have to Schedule an appointment to make up the exam for Activity and Lecture courses.” (DD) “They must set up a meeting to complete their exam 1 week after missing the exam.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 8a</td>
<td>“No.” (PE) “Yes, I tend to accommodate student athletes individually.” (DD) “No.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 3: Knowledge/Understanding

The final theme, “knowledge and understanding,” emerged as all three faculty participants expressed knowledge and understanding of the current policy in place to govern student athletes submitting travel notes, communicating, following up, and making up missed assignments and exams due to athletic travel. Faculty responses related to the knowledge and understanding theme are outlined in Table 4.9, and interview questions 3 (What is your knowledge and understanding of the policy for student athletes
missing class due to athletic travel?) and 11 (Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know?) produced responses related to this theme.

Table 4.9 Faculty Responses Connected to the Knowledge/Understanding Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question #</th>
<th>Faculty response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>“Student athletes are supposed to bring in notes from their team stating date of travel, and the absence will not be counted against them.” (PE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Student athletes are required to make up the assignments upon return, also required to submit in advance their travel schedule. Each faculty member receives a letter with the athletes that will be traveling.” (DD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 11</td>
<td>“I am not aware of an official policy for student athlete travel.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There needs to be a written policy on how to accommodate SAs, having SAs is disruptive to the course.” (PE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“University needs a better system for student athletes making up missed assignments and exams. Communication between coaches and athletic department and faculty athlete rep would be better if there were meetings to discuss better outcomes for student athletes.” (DD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There should be some sort of universal understanding of how student athletes can make up their assignments.” (VB)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses to the Intervention

Student Athlete Participants

Four weeks after the conclusion of interviews, a follow-up message was sent to student athlete participants via electronic mail to assess whether or not students had implemented the intervention strategy. Three student athletes responded to the message. Two student athletes, GM and AC, shared that use of the strategies offered in the intervention had improved their overall success in making up missed work and also promoted better communication with their instructors. One student athlete, MJ, shared that the intervention did not make much of a difference in the way she was allowed to make up her exams.
Faculty Participants

A follow-up message was also sent to faculty participants four weeks after the conclusion of interviews to determine if they had implemented any of the intervention strategies shared at the conclusion of their interviews. Two faculty members shared that because it was the end of the semester, they were unable to change their syllabi, but that they would try to engage in better communication and be more consistent when dealing with student athletes regarding make-up work. The third faculty member did not provide a response about the intervention strategies. Finally, several attempts were made to contact student affairs, but to no avail.

Summary

Findings from the current study were included in this chapter, providing insight into student athletes’ experiences with missing work stemming from athletic travel. Findings from this study also offered insight into faculty member’s knowledge and understanding of student athletes being allowed to make up missed work. The four themes that emerged from the data on student athletes were described in this chapter, and the three themes emerging from faculty participant data were also described. Information was presented in this chapter via a series of detailed tables to capture participants’ exact words and the phenomenon as a whole.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The current study was designed to address student athletes’ dual roles of both student and athlete, which involve academic expectations (e.g., attending classes regularly, studying, maintaining the grades needed for eligibility) (Hodge, 2015) and athletic expectations (e.g., sports practice, competition, maintaining the grades needed for scholarship eligibility, watching film, treating competition injuries, attending team events, traveling for team-related competition) (Fletcher et al., 2003).

Student Athletes and Ambiguous Make-Up Policies: A Problem of Practice

This duality results in student athletes missing classes, despite their academic expectations sometimes suffering from athletic travel. This issue becomes a “problem of practice” as the make-up work policies for student athletes and faculty members’ knowledge and understanding of these policies, according to the student handbook, may be unclear. This lack of clarity and faculty knowledge allows teaching faculty to establish their own policies, which can have negative impacts on student athletes’ learning.

Purpose of the Study and Guiding Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of academic policies and athletic procedures on student athletes’ learning at a Division I institution. Specifically, faculty members’ knowledge and understanding of current policy, per the student handbook, were examined in this study. Since limited knowledge of such policies somewhat allows faculty members to establish and enforce their own policies, which can
have detrimental impacts on learning for student athletes. Two research questions guided the current qualitative action research study:

**Research Question 1:** How does the lack of a universal policy to make up missed assignments and exams due to athletic travel impact learning for student athletes?

**Research Question 2:** How does faculty knowledge/understanding on student athlete travel affect student athletes’ ability to make up missed assignments or exams?

**Overview of Research Methods and Results**

To date, the links between the absence of uniform, consistent policies governing student athletes and make-up work related to athletic travel and the impacts of this absence on student athletes’ learning has not been addressed in the literature. The current action research study was designed to address this gap in the literature. Chickering’s student development theory (1993) and Kolb’s learning theory (1984) established the framework for the current study and aided the current understanding of students’ cognitive learning processes along a continuum.

Data were collected via in-depth interviews, and participants included eight student athletes and three faculty members (described in Chapter 3). Data analysis and coding followed the interviews and was completed via a five-step method for phenomenological research (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Four themes emerged from the student athlete data: (1) process/policy, (2) impact, (3) lack of communication, and (4) course difficulty. Three themes from faculty data: (1) policy, (2) process, and (3) knowledge and understanding. Results revealed that faculty members, athletic administrators, and student affairs professionals all play vital roles in the successful outcomes of student athlete learning. This chapter includes a discussion of these findings.
as they relate to extant literature and the proposed interventions. Researcher reflections, implications for education and for practice, and directions for future research are also included in this chapter.

