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Outcomes-Based Career Preparation Programs for Contemporary Student-Athletes

Kristina Navarro
Heather McCormick

Abstract

Framed from a constructivist approach, this manuscript draws from Savickas' (2005) Theory of Career Construction to assess programmatic development and mastery of learning outcomes in preparation for life after higher education. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, findings outline recommendations for campus-based practitioner programming informed from the voices of NCAA Division I football student-athletes.

Keywords: *Career development, student-athletes, higher education, best practices*

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One of the inherent functions of colleges and universities is to prepare students to graduate with a degree that allows them to embark on their career journey. Bell (2009) stated that today's student-athletes, a population subset within the larger student body, have an enhanced pressure to maintain eligibility, which can oftentimes cloud the aforementioned function of higher education. In turn, intentional career preparation may be sacrificed as student-athletes succumb to pressures from coaches and media to produce winning records and maintain eligibility (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Currently, a small percentage of the student affairs literature base considers the personal experiences of college student-athletes and the subsequent spheres of influence (i.e., academic support services, student support services) that support these college students as they prepare for career fields.

While literature supports that the student-athlete experience is unique (Bell, 2009), there is scant research that considers how millennial student-athletes view academic and student support programs for life after athletics. To address this gap in the current student development literature, this article draws on the interviews of NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) student-athletes who attended large, highly selective Research I institutions. The sport of football was selected for several reasons. First, due to participation numbers and the size of a football team, as well as access to the sport of football in an athlete's formative years, there is a diverse student-athlete population participating in football. Second, the sport of football has professional playing opportunities as a viable career option, which has been noted in previous research to hinder student-athlete career development. Finally, college football is a highly visible sport whereby intense societal and cultural factors typically cultivate a strong athlete identity.

The purpose of this article is threefold: (a) to understand football student-athletes' involvement in traditional career development activities, (b) to understand football student-athletes' thoughts and perceptions of their career preparedness upon graduation, and (c) to explore how graduated and career-seeking or employed football student-athletes perceive campus programming to support their transition to life after athletics.

Literature Review

Higher education scholars (i.e., Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Blann, 1985; Keup, 2007; Kidwell, 2005; Reason, Terenzini & Domingo, 2006) posited that processes of identity development intensify for undergraduate students as they explore undergraduate majors, adjust to the demands of college life, and develop an enhanced understanding of their own personal strengths and passions. While the literature supports viewing the higher education experience as a time of intense identity development for all students, the specialized needs of student-athletes must continue to be examined to discern how college professionals who work to support student-athletes can best prepare these individuals for life after both intercollegiate sport and college.

Career Development and Student-Athlete Campus Integration

Throughout the relatively limited literature body on student-athletes and student development, scholars disagree as to whether student-athletes should be integrated into the student body at-large or be given separate developmental training to foster transferrable skillsets for life after college (Chartrand & Lent, 1987). Comeaux and Harrison (2011) as well as Jolly (2008) support the importance of offering specific career preparation programs for student-athletes and suggest separate development programs allow student-athletes to more fully engage as they are surrounded by individuals who share common schedules and challenges. In contrast, Broughton and Neyer (2001), Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001), and Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) suggest social isolation, faculty isolation, and even isolation from peers is elevated for student-athletes during the college experience.

Student-Athlete Role Conflict

Literature on the student-athlete experience suggested student-athletes face additional psychosocial challenges while developing a sense of career direction during the higher education experience (Miller & Kerr, 2003). The concept of role conflict further intensifies the debate as to whether undergraduate students benefit from or are hindered by specialized academic and student affairs support services. Researchers continue to probe how current student affairs professionals may exacerbate these challenges for student-athletes, who often already experience pressure from other spheres (i.e., pressure from family and coaches) to perform in the classroom and on the playing field (Adler & Adler, 1987; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010).

Adler and Adler (1987), Bell (2009), Comeaux and Harrison (2011), Harrison and Lawrence (2003), Miller and Kerr (2003), Linnemeyer & Brown (2010), and Snyder (1985) addressed how Division I student-athletes often struggle to balance athletic and academic roles during the college experience. Their evidence suggested that student-athletes often associate more with their athletic- than academic-centered roles, which negatively influenced campus integration and student engagement (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). These scholars put forward that student-athletes who tend to focus primarily on their athletic role above all else struggle to engage in the major exploration processes that include long-range career planning.

Due to the multiple aforementioned reasons and pressures, student-athletes tend to rely to a greater extent on support services internal to athletic departments as they transition from the home environment to college (Bell, 2009). While parents and family often provide a strong foundation for shaping career vision prior to college, spheres of influence tend to shift during the higher education experience as student-athletes balance dual roles (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). To this end, it is imperative to present student and academic affairs professionals, who may intimately influence the career decisions of millennial student-athletes dur-

ing college, with additional empirical research on how student-athletes engage in career decision-making processes.

Theoretical Framework

We framed this study utilizing an overarching interpretivism theoretical framework. Interpretive research uses human interpretation to develop knowledge about a phenomenon (Crotty, 2010). Throughout this study, we drew on Savickas' (2002) interpretive Career Construction Theory to guide our analysis. Moreover, we sought to understand how individuals selected undergraduate majors and subsequently considered the alignment of major choices with future career aspirations.

