

IN THEIR WORDS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
FORMER STUDENT-ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES IN LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS IN
RELATION TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITION OUT OF COLLEGE

by

Morgan D. Fisher
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
Education

Committee:

Jon Armistead Chair

Cathy Swann

Josephine McDowell

Walter H. O. Program Director

Robert E. Fisher Dean, College of Education and Human
Development

Date: March 27th, 2020 Spring Semester 2020
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

In Their Words: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Former Student-Athletes'
Experiences in Life Skills Programs in Relation to Career Development and Transition
Out of College

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

Morgan D. Fisher
Master of Education
Bowling Green State University, 2007
Bachelor of Science
Kansas State University, 2004

Director: Jan Arminio, Professor
College of Education and Human Development

Spring Semester 2020
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA



THIS WORK IS LICENSED UNDER A [CREATIVE COMMONS
ATTRIBUTION-NONCOMMERICAL 3.0 UNPORTED LICENSE](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

Dedication

My work is dedicated to those who tirelessly and boldly fought, paving the way so that I may achieve my dreams and aspirations.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I give all praise and glory to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who, through Him, I can do ALL things (*Phil. 4:13*). Father, thank you for waking me every morning with Your unfailing love and grace. How great Thou art. To my amazing mother and father, thank you for your unconditional love, support, and Godly guidance. You've propelled me to become a confident woman of whom I know you are proud. Looks like I finally finished all my papers! To my artistically gifted and beautiful sister, Shawn, you're my example of never giving up on one's hopes and dreams. Thank you for showing me perseverance.

To my chair, Dr. Arminio, thank you for your unwavering support from the time I first entered the higher education program. You welcomed me, encouraged me, and challenged me to become a better student, scholar, and practitioner. It was truly a privilege to work with and learn from you. To Dr. McDowell, thank you for your support and sharing your invaluable expertise and perspective on the field of intercollegiate athletics. To Dr. Swan, thank you for your positive spirit and encouraging words throughout my journey as well. To the many CEHD faculty I had the privilege of knowing—Dr. Galuzzo, Dr. Maxwell, Dr. Holincheck, Dr. Weiss, Dr. Forcier, Dr. Reybold—who played a role in my development as a student and scholar, thank you.

I'm truly grateful to my alma mater, Kansas State University, where I was first introduced to academic research as an undergraduate through the Developing Scholars Program. Mrs. Anita Cortez, thank you for the opportunity to be a part of the inaugural class and to discover the limitless possibilities of being inquisitive and asking questions.

Special thank you to my collaborators who were bold in sharing their stories as former student-athletes. Your words brought my study true meaning. For every former and current college student-athlete I had and have the privilege of working with, thank you for showing me the importance of discipline and passion. You truly inspire me to continue fighting in the trenches with you.

Finally, I thank my dear friends and colleagues. To my friends, you endured my many absences, yet continued to provide me needed words of encouragement and the occasional, mandated breaks as well. To my supervisor, Paul, thank you for your support and for creating a space for me to grow professionally in the field of intercollegiate athletics. To my colleagues, thank you for your understanding and willingness to fill in and cover for me when needed, especially as I drew closer to the finish line. I greatly appreciate the team coaches I have had and currently have the privilege of working with; you have inspired me as well. And to my SGFG (Start Green, Finish Gold) Mason family, you know who you are! Thank you for all your messages of support, advice, laughter, brunches, and happy hours! I am so blessed to know each of you as classmates, scholars, colleagues and friends.

Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Abstract	xi
Chapter One—In Their Words	1
Background	3
Problem Statement	7
Purpose of the Study	10
Research Questions	11
Significance of the Study	11
Definitions	12
Summary of Delimitations	15
Summary of Introduction and Organization	16
Chapter Two—Literature Review	18
History of Intercollegiate Athletics	18
National Collegiate Athletic Association	19
NCAA academic reform	21
The Student-Athlete	24
Athletic identity	26
Time demands	29
Academic preparedness	30
Academic major mismatch	31
Life Skills	32
History of Life Skills within intercollegiate athletics	35
NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program	37
The five pillars	38
The new partnership and student-athlete development	51
Theoretical Framework	53
Bridges' transition model	55
Summary of Literature	60
Chapter Three—Methodology	62
Why a Qualitative Methodology?	63
Research Questions	64
Phenomenology as Methodology	65
Hermeneutic phenomenology	66
Research Design	74