Themes and Findings Related to Student Athletes

Four themes emerged from the data collected from the student athletes participating in the current study: (1) process/policy, (2) lack of communication, (3) impact/motivation, and (4) course difficulty. Each of these themes are supported with extensive examples and quoted material taken directly from study participants in Chapter Four. The first of these four themes, process and policy, overlap with two themes identified in the data collected from faculty participants.

Student Athlete Theme 1: Process/Policy

Fletcher et al. (2003) acknowledged that a first step in conceptualizing student athletes’ issues and planning effective interventions is gaining an understanding of several systems (i.e., the NCAA, the student’s education institution, the athletic department, the sports/athletics team). This is essential because student athletes competing at the collegiate level are affected by a myriad of policies imposed by all of these groups. According to Simiyu (2010), institutional policies should govern make-up work procedures followed at universities to ensure that traveling student athletes are not penalized for participation in sports. However, the literature concerning the impact of academic policies and athletic procedures on the learning process for some student athletes was quite limited.

Results from the current study show that processes differing from the policy stated in the student handbook were governing make-up work for student athletes at the
According to the student handbook (DMV University), a student athlete should:

Schedule a time to review the course schedule with your professor and discuss any possible conflicts with exams, projects, or papers. Make sure you understand your professor’s requirements. Each professor will determine how you will make up missed work. Do not assume that all professors will follow the same make-up policy. (p. 25)

Many participants shared instructions they had been given, such as getting letters from their head coaches, communicating with their instructors at the start of the semester, and coordinating with their instructors once they return from sports travel to make up missed work.

However, participants also acknowledged issues with this. One of such issues is a student athlete reportedly being unable to make up assignments even after presenting a note because the assignment should have been completed prior to travel, the final result being a lower grade. Yet, another student athlete shared that there were no issues affecting the completion of missed assignments. One participant pointed out that some faculty members are stricter than others. When asked about the difference in making up assignments versus making up exams, the process remained the same—confusing. Study results indeed show that there are inconsistencies in the way students are allowed to make up missed work due to athletic travel.

Horton (2011) and Forster (2012) argued that issues surrounding academic policies and athletic procedures continue to be a problem on college campuses and have lasting effects on a student athletes’ academic performance. This was supported by
several study participants who shared the following: (1) “My academic performance is affected because I am tired, and I barely have time to make up my assignments or coordinate with teachers when I return” and (2) “There is no Wi-Fi on the bus when traveling, and it’s also hard to type while on the bus, so I cannot complete some assignments before or during travel because of other obligations.”

**Student Athlete Theme 2: Lack of Communication**

According to Hamrick et al. (2002), communication is an important component of learning for college students. Based on the theory of student development (Chickering, 1993), the *developing competence* vector involves communication skills that help college athletes build interpersonal competence that contributes to them becoming better citizens. According to Horton (2011), student athletes should keep open lines of communication with faculty so that faculty can identify students who may be struggling and need assistance. Faculty communication is just as important as student athlete communication. According to Raunig and Coggins (2018), “How faculty communicate can affect what student athletes hear, what they believe about their potential, and the extent that they can be motivated to reach academic learning objectives” (p. 121).

Of the student athletes, 50% stated that the most important aspect of making up an assignment or exam was faculty communication as well as student athletes communicating with faculty while the other 50% of student participants pointed out that time management, getting a grade, and graduating on time were the most important aspects in making up delinquent assignments. One participant stated, “Communication from faculty and from me and respect” were the most important aspects of making up their missed assignments and exams, and another participant acknowledged this
importance by stating, “Communication and giving your teacher a heads up as well as faculty communication in person and in the syllabus.” According to the student handbook, which guides both students and student athletes on school policies: “Communication from the student athlete to the faculty members is key” (p. 25).

Kuh (1996) argued that students who develop relationships with faculty members outside of routine involvement have greater gains in cognitive development. Results from this study show that while communication is important for student athletes, it is also important that faculty communicate their policies in person and on the syllabus so that students are aware of these expectations prior to athletic travel. According to Raunig and Coggins (2018), both verbal and nonverbal communication are important instructional tools, and faculty should be considerate of both what they say and how they say it. “The volume in context, the emotive force, rate of interruption, rate of affirming, active listening, and rate of feedback are all important components of verbal communication which can be used to enhance communication between faculty and student athletes” (Raunig & Coggins, 2018, p. 121).

**Student Athlete Theme 3: Impact/Motivation**

Learners’ success can be dependent upon learners being motivated or not (Filgona et al., 2020). Kuh (2007) listed some of the internal factors that influence student learning as peer engagement, faculty relationships, and motivation toward academic pursuits. Student athletes were asked several questions to assess the importance of making up missed work: “What is your motivation to attend class?” and “What is your motivation to learn?” Many of the participants reported that they were motivated to learn to pursue postgraduate programs and careers. Several participants confirmed this by sharing, “I
want to attend graduate school,” “I want to become a doctor,” and another participant identifying a goal “…to graduate and go to graduate school.”

