College Student-Athletes Perceptions of their Faculty Interactions

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Review of Literature

Many student-athletes (SAs) report enhanced struggles to succeed academically due to high demands associated with being a SA. With a good amount of time spent in athletic practices along with missed class time due to academic competitions, some SAs need additional academic support. One potential resource to combat this problem would be for SAs to develop stronger relationships with faculty members. Faculty from an NCAA Division II institution, however, have reported having prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes toward SAs, which may have prevented some SAs from wanting to interact with faculty (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). Additionally, over one-third of SAs from a NCAA Division I institution reported they were negatively perceived by faculty (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita & Jensen, 2007). SAs in more recent studies have reported more positive experiences interacting with faculty, but their specific experiences differed based on gender, academic performance, class affiliation and sport played (Parsons, 2013; Williams, Colles & Allen, 2010). The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of SAs academic experiences and their perceptions of interactions with faculty.

Methods

Data was collected from 303 NCAA Division II SAs across 16 sports within one university. A modified version of the Academic Experiences of Student-Athlete Survey (Parsons, 2013; Simons et al., 2007) was developed and administered to the SAs by athletic administration, which did not include athletic coaches. Demographic data and descriptive statistics were analyzed. An assumed unequal variance t-test was used to compare differences separately between independent groups: 1) gender, 2) transfer status, and 3) academic year status comparing freshmen to upper classmen (i.e., juniors & seniors).

Results

Overall, SAs felt in general that faculty had neutral to positive perceptions about them, with female athletes having statistically significant more positive perceptions. When SAs perceived a negative attitude from faculty based on SAs’ status (statistically significant results were displayed within all three comparison groups), the majority responded they wanted to work hard to show SAs are good students. Findings also support previous literature that male SAs are less likely than female SAs to identify as athletes in front of their faculty members (Williams et al., 2010). This study also found similar differences between upper classmen and freshmen with upper classmen not wanting to identify as SAs.

Conclusions and Future Research

Overall, findings supported those from Parsons (2013) and Williams et al. (2010). SAs in the current study wanted to work hard to show they were good students. Male SAs perceived their SA identification played a positive and negative role in their academics and faculty interactions. These results suggest that an increased amount of time should be spent discussing with SAs the importance of faculty and SA relationships. Additional time may need to be dedicated to upper classmen and male SAs whose perceptions tended to be less positive than their comparison groups. Future research should examine relationships from the faculty perspective to look for similarities and alignment in perspectives, develop ways to improve relationships, and continue to track data across time.