Collaborators.....	75
Setting.....	78
Data collection.....	79
Data analysis.....	81
Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness.....	84
Limitations.....	86
Summary of Methodology.....	87
Chapter Four—Findings.....	89
Demographic Background of Collaborators.....	89
Jason—football player from the West.....	90
Jillian—softball player from the West..	91
Justin—football player from the South..	91
Mollie—softball player from the Midwest.....	92
Tim—thrower, track and field from the West.....	92
Structure of Conversations and Writing Prompts.....	93
Essential Themes.....	95
Living the dream.....	95
Cadence: Relationships and networks.....	106
Hurdles: Transition, detours, and roadblocks.....	110
Get set . . . go!.....	129
A leap of faith.....	147
It’s a marathon, not a sprint.....	152
Summary of Findings.....	157
Chapter Five—The Structure, Essence, Discussion, and Conclusion.....	158
The Structure: Key Points from Essential Themes.....	159
The Essence of Life Skills.....	161
Reflection on Collaborators’ Broader Experiences in Higher Education.....	163
“Not the exception, but the rule.”.....	169
Career development vs. career readiness.....	170
The three groups of student-athletes: The benched players, the rookies, and the starting lineup.....	172
So Now What?.....	176
Future Research.....	182
Conclusion.....	183
Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Letter.....	186
Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Email.....	187
Appendix C: Interview Consent Form.....	189
Appendix D: Writing Prompts.....	192
Appendix E: Demographics Survey.....	193
Appendix F: Interview Protocol.....	195
Appendix G: Table 2—Essential Themes Example.....	199
References.....	200

List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. My Collaborators	90

List of Figures

Figure	Page
Figure 1. Depiction of Bridges' Transition Model.	56
Figure 2. The “3+1” phenomenology framework	70
Figure 3. Simplified Hermeneutic Circle.....	82

List of Abbreviations

Academic Progress Rate.....	APR
Graduation Success Rate.....	GSR
National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals..	N4A
National Association of Colleges and Employers.....	NACE
Progress Toward Degree.....	PTD
Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.....	SAAC
The National Collegiate Athletic Association.....	NCAA

Abstract

IN THEIR WORDS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
FORMER STUDENT-ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES IN LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS IN
RELATION TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITION OUT OF COLLEGE

Morgan D. Fisher, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2020

Dissertation Director: Jan Arminio

This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding student-athlete experiences and perceptions of Life Skills or student-athlete development programming (formerly known as the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success/Life Skills Program). There is a growing need to understand how best to assist student-athletes as they prepare for their post-collegiate athletic careers. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, the study explored how former student-athletes experienced such programming, and if at all, how it prepared them for their transition out of college and into a career. From my collaborator's experiences, an athletic hurdle or conclusion of the athletic career ultimately led to the discovery of student-athlete programming and the pursuit to nurture other personal interests and goals. While on this journey, they discovered the temporary state of their collegiate careers and the need to prepare for life after college. The findings have practical implications for improving

programming in support of student-athletes gaining applicable skills to navigate their transition out of college and prepare for a career of their choosing; additionally, it will guide conversations to reshape the policies on institutional participation, resources, and how best to integrate such programming into daily operations of intercollegiate athletics.

Keywords: intercollegiate athletics, NCAA, Life Skills programming, student-athlete development, career development, hermeneutic phenomenology

Chapter One—In Their Words

While in high school, I had decided that when I went to college, I would pursue a bachelor's degree in business, followed by a master's in business administration (MBA) because those who worked in business earned a decent wage, wore power suit attire, and had significant responsibility to make important business decisions for others. I envisioned a life working in corporate America, specifically human resources; I would work in a tall, glass building with a corner office, attend weekly board meetings with executives and make critical hiring decisions on behalf of a company. Fortunately, during my third year of college, I had the opportunity to intern in the human resources department of an electric company in the Midwest; the company was located in a tall, glass office building, but I worked in a cubical. I attended a few meetings, but mostly to receive directives for small-scale benchmarking projects on compensation and benefits. I was grateful for the experience, but during that summer, I began to question whether corporate America or human resources was the right career field for me.

Throughout college, as time permitted, I was fortunate to attend skill-building workshops, guest lectures, career seminars, mock interviews, and my internship, all of which prepared me for my transition out of college into a career. Academically, I thoroughly enjoyed my business program and completed my degree in human resources management. However, did I feel confident and equipped with the skills necessary for

life after college? Upon graduation, I had two job offers; one in corporate America and the other at a university. I selected the position at the university, which changed the trajectory of my career path. I have yet to pursue my MBA; instead, I took my educational and career journey in a different direction.