This theory incorporates three main perspectives that position career construction as a differential, developmental, and dynamic process (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013). As individuals develop over the course of the lifespan, Savickas (2002) posits different life experiences shape career decision-making processes. Since these experiences are highly individualized, each individual's career construction process is different. Next, he suggests career decision-making processes occur as individuals dynamically respond to factors of their environment and life transitions they endure. He posits these life experiences inform one's development of a personal career identity. As individuals cope with life transitions and navigate life experiences, they construct and inform career plans.

Savickas' (2002) Career Construction Theory has frequently been utilized to further understand general population students and adult learners as they craft career plans (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013). This theory has never been applied to student-athletes in higher education. Since previous literature suggests student-athletes faces unique challenges as they transition to college and construct career plans, this guiding framework can provide a lens to further inform how these individuals cope not only with environmental challenges, but struggle to balance roles as students and athletes in their everyday higher education environments.

Methods

A two-phased, sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was utilized with priority given to qualitative research. The initial quantitative phase of the study was used to characterize individuals along certain traits of interest related to the research questions for the purposeful selection of a diverse group of participants for the second phase of the study. The second qualitative phase of the study provided a detailed understanding of the graduated Division I football student-athletes career development experiences. While this study gave priority to qualitative research, it integrated quantitative and qualitative methodologies within various stages of inquiry: data analysis and data interpretation.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the football student-athletes' involvement in traditional career development activities (researching a career, internship, externship, work experience, resume preparation, mock interview, networking, career search plan) across a diverse set of demographic variables (ethnicity, past and current socioeconomic status, academic degree, playing time at the participant's academic institution, current employment status, professional career area of employment, level of job satisfaction)?
2. What are the graduated football student-athlete's thoughts and perceptions of their career preparedness upon graduation and its impact upon the graduated student-athlete's transition into a life after sports?
3. What do graduated and career seeking or employed football student-athletes' perceive should be provided by University/athletic programs for student-athlete career development?

Phase One Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

An introductory email was sent to 125 Division I football student-athletes who graduated from six different FBS schools located in the southeastern region of the United States. Student-athlete alumni e-mail addresses were obtained from athletic administrators, athletic academic counselors and through a social media posting. To be eligible for the study, the prospective candidate had to have played for a Division I football program, graduated from the institution, and have been 3 to 7 years postgraduation at the time of the introductory email. The 3- to 7-year time span was selected to increase the probability that the participants had secured employment postgraduation in a position other than professional athlete. In addition, the time span allowed for the inclusion of the graduated student-athlete who played professional football and completed an average National Football League (NFL) career that spanned between three and a half seasons (National Football League Player's Association, n.d.) to six years (NFL Communications, 2011) prior to entering the workforce in a position other than professional athlete.

The 30 initial responders were e-mailed a quantitative questionnaire collecting demographic information across 11 predetermined factors: (a) Institution Attended, (b) Degree of Study, (c) Year of Graduation, (d) Ethnic Identification, (e) Previous Family Income, (f) Current Socioeconomic Status, (g) Playing Time at the Participant's Academic Institution, (h) Participation in a Professional Sports Career, (i) Current Professional Career Area of Employment, (j) Current Level of Job Satisfaction, and (k) Participation in Traditional Career Development Activities Prior to Graduation. Traditional career activities were defined as those activities or experiences that are traditionally provided by a University career services office and include (a) researching a career, (b) internship/externship, (c) work experience, (d) resume preparation, (e) interview preparation, (f) networking, and (g) career search plan. Of the original 30 responders, 22 prospective participants

representing six different institutions completed the questionnaire with three participants, two of which attended the same institution, requesting to not continue with the study.

To ensure the selection of a diverse participant pool across the 11 predetermined factors, maximum variation sampling was utilized as it seeks to include a wide range of extremes, requiring the researcher to purposively and nonrandomly select a small set of participants who exhibit maximal differences on specific variables of interest. The sampling process began by calculating relative frequency percentages for each of the 11 predetermined categories (Table 1). For purposes of confidentiality, participants' names have been changed, institutions are not identified, and degree titles have been generalized. After calculating relative frequency percentages, the outliers were highlighted within the categorical factor analysis for preferential consideration of inclusion into the participant pool (Grubbs, 1969). Next, an analysis of the outlier categories as well as the frequency of outliers per participant were analyzed. Finally, a purposeful sample based on maximum variation across the 11 pre-set factors was deductively determined. Full disclosure of the researcher's selection process was documented in a memo and a peer review of the sample analysis and the sample selection process was conducted.

Phase One Results: Participant Pool

Phase one analysis resulted in the purposeful selection of a diverse participant pool consisting of 12 Division I graduated football student-athletes (Table 2). The participants selected for the second phase of the study represented five southeastern institutions that consisted of four public institutions and one private institution. Maximum variation sampling resulted in 1 of the institutions having a greater number of participants in the final participant pool due to the diversity these participants provided across the 10 other preselected demographic factors. While maximum variation sampling cannot be generalized to all people in all groups, every effort was made to select a sample that represented a relatively heterogeneous football student-athlete population across the 11 preset demographic variables.

Phase Two Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The second phase of the study began with the phase one quantitative data pertaining to involvement in traditional career development activities transformed to qualitative themes. Data collection for phase two consisted of an open-ended survey and one-hour recorded interview. The open-ended survey was comprised of six questions that were completed via an email link. These questions focused on major of study, career goals upon graduation, postgraduation job search, perceptions of career preparedness upon graduation, postgraduation employment history and perceptions of current employment situation and future employment opportunities. Prior to the scheduling of individual interviews, survey responses were coded and added to the qualitative database.