Simons et al. (1999) argued that with institutional demands, staying academically motivated is more difficult for student athletes. According to Filgona et al. (2020), motivation drives learners to reach learning goals. Many of the student athletes had plans for postgraduate studies. Motivation was seen as important to student athletes in this study because they needed earn good grades to graduate and move on to graduate programs. Filgona et al. (2020) add that a student’s motivation to learn is even more important because simply attending class is not always indicative of a student’s willingness to learn. For student athletes, changes to the perceptions and approaches to their education might be essential in increasing their motivation to succeed academically (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

**Student Athlete Theme 4: Course Difficulty**

According to the NCAA (2016), student athletes choose both classes and majors that are less academically taxing so that they can limit feelings of conflict as they focus on athletics. Findings from this study revealed that there was a difference in course difficulty in making up work, which is primarily attributed to pacing and time. One participant expressed that make-up assignments are “all hard to make up because I just do not have the time to keep up...” while another stated, “Yes, the courses that move at a fast pace, and when you miss the lecture, you have to go back and try to understand it on your own.” One participant also expressed that “The courses that have a ton of slides to look through and when you don’t understand it, you have to email the teacher and sometimes they take more than a day to respond, which delays my work.”
Logan (2015) argued that to ensure student athletes’ access to classes and majors of their choice, the times that classes are offered and scheduled practice times should accommodate and support student athletes’ learning. Findings also revealed differences in course difficulty for student athletes making up exams. Three participants identified math as a more difficult course for making up exams while three other participants identified science as a more difficult course for making up exams.

Study findings revealed that some courses had stricter policies than others. One participant stated, “Business courses and math courses are stricter than science courses” while another one expressed, “School of Business has stricter policies, the teachers for those courses usually have a no non-sense tolerance policy for late and make-up work.” Another participant echoed, “The business courses are typically more strict” while other student athletes expressed that science courses have stricter make-up work policies. Astin (1993) argued that certain experiences, such as working full time, commuting, and taking multiple choice exams negatively affects student growth, and minimizing such activities “enhance” student learning (p. 424).

Themes and Findings Related to University Faculty

Three themes emerged from the data collected from the three faculty members that participated in this study. These themes are thoroughly discussed and supported by examples in Chapter 4. The themes included (1) policy, (2) process, and (3) knowledge and understanding. The first two themes, process and policy, overlap with a combined theme (i.e., process and policy) identified in the data collected from student athlete participants.
Faculty Theme 1: Policy

Thoughtful consideration toward policy development can significantly contribute to an overall positive academic culture; therefore, policy development should involve conversations between staff (e.g., faculty, student support), student athletes, and coaches to ensure adherence to academic expectations (Charlton, 2011). The most important aspect of this study was related to faculty members’ varying practices in handling make-up work for student athletes, especially in light of the student handbook, which states that “Each professor will determine how you will make up missed work. Do not assume that all professors will follow the same make-up policy.”

During faculty interviews, it was revealed that faculty members account for student athletes’ absences in different ways, with one faculty participant stating, “Absences are not counted against student athletes.” One faculty participant shared that “a ‘T’ for travel is entered into the roll book” and another one said that “absences are documented in Blackboard.” Study findings proved that there were inconsistencies in the way student athletes were accommodated for their delinquent assignments. When faculty participants were asked about the timeframe student athletes are given to make up missed assignments and exams, the results varied. One participant stated, “It can range for 6 weeks, 2 days, 2 weeks,” a second one stated, “48 hours past the assignments due date,” and a third participant stated, “1 week after missed due date.”

Faculty Theme 2: Process

According to the student handbook, student athletes are expected to communicate with their instructors at the beginning of the semester and provide travel notes, highlight the dates of their upcoming absences, and then send follow-up reminders to their
instructors. Findings revealed that student athletes follow different processes when submitting travel notes. Each faculty participant shared that there are inconsistencies in student athletes’ communication regarding absences stemming from athletic travel courses. One participant said, “Student athletes (SA) bring in their travel note, I sign it and keep a copy. SAs remind faculty when they will travel, however, not all student athletes abide by this,” another one stated, “I get the travel note at the beginning of semester from student athletes, then I refer to the note when I notice a student athlete missing from class,” and a final participant stated, “Student athletes submit their note at the beginning of the semester notifying me about their absence.”

Simiyu (2010) acknowledged that institutional environments in which expectations are clear are essential to student learning. When faculty members were asked about processes for allowing student athletes to make up exams, one participant shared:

They are given a date on Blackboard, and they will need to complete it within that date. The exam is set via BB. Student just has to take it. Given a 2-week extension for assignments, after that if it is not complete, they will receive a 0.

Study findings proved that there are, in fact, inconsistencies in the way student athletes make up their exams. One participant stated, “For an Exam, they have 14 days to make up the exam. The date is already set on Blackboard, they just need to complete it,” another one stated that he or she had “dealt with on an individual basis, but students make up their exams via Zoom. They have to schedule an appointment to make up the exam for
Activity and Lecture courses,” and the third one stated, “They must set up a meeting to complete their exam one week after missing the exam.”

Faculty participants were also asked whether or not athletes had to follow different processes than nonathlete students, and all faculty participants said this was not the case. Faculty members were also asked about processes that student athletes were to follow to make up their assignments after returning from athletic travel. Results showed these inconsistencies in student athletes making up assignments. One participant shared, “If the assignment is provided during the week that they travel, but posted in advance, they are required to complete the assignment prior to travel” while another one stated that “Student athletes have a deadline to complete their assignments via the syllabus and if they are going to be absent, they will need to complete their assignments prior to travel.”