Today, from the neoliberal or vocational context, career exploration and preparation are important components of attending college. From my own experience, I should have begun preparing for a career earlier. Some students may postpone the process and find it challenging to devote the time necessary for career exploration and job attainment; this is a challenge that may be even more familiar to student-athletes as their overall collegiate experiences may differ from their non-athlete counterparts (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004). More scholars recognize the time constraints placed on student-athletes and their inability to participate in adequate career development activities (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Navarro, 2015; Simons, Van Rhee, & Covington, 1999; Trahan, 2014). Additionally, Lally and Kerr (2005) found some study participants had yet to develop career goals despite the approaching end of their college career. Furthermore, the debate surrounding the quality of education received by student-athletes, and the overall role of athletics in higher education, continues (Navarro, 2014; Trahan, 2014).

Fortunately, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has implemented many reform efforts to combat practices that led to publicized scandals regarding education quality, degree attainment, and well-being of student-athletes. Additionally, those who work at the NCAA, along with educators at the institutional

level, have understood the importance of fostering environments that equip student-athletes with a skill set that is transferrable beyond their experiences in college and intercollegiate athletics. Hence, the NCAA introduced and implemented the Challenging Athletes Minds for Personal Success (C.H.A.M.P.S.)/Life Skills Program for its member institutions (NCAA, 2019f).

The purpose of this research study was to provide an overview of the current state of the NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program, now more commonly known as Life Skills or student-athlete development, while demonstrating the need for a study that explores the experiences and perspectives of former NCAA Division-I student-athletes on the essence of the Life Skills programs in which they were participants. I accomplished this through a qualitative design that captured the voice of participants, which is missing in much of the existing literature surrounding this population. Their voices could aid educators and policymakers in intercollegiate athletics to evaluate current programming effectively while enhancing program offerings to foster the transition and career development of student-athletes. The focus on this topic could inform further studies and foster innovative practices in programs focused on transition and career development for this population.

Background

Vocation and career preparation remain one of the focal points for colleges and universities. In the 1920s-1940s, deans of men and deans of women were charged with helping students, not only with navigating campus life but also preparing for graduation and vocation (Coomes & Gerda, 2016). After World War II, the economy began to shift

from war efforts to accommodate the return of many troops to the workforce. Academic programs focused on equipping students with vocational and professional skills; institutions formalized academic disciplines such as engineering and business in an effort to connect academic learning with career preparation and outcomes (Coomes & Gerda, 2016; Thelin, 2019). In the late 1960s, Chickering (1969) defined vocation within the context of developing purpose in one's career or life. Moreover, accrediting agencies began to link degree completion to career attainment (Hora, Benbow, & Oleson, 2016; Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quayle, 2016).

Since the 1970s, higher education in the United States has experienced rapid reform, as stakeholders have significantly reshaped the approach to educating students and establishing methods to measure outcomes. This shift in philosophy, known as neoliberalism, has redefined expectations that include demonstrating student learning outcomes and job placement (American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASC&U], 2005; Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009; Hora et al., 2016). Neoliberal is defined as a politically and economically driven viewpoint that emphasizes the free market and privatization (Hora et al., 2016). Historically, most colleges and universities have emphasized the traits and characteristics students possessed prior to their entry into college and not “what they [were] expected to accomplish once there” (Association of American Colleges and Universities [AASC&U], 2002, p. vi; Astin, 1984; Thelin, 2019). As industry demands continue to shift, accrediting agencies, employers, and other higher education stakeholders have placed an emphasis on its outcomes, such as degree completion and attaining transferable soft skills (Fox, 2011; Hora et al., 2016; Swan &

Arminio, 2017). The debate surrounding best practices and assessment of these outcomes has placed higher education under scrutiny and at the epicenter of many economic discussions (Fox, 2011).

Regional accrediting bodies, government agencies, and funding sources expect college graduates to gain skills and competencies to transition to life after college successfully. In 1937, The American Council on Education (ACE), drafted a document that detailed the components found critical to the nurturing of students, referred to as the *Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1937). Of the 23 objectives mentioned in the document, some included:

- “orienting the student to the educational environment;
- providing services to help the student discover abilities, aptitudes, and objectives;
- assisting the student to reach maximum effectiveness through clear purposes, improved study methods, speech habits, personal appearance, manners”; and
- assisting the student in clarifying occupational objectives and related educational plans.” (ACE, 1937, p. 4-5)

Today, the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) has detailed best practices, referred to as standards, for the many departments and services offered at a college or university in the United States, including academic advising, admissions, career services, residence life, and student unions. Many other higher education professional organizations, such as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), offer recommendations for best practices and

assessment methods to measure student outcomes, including career development. In addition to these stated established CAS best practices, scholars have used varying terms to define the competencies students should gain while in college such as soft skills (Swan & Arminio, 2017), Life Skills (NCAA, 2019f), 21st-century habits of mind (Hora et al., 2016), and non-cognitive skills (Rowan-Kenyon, Savitz-Romer, Ott, Swan, & Liu, (2017). The variation in terms used among education scholars and practitioners has led to confusion in discussing and measuring outcomes.