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Table 2*Phase 2 Participant Pool Across Predetermined Factors*

	DEGREE/ MAJOR	YEAR OF GRADUATION	ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION	PREVIOUS/ FAMILY INCOME	CURRENT INCOME LEVEL	PLAYING TIME	PROFESSIONAL SPORTS CAREER	CURRENT PROFESSION	JOB SATISFACTION	RESEARCH A CAREER	INTERNSHIP/ EXTERNSHIP	WORK EXPERIENCE	RESUME	INTERVIEW PREPARATION	NETWORKING	CAREER SEARCH PLAN
DJ	Bachelor of Consumer Economics	2007	Black/White	\$50,000 - \$75,000	\$25,000 - \$50,000	In the Playing Rotation	Never	Landscape Contractor/ Business Owner	Very Satisfied	Research a Career			Resume	Interview Preparation	Networking	
Brian	Bachelor of Consumer Economics	2008	African American	\$75,000 - \$100,000	Under \$25,000	A Starter	Never	Sales/ Temp Intern	Unsatisfied	Research a Career			Resume			
Langley	Bachelor of Arts	2004	African American	\$75,000 - \$100,000	\$25,000 - \$50,000	A Reserve	Never	Higher Education/ Administrative Staff	Very Unsatisfied	Research a Career		Work Experience	Resume	Interview Preparation		
Tom	Bachelor of Science	2004	White	\$25,000 - \$50,000	\$150,000 +	In the Playing Rotation	Never	Associate Attorney/ Other	Partially Satisfied			Work Experience	Resume		Networking	
Wade	Bachelor of Consumer Science	2010	African American	\$75,000 - \$100,000	\$25,000 - \$50,000	In the Playing Rotation	Never	Driver/ Entry Level	Satisfied			Work Experience				
AJ	Bachelor of Consumer Science	2007	African American	\$25,000 - \$50,000	No Response	In the Playing Rotation	Never	Appraiser/ Trained Professional	Very Satisfied					Interview Preparation	Networking	
Harris	Bachelor of Arts	2008	African American	\$25,000 - \$50,000	\$25,000 - \$50,000	A Starter/Playing Rotation	Previously: 1 Year	Police Officer/ Trained Professional	Satisfied	Research a Career	Externship		Resume	Interview Preparation	Networking	
Harold	Bachelor of Business Administration	2005	African American	\$75,000 - \$100,000	\$100,000 - \$125,000	A Starter	Previously: 6 Year	Finance Manager/ Middle Management	Satisfied				Resume	Interview Preparation	Networking	
Mark	Bachelor of Consumer Science	2009	African American	\$25,000 - \$50,000	\$25,000 - \$50,000	In the Playing Rotation	Never	Special Ed Teacher & Football Coach/ Trained Professional	Satisfied			Work Experience	Resume	Interview Preparation		
Larry	Bachelor of Consumer Science	2008	African American	\$25,000 - \$50,000	\$150,000 +	A Starter/Playing Rotation	Currently: 5 Year	Pro Athlete/ Trained Professional		Research a Career			Resume	Interview Preparation		
Alex	Bachelor of Arts	2009	African American	Under \$25,000	\$25,000 - \$50,000	In the Playing Rotation	Never	Case Manager - Job Coach/ Lower Management	Very Satisfied	Research a Career			Resume			
Ben	Bachelor of Business Administration	2007	White	\$75,000 - \$100,000	\$50,000 - \$75,000	In the Playing Rotation	Never	Development Officer/ Other	Very Satisfied	Research a Career	Externship	Work Experience	Resume	Interview Preparation	Networking	

The one-hour qualitative interview was conducted in person or over the telephone utilizing a 15 open-ended question interview guide. Questions provided detailed accounts of the graduated football student-athlete's involvement in each of the outlined traditional career development activities prior to graduation, perceptions of career readiness upon graduation, a descriptive account of the participant's transition into career and a life after sports including career ladder, an understanding of the participant's current employment situation as well as a reflective narrative on recommendations to enhance student-athlete career development programming. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then forwarded to the participant for member checking providing the participant the opportunity to review transcribed responses to ensure factual accuracy. None of the participants retracted interview responses and only one participant provided further elaboration of his comments after reviewing his transcript.

Following member checking, the transcripts were coded into existing and new categories utilizing the constant comparative method and Microsoft Word processing software. Throughout the analysis of interview themes, memo writing was conducted to document the thought processes in the creation of data codes and categories. Upon completion of coding, the entire database was analyzed for emerging concepts or themes (Table 3). Then, themes within the qualitative data were counted and the frequency of these themes were converted to a relative frequency percentage to prevent the "overweighting" or "underweighting" of emergent themes (Sandelowski, 2001, p. 231 & 234). After a complete analysis of relative frequency percentages of data themes and their relation to one another, a set of credible assertions were inductively and intuitively derived.

Results

RQ #1: Student-Athlete Involvement in Traditional Career Development Activities

Across a diverse set of demographic variables, this research study reveals that the majority of the graduated Division I football student-athletes in this study did not engage in career development activities at a depth and breadth needed to construct career plans prior to graduation resulting in a smooth transition into a life after sports. The student-athlete time conundrum, which the researchers define as the difficult decision-making process student-athletes face as they determine how to divide their time among the competing wants and needs of their academic commitments, athletic commitments, and personal interests outside of academics and athletics, was cited as inhibiting the student-athlete's ability to participate in traditional career development activities. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data are discussed below and appear in Table 4.