Many of the student athletes participating in this study shared that sometimes, they were too tired to complete assignments after athletic travel and that faculty members did not always respond to electronic messages, causing delayed communication that further impacted their learning. Communication is both documented and understood to be an important aspect of learning for student athletes.

Faculty Theme 3: Knowledge and Understanding

Result from this study concluded that faculty members’ knowledge and understanding indeed affected student athletes’ approaches to making up missed work. Building an institutional culture around traditions of excellence is significant to the demarginalization of student athletes and changing the negative perceptions shared by some faculty and students regarding student athletes’ academic abilities (Horton, 2011).
Faculty members were asked about their knowledge and understanding of institutional policies governing student athletes’ absences and missing work. Some of the responses were as follows: “Student athletes are supposed to bring in notes from their team stating date of travel, and the absence will not be counted against them”; “Student athletes are required to make up the assignments upon return, also required to submit in advance their travel schedule. Each faculty member receives a letter with the athletes that will be traveling”; and “I am not aware of an official policy for student athlete travel.” As shown, two of the three faculty participants understood some parts of the policy and accommodated student athletes accordingly while one was not aware and, interestingly, had a stricter policy.

Finally, this theme encompassed other important bits of information that faculty members felt were important in terms of their missed-work policy. One participant shared, “There needs to be a written policy on how to accommodate student athletes; having student athletes is disruptive to the course when they travel.” Another one stated, “The university needs a better system for student athletes making up missed assignments and exams. Communication between coaches and athletic department and faculty athlete representative would be better if there were meetings to discuss better outcomes for student athletes.” The third faculty participant added, “There should be some sort of universal understanding of how student athletes can make up their assignments.” This information contributed to the intervention strategy that was developed and suggested in this study for use by student athletes, administrators in the athletic department, and student affairs professionals.
Answers to the Research Questions

Two research questions directed the current study: (1) How does the lack of a universal policy to make up missed assignments and exams due to athletic travel impact learning for student athletes? (2) How does faculty knowledge/understanding on student athlete travel affect student athletes’ ability to make up missed assignments or exams?

In answering research question 1, student learning did not appear to be impacted; however, student athletes’ understanding of their roles was misunderstood because they were not adhering to the policies and procedures set forth in the student handbook. In answering research question 2, faculty seemed to be unfamiliar with many practices in the athletics department, so creating their own make-up work policies for student athletes was not alarming. However, inconsistent faculty practices led to some student athletes being unable to make up assignments and exams while accommodations were made for other student athletes based on varying levels of faculty knowledge regarding student athlete policies.

At the beginning of the study, there was an understanding that student athletes would have understandings with their instructors about making up assignments and exams. However, this was not always the case as institutional policies are vague and faculty members are not always aware that there are policies that can guide their practices. The result is inconsistent practices by faculty members that tend to confuse student athletes and cause frustration for both. Two of the biggest inconsistencies identified in this study include (1) the process by which student athletes submit their travel notes—some student athletes fail to do this until they return although this should be done prior to athletic travel, and (2) the ways in which faculty allow students to make up
work—from speaking with faculty members, student athletes are not always allowed to make up their work, despite accommodations being made by some faculty. In addition, faculty members sometimes consider sports absences disruptive, which could affect the process.

It is important that students are motivated to learn as motivation is crucial, especially for student athletes. Scholarships are a necessity for many student athletes, and some of them even want to continue with their education. Therefore, they need to be motivated to earn good grades so that this process flows smoothly. However, faculty members must hold student athletes accountable.

Academic advisors also must intervene and act in the best interest of student athletes. Tutoring centers are considered a source of academic support, yet advisors are responsible for students’ academic support as well. Since advisors are assigned to specific sports and have portfolios of students that they advise, their positions and responsibilities need to be clearer. Advisors even travel with the teams/athletes, doing things such as proctoring exams, and periodically check their grades and academic progress. Athletic departments and the larger student affairs departments should ensure that advisors are effectively liaising between student athletes and faculty.

Relationships between advisors and student athletes and advisors and faculty should also be strengthened. Athletics departments operate in one way, and instructional faculty operate in other ways. Student athletes are the ones most affected by this. However, this can be addressed in student affairs departments by the establishment of written policies surrounding missed assignments for athletes and faculty adoption of these policies. These policies are necessary to ensure student athletes’ fair treatment as
university athletics are important at schools and in communities as well as major sources of university funding.

**Implications for Education and Practice**

The results of this study offer insight into better ways for student athletes to inform faculty members of competition-related travel and better ways for faculty members to accommodate these student athletes who have to make up work due to this travel. Student affairs departments also have parts to play in improving learning outcomes for student athletes. Certain experiences tend to enhance student learning, including their critical thinking and cognitive development (Hamrick et al., 2002). Practice can be improved using the results of this study as it highlights the need for a universal policy governing the process of student athletes completing work after sports-related class absences. Results may also offer insight into creating more optimal learning environments for student athletes and improving interaction between faculty members and student athletes, all of which will help mitigate the academic-athletic divide.

Logan (2015) noted that student athletes can sometimes quickly adapt to learning environments, stay focused, build meaningful relationships, and actively participate and engage in the learning process. Kolb’s (1984) learning stages and the learning cycle, which served as part of the theoretical framework in this study, can be used by instructors to aid critical evaluation of the learning provision typically available to students. This learning cycle can also aid the development of more appropriate learning opportunities.

Educators should ensure that activities are designed and implemented so that all learners have the chance to engage in the manner(s) most suitable for them. Also, individuals can learn more effectively when their least preferred learning styles are
strengthened via the application of the experiential learning cycle. Cognitive structural theorists (Hamrick et al., 2002) have argued that the development of complex patterns of intellectual and moral reasoning is an important goal of higher education, which further acknowledges that students learn differently. As student athletes are known to sometimes operate under the pressure of time, which is noted by coaches and faculty members, faculty should maximize students’ learning opportunities by carefully planning assessments, assignments, and resources (Raunig & Coggins, 2018).

**Directions for Future Research**

Academic culture supports autonomous thought, and there are expectations for students to grapple with difficult concepts and create new and meaningful knowledge. Since student athletes are subjected to the way teaching/learning occurs in the athletic learning environment, student athletes have trouble learning concepts in a meaningful way (Logan, 2015). As suggested by the results of the current study, inconsistent faculty practices related to student athletes making up work they miss due to athletic travel can lead to disruptions in the learning process for student athletes. Future research may address the range of practices that could possibly be used in environments such as the site of the current study or in other environments with athletic programs. Future research could also involve the inclusion of institutions from each collegiate athletic division as this study was limited to a single Division I institution. In addition, future research could be centered on institutions with a various policies and procedures, which would offer a more comprehensive look at the role academic policies and athletic procedures in student athletes’ success.
A few other recommendations for future study are as follows: (1) Student athletes could be stratified and/or compared by sex, race, class level, and/or sport (e.g., female vs. male athletes, institutional majority vs. institutional minority athletes) to determine if there is any bias in the treatment of student athletes. (2) The perspectives of student athlete advisors could also be explored to determine whether or not they are optimizing their roles as liaisons between student athletes and academic. (3) Stereotypes surrounding student athletes could be examined in terms of the effects they may have on perceptions and treatment of student athletes. (4) School culture, school’s dependence on revenue-generating sports, and the visibility and influence of athletics at an institution could also have a major effect of student athletes’ treatment. These types of institutional differences could reveal drastic differences in the treatment or expectations of student athletes.

**Implementation Plan/Recommendations for College**

The faculty athletic representative and department chair for the health science department agreed to present this information to the faculty senate to help create a policy and procedure for faculty members to follow. It was also stated by the faculty athletic representative that the intervention and recommendations would apply to students in all auxiliaries such as dance, band, and debate teams, to ensure inclusion of all students representing the university on travel. The faculty athletic representative agreed to have weekly meetings within the athletic department and report information to faculty during staff meetings to ensure that faculty members are aware of athletic practices.

To further assess this practitioner-based research, the researcher will expand the study to include faculty from other departments on campus. The current study
included faculty members from the health science department. There are 503 student athletes at the university and 305 of those student athletes all have majors within the health science department. With expanding the study, it will be important to see if student athletes are not choosing other majors on campus due to inconsistent faculty practices and course difficulty or making up their missed assignments and exams with non-health science course.

**Researcher Reflections**

The topic of the current study was chosen based on the researcher’s experience working with student athletes who struggle to balance athletic and academic obligations. Informal conversations with these student athletes often pointed to glaring inconsistencies in the way faculty members allowed them to make up missed work, and this seemed to lead to student athletes’ inconsistent communication with instructors. In addition, conversations with colleagues helped me realize that some faculty members have no connection to or familiarity with athletic department practices or procedures.

Prior to collecting data, I closely considered personal biases, assumptions, and preconceived notions, all of which are inevitable in qualitative research. Peshkin (1988) defined “subjectivity” as the “amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one’s class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one’s object of investigation” (p. 17). To monitor my biases, I recorded my thoughts, reactions, and reflections in a journal throughout the course of the study. This process helped me develop a greater appreciation for phenomenological research as I was able to remain focused on the participants’ experiences. The data I collected in the course of this study deepened my personal and professional understanding of the frustration experienced by
both sets of participants (i.e., student athletes and faculty members), many of whom may be uninformed on the policies in place to guide their practices.

Summary

Chapter Five included a review of the study findings as well as implications, directions for future research, and limitations of the study. Each of the themes identified during data analysis and coding was explored in more depth, and additional examples were provided to further illustrate these themes and connect participants’ responses with the literature. This chapter concluded with researcher reflections to provide a final look at the role of the researcher in this inquiry into the underexplored policies governing student athletes, faculty-student communication, and make-up work associated with student athletes’ athletics/sports travel.
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APPENDIX A:

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
APPROVAL LETTER FOR EXEMPT REVIEW

Seanta Cleveland
University of South Carolina
The Graduate School
1705 College Street, Suite 552
Columbia, SC 29608

Re: Pro001112992

Dear Seanta Cleveland:

This is to certify that the research study An Evaluation of how Academic Policies and Athletic Procedures Impact the Learning Process for Student-Athletes, was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.104(a)(2) and 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7). The study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on 8/18/2021. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the study remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research study could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this study was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

All research related records are to be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Lisa Johnson at lisa@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager
APPENDIX B:
CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION – STUDENT ATHLETES

KEY INFORMATION:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study title</th>
<th>An Evaluation of the Impact of Academic Policies and Athletic Procedures for Student Athletes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Advisor</td>
<td>Leo Eyoombo, Ed.D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Investigator:</td>
<td>Scanta Cleveland (Doctoral Candidate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Chair:</td>
<td>Terrence McAdoo, Ph.D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Study Number:</td>
<td>IRB2021-0134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INVITATION to PARTICIPATE:

My name is Scanta Cleveland. I am a (doctoral candidate/graduate student) in the Education and Curriculum Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting an action research study as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree in Education & Curriculum, and I would like to invite you to participate in this research study.