Table 3
Final Qualitative Categories and Themes

Category	Theme	Sub-Theme	Sub-Theme
Reason for Selecting Institution	Academics Prominent in Decision-Making Process	Parental Influence	
	Athletics Prominent in Decision-Making Process	NFL/Professional Football Opportunities	
Major	Preferred Area of Study	Career Goals Related To Major	Career Goals Not Related to Major
	Not Preferred Area of Study	Career Goals Related to Major	Career Goals Not Related to Major
	Major Changes During Academic Career (#)	Reasons for Major Changes	Influence(s) for Major Change
	Clustering	Experienced Clustering	Witnessed Clustering
Research a Career	Did Research a Career	Activities Performed	Resources Utilized for Major/Career Research
	Did Not Research a Career	Reasons for Not Researching a Career	Lack of Understanding of Interests/Values/Etc.
Externship	Participated	Influence(s) in Participation	
	Did Not Participate	Reasons for Not Participating/Time Conundrum	
Internship	Participated	Influence(s) in Participation	
	Did Not Participate	Reasons for Not Participating/Time Conundrum	
Work Experience	Participated	Not Exploratory Work Experience	
	Did Not Participate	Reasons for Not Participating/Time Conundrum	
Resume	Participated	Resources Utilized	
	Did Not Participate	Reasons for Not Participating	
Networking	Participated	Resources Utilized	
	Did Not Participate	Reasons for Not Participating	Feelings of Regret/Lost Opportunities
Job Search Plan	Had Plan Prior to Graduation	Influence(s) in Participation	
	Did Not Have Plan Prior to Graduation	Reasons for Not Participating/Time Conundrum	
Career Preparedness Upon Graduation	Feelings of Preparedness	Reasons for Preparedness	
	Feelings of Unpreparedness	Post-Graduation Career Confusion	Entitlement/Unrealistic Career Expectations
Career Ladder Post-Graduation	First Job In Career Area of Interest		
	First Job Not in Career Area of Interest		
	Dissatisfaction with First Job Post-Graduation	Number of Jobs/Years Post-Graduation	Types of Job Post-Grad/Lack of Career Ladder
Current Career	Career Satisfied		
	Career Unsatisfied		
	Career Related to Degree Area of Study		
Career Development Programming	Need for Student-Athlete Career Development	Mandatory Programming	
	Comprehensive Programming	Early Career Development Programming	Programming as Athlete ID Naturally Decreases
	Suggested Content	Establish a Value for Degree	
		Understand Skill Sets & Relation to Career	
		Establish Realistic Career/Salary Expectations	
		Need for Experiential Opportunities	
		Networking	Leverage D-I Status & Mentoring Program
		Address First Generation College Student Needs	
Transition to a Life After Sports		Post-Graduation Career Development Assistance	
	Student-Athlete to Civilian Life Transition	Independent Life Skills (Time Management)	Loss of Support Team/Handlers
	Emotional & Psychological Issues	Loss of Athlete Identity	Career Confusion
		Stages of Grief	Career Confusion

Table 4*Research Question #1 Results*

Themes and Sub Themes	Frequency
Lack of Involvement in Researching a Career	67%
Limited Knowledge of Interests and Skill Sets	83%
Limited Use of Resources to Obtain Major and Career Information	100%
Lacking in Involvement of Externship Opportunities	83%
Lacking in Internship Opportunities	83%
Lacking in Exploratory Work Experiences	67%
Work Experiences Not Furthering the Career Development Process	67%
Resume Preparation is Occurring Prior to Graduation	75%
Limited Interview Preparation is Occurring Prior to Graduation	67%
Lacking in Effective Networking	67%
Lacking a Career Search Plan Prior to Graduation	97%
Student-Athlete Time Conundrum Inhibits Participation	100%

Researching a career. Researching a career generally involves developing an understanding of personal interests and skill sets and acquiring an understanding of how those interests and skill sets relate to a particular major of study as well as vocational opportunities. While three (25%) of the participants explicitly mentioned visiting their institutions' career services office, only two of the three utilized a formal evaluation tool such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the Strong Inventory to explore their interests and skill sets. The majority of the football student-athletes (83%) in this study specified a career interest discovered in childhood or adolescence without a detailed exploration of how those interests aligned with major options and career choices.

I was young. I have a cousin who is in the Secret Service and we were at a family event one day and that's what he was talking about . . . I was like 12 or 13 and ever since then that's what I wanted to do . . . But it was like an early on thing . . . it was not that when I got to college I figured it out. But one thing that I wish for to happen in college is that I . . . figured out a career path that would be more suited for that. –Harris, Bachelor of Arts, Police Officer

The data acknowledged that the football student-athletes utilized limited resources to research a major and/or career. While participants cited having had discussions with family members (33%), teammates (17%) and a university academic counselor (8%), the predominant source of information for selecting and researching a major was a discussion with the student-athlete's athletic academic counselor/advisor (67%). While only three of the participants (25%) reported that major course times and internship requirements deterred or impacted their choice of major/coursework, this finding may be understated. The interview narratives reveal that the student-athletes in this study who were undecided about their major were presented with a limited list of major options by their athletic academic

advisor for consideration. The limited options provided by the athletic academic advisor were interpreted as having been presented due to their adaptability to the student-athletes practice schedule and time demands. Harold, a Finance Manager offered:

To fit in all of your classes into a window from eight [a.m.] to about . . . one o'clock because they [the athletic academic advisor] have to free up enough time to get you from class to practice or a meeting by two-thirty every day, that's a bit of task . . . that's a little bit of juggling act . . . because they have to put you in classes that fit in the schedule.