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- I am studying how academic policies and athletic procedures may impact the successes and failures of student-athletes at institutions.
- If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sit with me for an interview via Zoom for about 30-45 minutes about your experience with making up missed assignments and exams due to travel related to athletic competition.
- There are minimal risks associated with this study.
- There is no compensation for participating in this study.

INTRODUCTION

I am planning to conduct a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form contains key information about the reason for doing this study, what we will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way we would like to use information about you if you choose to be in the study.

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research study on

I am conducting an action research study as part of the requirements of my doctoral degree in Education & Curriculum, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying how academic policies and athletic procedures may impact the successes and failures of student-athletes at institutions. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to interview via Zoom for about your experience with making up missed assignments and exams due to travel related to athletic competition.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure folder of the student researcher’s computer. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity or University’s identity will not be revealed.

IF I CHOOSE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will be asked questions about (1) process for how student-athletes can make up missed assignments and exams (2) interaction with professors for making up missed assignments and exams (3) consistency in policy handling with making up assignments and exams due to athletic travel by your professor. The results from the
interviews will inform the study on the best possible way for student-athletes to make up missed assignments & exams due to athletic travel.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT**
Study participation will last up to 30-45 minutes per interview.

**STUDY LOCATION**
- All study procedures will take place at via Zoom to mitigate Covid-19 transmission risks.
- The study will be recorded via Zoom application.
- With your permission, I would like to audio record this interview to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will keep these recordings in a password protected folder on my computer and they will only be used by the research team. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead.
- Indicate Yes or No.
- I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS?**
- There are minimal risks associated with this study:
- You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell the interviewer at any time if you wish to take a break or stop the interview.
- You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about.
- If you are uncomfortable, you are free to not answer or to skip the next question.
- As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – we will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS?**
- The benefits for participating this study are 5 extra credit points (for an assignment/class participation points) in your HCHPL course for your participation in the interview and 5 extra credit points in your HCHPL course for participation in the focus group (totaling 10 points if you decide to an interview and focus group).
- We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study.
- This study is designed to learn more about how academic policies and athletic procedures may impact the successes and failures of student-athletes at institutions.
- The study results may be used to help other people in the future.
- Your decision whether to participate in this study will not affect your status as a student-athlete, however, you will not receive extra credit points if you decide to withdraw.

**ADDITIONAL/REMAINING CONSENT ELEMENTS**

**HOW WILL YOU PROTECT THE INFORMATION YOU COLLECT ABOUT ME, AND HOW WILL THAT INFORMATION BE SHARED?**
- Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations.
- Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible.
- If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.
- To minimize the risks to confidentiality, recordings will be kept in a password protected folder on the student-researchers computer and will only be accessed by members of the research team.
- If we think that you intend to harm yourself or others, we will notify the appropriate people with this information.
WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?
- If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
- You have the right to refuse to answer questions.
- The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

PRIVACY and CONFIDENTIALITY
- Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.
- All data will be coded by identification number assigned to you and are known only by the investigators on this project.
- Your name will not be associated with the results.
- After the removal of identifiers from identifiable private information, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you. Videos will not be permitted as a means to protect confidentiality.
- Audio recordings will be retained until the conclusion of this study; following conclusion, all recordings will be destroyed.

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY?
Questions: We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (202-596-6943 and scanta@email.sc.edu) or my USC Committee Chair, Terrance McDade, Ph.D., 803-777-5129, and tmcadoc@email.sc.edu) or the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance 803-777-4670.
Howard University Faculty Advisor (Leo Eyombo, Ph.D. leo.eymombo@howard.edu, 336-253-2566).
- **Independent Contact:** If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the Howard University Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at (202)-865-8597.
- You can also write to: The Institutional Review Board
  Howard University
  1840 7th Street, NW Suite 309
  Washington, DC 20001
  Phone: (202)-865-8597

CONSENT
I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. The need to review and sign the consent form which is intended to provide the critical information needed to make an informed consent.

Participant’s Name [printed] ___________________________ Signature and Date ___________________________

Participant’s Signature ___________________________ Signature and Date ___________________________
APPENDIX C:

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION – FACULTY

KEY INFORMATION:

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<td>Scanta Cleveland (Doctoral Candidate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committee Chair</td>
<td>Terrence McAdoo, Ph.D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Study Number</td>
<td>Pyo0012892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introduction:
My name is Scanta Cleveland. I am a (doctoral candidate/graduate student) in the Education and Curriculum Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting an action research study as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree in Education & Curriculum, and I would like to invite you to participate in this research study.