Overall, 67% of the graduated football student-athletes in this study revealed that they did not research a career prior to graduation. While the phase one quantitative results reported that only 42% of the participants responded that they did not research a career, mixed methods and the utilization of qualitative inquiry in the second phase of the study allowed for elaboration by the participants and, ultimately, corroboration of the phase one and phase two data sets. In phase one's quantitative questionnaire, participants were asked to respond "yes" or "no" as to their involvement in researching a career. In phase two, participants provided a detailed qualitative description of the research process. The qualitative data noted a retraction by the participants as they revealed not having evaluated their personal interests to an extent that the participants had an understanding of how their personal interests aligned with major and ultimately vocational opportunities for a job search postgraduation.

Experiential opportunities: Externship, internship, and work experience.

The majority of the diverse participants in this study did not engage in experiential opportunities that furthered the career construction process. Eighty-three percent of the student-athletes reported not participating in an externship or internship. The two (17%) participants, Harris and Mark, who revealed that they had experienced an externship were required to participate by their athletic department as it had hired an outside firm to assist in scheduling the opportunity. Although Harris and Mark revealed they were not autonomously motivated to participate in the externship, both reported that the experience was valuable furthering their construction of career.

Ben, who attended a private college, and Tom who attended a public institution revealed in the interview that they had both (17%) conducted a summer internship. Ben and Tom noted they were internally motivated to obtain the position for experience/resume purposes and reported that the internship was a valuable learning opportunity that provided insight for their future career choices. While Tom was a kicker, by virtue of his individualized skill position and individualized summer workout schedule, he was able to train off-campus for the summer internship period. In comparison, Ben struggled with the time conundrum while performing an internship that was located approximately an hour from his athletic program's practice facilities.

I knew I needed an internship [so I had work experience on my resume] before I graduated. My internship was only in the summer but it was challenging . . . I was a senior team leader and so I had to be at workouts throughout the morning and then I had to be at whatever, pads/skeleton in the afternoons and so, yeah, that summer was tough. And I wouldn't have had to do it but . . . you know, it was kind of the balance of wanting to get a job and wanting a meaningful experience but also being a captain on the team and being there to help lead things.

While 50% of the football student-athletes in this study did obtain employment at some point during their academic career, those student-athletes who reported working (67%) discussed summer employment experiences that were short term, low skilled positions for the purpose of earning spending money. These positions were not major or career specific and usually took place a few weeks during the summer until official practice commenced. The exception was Tom and DJ whose work experience exposed them directly to a career area of interest (33%). Both described unique circumstances that permitted them to obtain a skilled employment position. Tom, as a kicker had individualized summer workouts, and DJ, a senior, waived his final year of eligibility obtaining an employment opportunity as he was completing his degree and not participating in football.

Resume, interview preparation, and networking. Upon graduation, football student-athletes in this study were equipped with a resume (75%), and over half (67%) reported engaging in limited professional career interview preparation prior to graduation. The qualitative data revealed that 67% of the football student-athletes felt they had networked prior to graduation, but typically expressed regret for not having effectively utilized networking events or contacts during their collegiate career to leverage their student-athlete status for career development or job search assistance prior to graduation.

Career search plan. A career search plan is a list of action items or a strategic blueprint containing a list of job titles and/or a target list of employers and contacts to network and apply for positions as one initiates the job search process. Only one participant (8%), Tom, articulated in the qualitative interview that he had established a firm career search plan prior to graduation. Tom, who also did not identify as strongly with his athlete identity as the other participants, had immersed himself in traditional career development activities at a far greater depth and breadth than the other participants in this study.

The results show that 92% of the football student-athletes in this study did not have a career search plan upon graduation. The participant narratives describe a scattered job search seeking employment in a variety of career sectors and industries. For example, Harold described a job search that included applying for automotive sales management positions, high school coaching positions and financial sales positions while simultaneously studying to obtain a state teaching certification and financial certifications.

RQ #2: Perceptions of Career Preparedness & Impact on the Transition into a Life After Sports

Four themes emerged from the data in relation to the graduated football student-athletes perceptions of career preparedness upon graduation and its impact upon the transition to a life after sports (Table 5).

Table 5

Research Question #2 Results

Results	Frequency %
Do Not Feel Career Prepared	83%
Experience Post-Graduation Career Confusion	60%
Sense of Entitlement Versus Unrealistic Career Expectations	60%
Experience Dissatisfaction with First Job Post-Graduation	90%

Career unpreparedness. Overall, the Division I graduated football student-athletes in this study reported not feeling prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation (83%). AJ and Alex explain:

Well, first of all, I didn't know that I wasn't ready [laughs]. And then when I started sending out resumes on top of resumes and I didn't have any experience what so ever at anything . . . It's hard to say what you want to do for the rest of your life without doing anything. –AJ, Bachelor of Consumer Science, Commercial Real Estate Appraiser

Well, the biggest thing I just feel like . . . a lot of student-athletes are unprepared for a life after football. Life after graduation. Because I think, for the most part, we start to understand, 'Alright, football is not going to last forever.' Okay, we know that. But we don't necessarily understand how to like transition from playing football to being a working professional. –Alex, Bachelor of Arts, Case Manager for Non-Profit

Career confusion. Of the 10 participants who reported feeling unprepared, 6 (60%) experienced career confusion as they searched for their initial job postgraduation. Career confusion is the inability of the student-athlete to initiate or sustain the career decision-making process perhaps due to a lack of understanding about the career decision-making process itself (Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1999). As a result, the student-athlete experiences generalized anxiety about the outcome of the decision making process which appears to perpetuate the indecision (Sampson et al., 1999).

I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do with [my degree]. Really didn't know like back when I graduated. Wish I had a better idea . . . There are

all these possibilities out in front of you, it's kind of like 'What do I do now?' You know? –Ben, Bachelor of Business Administration, University Development Officer

[I felt] really anxious because I was the first one to graduate college [in my family] and so it was like, 'Okay, now what do I do?' It's like everybody is looking at me, 'Okay, you graduated from college, now what are you going to do?' – Alex, Bachelor of Arts, Case Manager for Nonprofit

There was a lot of confusion [upon my job search following a NFL career that concluded only several months after graduation]. There was a lot of confusion. I was calling everybody, 'What do you think I should do? Where do you think I should go from here?' And then I had everything was going five different ways. –Harris, Bachelor of Arts, Police Officer

Sense of entitlement. In addition to career confusion, 60% of the football student-athletes who cited career unpreparedness stated they noted a sense of entitlement and/or had unrealistic career expectations in regards to their worth to the job market as well as salary expectations. DJ, a Bachelor of Consumer Economics, Landscaping Contractor/Business Owner noted:

I was, 'I'm so sharp, I'm such a good salesperson, I'm bringing in this amount of money, I should be making fifty, sixty thousand, I'm not appreciated enough' . . . And, so I will say that I didn't have, and I don't know that it's something that should have been, well, like given to you in college or like have more realistic expectations of what we should see out there in the job market, you know? I don't know whose fault that should have been. Partially my own arrogance. But it was a lot of ignorance in the job market.

Initial job dissatisfaction. A final theme related to career unpreparedness, was a high rate of job dissatisfaction in the participant's initial employment opportunity postgraduation (90%) resulting in a high rate of job turnover at two to three years postgraduation (Table 6). It is important to note that at five to seven years postgraduation, all of the participants in this study report 100% career satisfaction.

RQ#3: Student-Athlete Perceptions of Career Development Programming

Overall, the majority of the graduated Division I football student-athletes in this study state there is a need for student-athlete career development programming (92%). The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data are located in Table 7 and are discussed below.

Table 6

Career Preparedness Themes by Category Per Participant

	CAREER PREPAREDNESS UPON GRADUATION	FIRST JOB POST- GRADUATION	CURRENT JOB	CAREER SATISFIED	NUMBER OF JOB/YEARS POST- GRADUATION
DJ	Unprepared	Landscaping Contractor (manual labor and sales)	Landscaping Contractor (business owner)	Yes	2 Jobs/5 Years
Brian	Prepared	Intern (Sports Industry)	University Athletic Academic Counselor	Yes	3 Jobs/4 Years
Langley	Unprepared	Academic Administrative Assistant	Marketing & Recruitment Officer	Yes	3 Jobs/8 Years
Tom	Prepared	Civil Engineering	Lawyer	Yes	2 Jobs/8 Years
Wade	Unprepared	Management Trainee (Food Retail)	Driver	Yes	4 Jobs/3 Years
AJ	Unprepared	Intern (Sports Industry)	Commercial Real Estate Appraiser	Yes	3 Jobs/5 Years
Harris	Unprepared	Professional Athlete (NFL)	Police Officer	Yes	4 Jobs/4 Years
Harold	Unprepared	Professional Athlete (NFL)	Finance Manager/Automotive Retail Management Trainee	Yes	2 Jobs/7 Years
Mark	Unprepared	Leasing Manger	Special Needs Teacher/High School Football Coach	Yes	2 Jobs/3 Years (One year Unemployed)
Larry	Unprepared	Professional Athlete (NFL)	Mortgage Loan Originator	Just Started	2 Jobs/4 Years
Alex	Unprepared	Car Salesman	Case Manager for Non-Profit	Yes	2 Jobs/3 Years
Ben	Unprepared	Bank Mangement Trainee	University Development Officer	Yes	2 Jobs/5 Years

Table 7*Research Question #3 Results*

Themes and Sub Themes	Frequency
A Need for Student-Athlete Career Development Programming	92%
Mandatory Career Development Programming	36%
Comprehensive Career Development Programming	83%
Early Career Development Intervention	45%
Athlete Identity Naturally Decreases Over Academic Career	50%
Career Development Programming Content:	
Understanding the Importance of Personal Skill Sets and Vocation	42%
Establish Realistic Career/Salary Expectations	50%
A Need for Experiential Opportunities	50%
Networking: Understanding How and When to Effectively Network	83%
Understanding How to Leverage Division I Football Status	50%
Student-Athlete Alumni Career Network and Mentoring Program	60%
Need for Postgraduate Career Development Assistance	75%
Emotional and Psychological Transition Issues:	
Student-Athlete to Civilian Life Transition	100%
Emotional and Psychological Issues Related to Athletic Retirement	100%