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- I am studying how academic policies and athletic procedures may impact the successes and failures of student-athletes at institutions.
- If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sit with me for an interview via Zoom for about 30-45 minutes about your experience with allowing student-athletes to make up missed assignments and exams due to travel related to athletic competition.
- There are minimal risks associated with this study.
- There is no compensation for participating in this study.

DESCRIPTION

I am conducting an action research study as part of the requirements of my doctoral degree in Education & Curriculum, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying how academic policies and athletic procedures may impact the successes and failures of student-athletes at institutions. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to interview via Zoom for about your experience with allowing student-athletes to make up missed assignments and exams due to travel related to athletic competition.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure folder of the student researcher’s computer. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity or University’s identity will not be revealed.

IF I CHOOSE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

In particular, you will be asked questions about (1) process for how student-athletes make up missed assignments and exams; (2) knowledge of policy on student athletes making up missed assignments; and (3) perceived impact of excuses absences on student performance. The results from the interviews will inform the study to determine if all instructors have the same policy for allowing students to make up missed assignments and exams.

TIME INVOLVEMENT
Study participation will last up to 30-45 minutes per interview.

**STUDY LOCATION**
- All study procedures will take place at via Zoom to mitigate Covid-19 transmission risks.
- The study will be audio recorded via Zoom application.
- With your permission, I would like to audio record this interview to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will keep these recordings in a password protected folder on my computer and they will only be used by the research team. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead.
- Indicate *Yes* or *No*:
  - *Yes*  
  - *No*

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS?**
- There are minimal risks associated with this study:
  - You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell the interviewer at any time if you wish to take a break or stop the interview.
  - You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about.
  - If you are uncomfortable, you are free to not answer or to skip to the next question.
  - As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – we will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS?**
- There are no benefits from participating in this study
- This study is designed to learn more about how academic policies and athletic procedures may impact the successes and failures of student-athletes at institutions.
- The study results may be used to help other people in the future.
- Your decision whether to participate in this study will not affect your job.

**ADDITIONAL/REMAINING CONSENT ELEMENTS**

**HOW WILL YOU PROTECT THE INFORMATION YOU COLLECT ABOUT ME, AND HOW WILL THAT INFORMATION BE SHARED?**
- Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations.
- Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible.
- If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.
- To minimize the risks to confidentiality, recordings will be kept in a password protected folder on the student-investigators computer and will only be accessed by members of the research team.
- If we think that you intend to harm yourself or others, we will notify the appropriate people with this information.

**WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?**
- If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
- You have the right to refuse to answer questions.
- The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.
PRIVACY and CONFIDENTIALITY

- Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.
- All data will be coded by identification number assigned to you and are known only by the investigators on this project.
- Your name or your university of employment will not be associated with the results. Videos will not be permitted to protect confidentiality.
- After the removal of identifiers from identifiable private information, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you.
- Audio recordings will be retained until the conclusion of this study; following conclusion, all recordings will be destroyed.

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

Questions: We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (202-596-6943 and seanta@email.sc.edu) or my USC Committee Chair, (Terrance McAdoo, Ph.D., 803-777-5129, and tmcadoo@mailbox.sc.edu) or (the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance 803-777-6670).

Howard University Faculty Advisor (Leo Eyombo, Ph.D., leo.eyombo@howard.edu, 336-253-2566).

- Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the Howard University Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at (202)-865-8597.

- You can also write to: The Institutional Review Board
  Howard University
  1840 7th Street, NW Suite 309
  Washington, DC 20001
  Phone: (202)-865-8597

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

- If you suffer physical injury during your participation in this research, the Howard University Hospital will provide acute and necessary medical treatment and subsequently provide referrals to appropriate health care facilities.
- Acute treatment costs will be charged to your insurance carrier, and to or any other party responsible for your treatment costs.
- Neither the Howard University Hospital nor Howard University College of Medicine can provide any financial compensation due to any injury suffered during this research study.

CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. The need to review and sign the consent form which is intended to provide the critical information needed to make an informed consent.

Participant’s Name [printed] ____________________________ Signature and Date ____________________________

Participant’s Signature ____________________________ Signature and Date ____________________________
APPENDIX D:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE – STUDENT ATHLETES

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Invitation to Participate in Research

LET'S CHAT:
AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC POLICIES AND ATHLETIC PROCEDURES FOR STUDENT ATHLETES

LOCATION
• Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all interviews will be conducted virtually via Zoom (30-minute duration)

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?
• Student-Athlete
• >18 years of age
• Missed an Exam or Assignment due to Athletic Travel
• Had to make up an Exam or

The purpose of this study is to explore how academic policies and athletic procedures may impact the successes and failures of student-athletes at institutions, in particular, I would like to explore the process for how student-athletes can make up missed assignments and exams due to athletic travel.

You will be asked questions about (1) process for how student-athletes can make up missed assignments and exams (2) interaction with professors for making up missed assignments and exams (3) consistency across various courses with making up assignments and exams due to athletic travel by your professor.

BENEFITS
5 extra credit points (for an assignment/class participation points) in an approved HNPL course for your participation in the interview.