Comprehensive and mandatory career development programming. Eighty-three percent of the research participants suggested that career development programming should be comprehensive involving the student-athlete's participation over the student-athletes entire academic and collegiate athletic career. These participant's qualitative narratives describe the Division I student-athlete as having a strong athlete identity, and in some cases foreclosed athlete identity, to the extent that during the student-athletes early academic career his main focus is football and a future NFL career. With the goal of educating the freshman college student, research participants suggested that career education begin as soon as the student-athlete arrives on campus and continue throughout the student-athletes academic career. As noted below, the participants' narratives chronicle a natural decline of the athlete identity as a result of injury and/or as the student-athlete nears graduation. Intuitively, many of the participants described engaging in a mental dialogue regarding career, but did not act on the thoughts of career exploration. Mark, Bachelor of Consumer Science, teacher/high school football coach noted:

So when you first get there, you know, you're kind of young and naïve and of course, you are going to the NFL because that's what you think and everything like that and so you're just like, 'Okay, I've got to get this football thing going so I can get to the next level' because that's your dream, that's what you want. And it doesn't always happen that way. And so by the time you get to be a little bit older, you realize, 'Okay, now I need to focus on both aspects of it [being an athlete and a student] so I can have a Plan B.

While four (36%) of the participants explicitly stated that student-athlete career development programming participation should be mandatory, those four student-athletes also commented that they did not and would not have engaged in career development activities unless they were required to participate. Those participants that did not recommend mandatory career development programming did provide commentary suggesting that due to the dominance of the athlete identity and the student-athlete time conundrum, administrators and coaches would need to be committed to programming specifically allotting time for explorative career development activities to occur. Harris explained, “I just think that maybe if I just had a little more pushing at my back [I would have gotten involved in career development]. I think a lot of push has to come from the coach or your position coach.” In addition, Mark noted:

What would have had to happen, something would have had to happen from the coaching staff, like they would have to be lenient . . . ‘Okay, I give you this amount of time’ [to participate in career development for me to have participated in career development activities].

Student-athlete career development programming content. The football student-athletes in this study recommended programming content that paralleled the career development deficiencies revealed in RQ #1. Those results displayed a need for structured programming that assisted the student-athlete in more effectively engaging in self-discovery to foster and identify personal interests and skill sets outside of sport while developing an understanding of how those interests and skill sets relate to major and vocation (42%). Programming recommendations also included engaging in experiential learning opportunities (50%) and establishing realistic career/salary expectations (50%). Mark offered:

Until you actually experience something you don’t know whether or not you’re going to like it . . . And so I think experience is the biggest, biggest teacher and I also think experience is the biggest thing that you need to have on a resume in order to be marketable to an employer.

Lastly, the student-athletes recommendations included programming content that included the theme networking (83%). Primarily, the football student-athlete suggested a curriculum that provided a better understanding of how and when to effectively network. During the student-athletes’ collegiate career, the participants recalled attending many on- and off-campus events representing their sports team, institution, or themselves but only retrospectively, postgraduation, recognizing that these events could have been opportunities for career exploration and job search assistance. A sub-theme of networking was understanding how and when a football student-athlete should leverage his name and/or experience as a Division I football student-athlete (50%) to further career exploration and job search opportunities. Sixty percent of the participants in this study recommended that their institution have a formalized student-athlete alumni networking and ca-

reer mentoring program to assist student-athletes in the vocational development process during their academic career and following graduation.

Postgraduation career development assistance. Seventy-five percent of the graduated football student-athletes recommended career development programming that provided postgraduation career development assistance to ease the transition into a career and life after sports. It was noted that career counseling and job search assistance should be provided to the student-athlete following graduation. Although psychological services were not recommended as part of the transitional support program, it was documented that each of the football student-athletes experienced an emotional and psychological transition (100%) into a life after sports. The football student-athletes in this study each provided a transitional narrative that vividly detailed an emotional and psychological adjustment away from the rigors and structure of the student-athlete lifestyle (100%). Participants expressed feelings of initial isolation and loneliness postgraduation as the student-athlete dealt with the physical loss of “team,” teammates, and a support staff. In addition, football student-athletes endured a reconditioning and re-socialization process as they began to adapt to an independent, less structured culture. DJ, a consumer science major, owner & CEO of High End Landscaping Company offered:

Big-time college athletics is probably one of the most detrimental things that can happen to somebody if they are not like a special person . . . Let's say, they don't have an identity before football, because, I mean, they get into ball and you become like an overnight pseudo-celebrity, you know, more people know your name regardless of talent level than the [names the state's professional NFL team] or whatever . . . And so you get the notoriety . . . you get coddled, you get structured, you know, you don't buy your books, you don't sign up for class [athletic academic counselors sign you up for your classes] . . . So, you kind of go through your whole [college] experience just going through the motions . . . until the very end.

Another aspect of the emotional and psychological struggle deals with the loss of the athlete identity and athletics having a less prominent role in their life. The interview narratives each detail a transition that mimics the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross Model, 2005). For the football student-athlete who strongly identified with the athlete identity and was not career prepared upon graduation, the psychological and emotional aspects of an identity crisis appeared to exacerbate levels of career confusion, anxiety, and career indecision.

Discussion

Emerging adulthood (roughly from 18 to 25 years of age) is the period of time that offers an individual the most opportunity for identity exploration in the areas

of work and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) refer to this time period as the career exploratory stage of the life span and describe it as a period of time that the emerging adult broadens his or her self-concept as well as the perception of individual abilities. During emerging adulthood, individuals utilize educational choices and experiences to explore options in preparation for future work (Arnett, 2000).

For the football student-athletes in this study, athletic scholarship obligations, university/athletic department time demands and the student-athlete's dedication to his football career created many obstacles in furthering one's self-concept toward constructing a career identity. The results of this study reveal that the graduated football student-athletes failed to sufficiently engage in career development activities prior to graduation at a depth and breadth of participation that moved the student-athlete along the career development continuum. As a result of insufficient role exploration beyond that of athlete, the graduated football student-athlete lacked an understanding of self-concept or individual interests, needs, values and skill sets outside of sport. Consequently, the football student-athlete graduated with immature career plans resulting in a job search that was marked by career confusion, anxiety, and career indecision. The career confusion the student-athlete experienced postgraduation was amplified by a social and cultural lifestyle shift that had emotional and psychological implications associated with athletic retirement and the loss of the athletic identity. Upon entering the workforce, football student-athletes initially reported a high level of job dissatisfaction and job turnover stemming from unrealistic career expectations. However, through self-discovery and exposure to vocation postgraduation, the student-athlete alumnus moved along the continuum toward job satisfaction. In order to positively impact career maturity prior to graduation resulting in a smoother transition to a life after sports, student-athletes must actively engage in career development programming during their collegiate academic career to expand the student-athlete's understanding of self beyond that of athlete while also exposing the student-athlete to real-life vocational experiences.

Student-Athlete Career Development Programming

Due to role conflict and the resulting time conundrum, participants in this study felt it was imperative for athletic administrators and coaches to impress upon their student-athletes the importance of engagement in career development activities and to allot time for the student-athlete to participate in vocational growth opportunities throughout their academic careers.

Vocational development is a continuous and dynamic process; therefore, programming cannot be occasional and piecemeal. To instill a culture that expands beyond athletics, administrators and student affairs professionals overseeing student-athlete welfare programming should emphasize the inclusion of a vocational curriculum and contemplate how vocational programming might be weaved into existing programming. Programming should feature a sequential curriculum

that emphasizes the growth of the student-athlete's self-concept outside the athletic sphere while also recognizing the positive behaviors and skill that athletes have developed through sport. Traditionally, assessment in career development begins with a subjective standardized measure of the "Big Three" constructs of career development, which include interest/needs, values, and abilities (Swanson & D'Achiardi, 2005). These three constructs form the content of an individual's career decision (Savickas, 2002). Once the student-athlete has identified these constructs, student-athletes should be directed to explore vocational opportunities through experiential learning opportunities such as an internship or externship. Due to the time conundrum, an externship or job shadow may offer the student-athlete the greatest opportunity for career exploration. With access to a structured externship program, flexible experiential opportunities could be made readily available for engagement during the summer semester which was noted in the data as a down time for this group of student-athletes. In addition, career development programming focused on the student-athlete population should educate student-athletes on how to network, promoting opportunities to network throughout the student-athlete's academic career. Programming should include one-on-one counseling sessions as well as group seminars and activities that assist with resume creation, interview preparation and the creation of a job search plan. Finally, student-athletes should be educated as to the emotional and psychological challenges they may be confronted with upon athletic retirement as they transition into a life after sports.

Career Counseling Expertise

A vital component to career development programming is the staff working directly with the student-athlete in vocational development. For the participants in this study, the primary major and career development resource was the athletic academic counselor. The participants' narratives described major and career advice that was based primarily upon the advisors' perceptions of the student-athlete versus an informed career counseling session where the student-athlete was taking an active role in personal exploration and career decision making. While academic advisors have a vast knowledge of the institution's academic policies, procedures, degree, and GPA requirements, they may not have an expansive knowledge of career areas, skills, and certifications required to obtain a certain job and strategies for locating employment opportunities (McCalla-Wriggins, 2009). While both academic and career advising are grounded in student development learning theories, career advising has the added caveat of career development theory (McCalla-Wriggins, 2009). Whether student-athlete career development programming is exclusive to the student-athlete population or integrated into university-wide programming, the individual working directly with the student-athlete in a career development role should have expertise in implementing career theory as well as experience in career counseling.

Program Evaluation

Once student-athlete career development programming has been implemented, it is critical that universities and athletic programs evaluate their career curriculum. Feedback from the student-athletes will be imperative for their buy-in to engage in programming as well as improve programming. The student-athlete perspective can lead to innovative ideas that may also streamline delivery of programming. For example, Langley suggested that behavioral interviewing training could be incorporated into his institutions media training program. He felt the combined training would encourage the student-athlete to practice this professional interviewing response technique throughout the student-athletes football career when talking to the media, ensuring he would represent the university in a professional manner, but also providing interview preparation for a NFL combine interview as well as a corporate interview.

In addition to student-athlete assessment, university and athletics programs should consider a comprehensive evaluation of student-athlete academic success. Currently, university and athletic program academic success is evaluated by NCAA academic progress rates (APRs) and graduation success rates (GSRs). Although the student-athletes in this study graduated, the majority reported that they were not career prepared upon graduation. To fully evaluate student-athlete success, administrators should be challenged to document not only APRs and GSRs, but also evaluate student-athlete career outcomes.

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