CONTACT
Seanta Cleveland
EdD Candidate
Student Investigator
seanta@email.sc.edu
Tel: 202-596-6943

Leo Eyombo, EdD
FACULTY ADVISOR
Leo.eyombo@howard.edu

IRB-2021-0134
Dear Participant,

My name is Seanta Cleveland. I am a (doctoral candidate/graduate student) in the Education and Curriculum Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting an action research study as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree in Education & Curriculum, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying how academic policies and athletic procedures may impact the successes and failures of student-athletes at institutions. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sit with me for an interview via Zoom for about 30-45 minutes about your experience with allowing student-athletes to make up missed assignments and exams due to travel related to athletic competition.

In particular, you will be asked questions about (1) process for how student-athletes make up missed assignments and exams; (2) knowledge of policy on student athletes making up missed assignments; and (3) perceived impact of excused absences on student performance. The results from the interviews will inform the study to determine if all instructors have the same policy for allowing students to make up missed assignments and exams. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The meeting will take place via Zoom to mitigate the risks of Covid-19 and should last about 30-45 minutes. The interview will be recorded so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The recording will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Selection Criteria: The selection criteria for faculty in the health science department that have experience with handling student-athletes that delinquent exams and assignments due to athletic travel. Faculty members will be interviewed until saturation is reached.

You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Location:
- All study procedures will take place at via Zoom audio to mitigate Covid-19 transmission risks.

Risks:
- There are minimal risks associated with this study;
- You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell the interviewer at any time if you wish to take a break or stop the interview;
- You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about;
- If you are uncomfortable, you are free to not answer or to skip to the next question;
- As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached—we will take steps to minimize this risk.

Confidentiality:
- With your permission, the study will be audio recorded via Zoom application. You will not have your camera turned on;
- I would like to audio record this interview to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. Recordings will be kept in a password protected folder on the student-investigators computer and will only be accessed by members of the research team;
- If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead.

Participation is confidential. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, recordings will be kept in a password protected folder on the student-investigators computer and will only be accessed by
members of the research team. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity or your university’s identity will not be revealed.

Withdrawal: Participation, non-participation, or withdrawal will not affect your job in any way.

Questions: We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (202-596-6943 and scanta@email.sc.edu) or my USC Committee Chair, (Terrance McAdoo, Ph.D., 803-777-5129, and tmcadoo@mailbox.sc.edu) or (the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance 803-777-6670). Thank you for your consideration. Howard University Faculty Advisor (Leo Eyombo, Ed.D. leo.eyombo@howard.edu, 336-253-2566).

- **Independent Contact:** If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the Howard University Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at (202)-865-8597.

- You can also write to: The Institutional Review Board
  Howard University
  1840 7th Street, NW Suite 309
  Washington, DC 20001
  Phone: (202)-865-8597

If you would like to participate, please sign the consent form, and email it to scanta@email.sc.edu and you will receive a confirmation of your participation in an email, followed by a Zoom Link with a date and time of your interview.

With kind regards,

Scanta Cleveland
College of Education
University of South Carolina
202-596-6943
scanta@email.sc.edu
APPENDIX F:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT ATHLETES

1. What sport do you participate?
2. What year are you?
3. How many courses are you taking? (When you were traveling)
4. What is your GPA?
5. Have you had to miss class due to athletic travel?
6. Have you had to miss an assignment due to athletic travel? If so, what kind?
7. Have you missed an exam due to athletic travel?
8. What is the process for submitting your travel note for assignments missed due to athletic travel?
9. What is the process for making up your missed assignments due to athletic travel?
10. What is the process for submitting your travel note for an exam missed due to athletic travel?
11. What is the process for making up your missed exam due to athletic travel?
12. What motivates you to learn?
13. What motivates you to attend class?
14. What type of academic support do you receive as an athlete that travels?
15. How often do you communicate with your instructor about athletic travel?
16. How do you know you have missed an assignment for your class (es)?
17. How do you know you have missed an exam for your class (es)?

18. Is the process for making up assignments/exams the same for all of your courses?

19. How does the process differ from course to course? (Explain the differences)

20. Which courses have stricter “make-up” policies?

21. Are there any courses that are harder to make up assignments for?

22. Which courses are harder to make up exams for?

23. What is the most important aspect in making up assignments/exams?

24. Are you familiar with the student handbook regarding student athlete travel at your university?

25. How is your relationship with your instructors?

26. How does your instructors perceive student athletes?

27. What is your ideal way to make up your missed assignments?

28. What is your ideal way to make up your missed exams?

29. How is your academic performance affected by athletic travel?

30. What role does the student athlete play in the process for making up missed assignments/exams?

31. Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know, besides what we talked about?
APPENDIX G:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY

1. Do you have student athletes in your courses that miss assignments and exams due to athletic travel?
2. What has been your interaction with student athletes in your class?
3. What is your knowledge and understanding of the policy for student athletes missing class due to athletic travel?
4. What is the process of student athletes submitting a travel note for absence due to athletic travel in your class?
5. How are absences for student athletes documented in your class?
6. Are student athletes allowed to make up missed assignments/Exams due to athletic travel?
7. What is the process for student athletes making up missed exams due to athletic travel in your class?
a. Does it differ from students that are not athletes?
8. What is the process for student athletes making up missed exams due to athletic travel in your class?
b. Does it differ from students that are not athletes?
9. What is the timeframe a student athlete can make up missed assignments with an official excuse?
10. How does athletic travel affect your classroom?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know besides what we talked about?