Since 1991, the NCAA has been committed to providing programming specifically targeting the holistic development of student-athletes through the C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program, complementing their academic and athletic involvement. Referred to as pillars, outcomes are centered on academic excellence, athletic excellence, personal development, career development, and community. The structure and purpose of the Program was originally based on Georgia Institute of Technology's Total Person Program created by Dr. Homer Rice (Georgia Institute of Technology, 2009a; NCAA, 2019f). The mission is to create and support programming developed for student-athletes to enhance their overall experience within the context of higher education (NCAA, 2019f). Most athletic departments focus on career development efforts, community service activities, and the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), which serves as the primary leadership and advocacy group for student-athletes (NCAA, 2019g).

To understand current and former student-athletes better, the NCAA conducted two longitudinal research studies: Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Learning of

Students in College (GOALS) for current student-athletes and Study of College Outcomes and Recent Experiences (SCORES), for former student-athletes. Since my study focused on the experiences and perceptions of former student-athletes, the SCORE study was reviewed regarding their post-college outcomes (NCAA, 2017).

In 2006, and again in 2010, the NCAA surveyed former student-athletes almost 10 years removed from college about their college experiences and specifically career preparedness. One-half of the former student-athletes who responded to the SCORE survey reported that their experience, along with the skills and values learned while playing a sport, helped “a great deal” in securing their current job; 26% reported these same skills and values were of “some help” regarding career attainment. Participation in college athletics had a positive influence also on leadership skills, teamwork, racial sensitivity, study skills, time management, and work ethic. Eighty-seven percent of respondents reported being “somewhat satisfied” with their current job and degree attainment while 91% reported having full-time employment (NCAA, 2017). Though these data are encouraging, the level of influence that Life Skills programs (i.e., student-athlete development programs) have had in the career development process for student-athletes is still relatively unknown.

Problem Statement

Scholars have found life skills development (lowercase l and s) valuable for college students as they matriculate, prepare to transition out of college, and find employment (Hart Research Associates, 2013; Kyllonen, 2013). Life skills are the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior “that enable individuals to deal effectively

with demands and challenges of everyday life” (World Health Organization [WHO], 1999, p. 1). The inclusion of educational activities that address life skills for student-athletes can be challenging given their differing collegiate experiences in comparison to their non-athlete counterparts (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004). For this study, C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills, as defined by the NCAA, are the institutional efforts to encourage student-athletes to develop competencies necessary for life after sports, and efforts to enhance student-athletes’ well-being and their overall college experience (NCAA, 2019f).

Since 1991, the NCAA has been committed to providing programming specifically targeting the Life Skills development of student-athletes. Student-athlete development programs, formally known as the NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program, have made a concerted effort to introduce student-athletes to the necessary skills for their personal and career development through events, seminars, and workshops. In 2016, the NCAA collaborated with the National Association of Advisors and Student-Athlete Development Professionals (N4A) in an effort to strengthen these programs with the continued mission to create support programming specifically for student-athletes, enhancing their overall collegiate experience (Leach, 2015; NCAA, 2019f).

However, despite the efforts to provide student-athlete development initiatives, some scholars have recognized factors—athletic identity, time demands, and academic misalignment—that contribute to the underdevelopment of student-athlete competencies regarding their transition out of college particularly related to career development and

preparedness (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Fox, 2011; Navarro, 2015; Simons et al., 1999; Trahan, 2014). To combat these challenging factors found to inhibit the student-athlete's transition and career development process, in 1991, the NCAA mandated that institutions provide Life Skills programs to serve as a conduit to further develop student-athlete character and to complement their academic and athletic endeavors in the areas of personal development, academic achievement, and athletic excellence. My study focused specifically on the transition process and career development aspects of Life Skills programming.

Programs like C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills can (and should) provide counseling and mentorship geared toward career development and transition (Levy, 2005). However, questions have been raised about the extent of the counseling and mentorship students receive. For example, Crawford (2007) constructed a framework for evaluating what were referred to as good educational practices in undergraduate student engagement: student involvement, campus environment, and interaction with faculty and peers. When evaluating structures, like athletic-sponsored Life Skills programming, Crawford (2007) found that over 50% of student-athletes, classified as third, fourth, and fifth-year students, acknowledged they attended an athletic-sponsored Life Skills event, either "not at all" or "very little" (p. 77). Crawford (2007) also noted that a majority of those who attended the programs were female and non-revenue-generating-sport participants. Such statistics suggest that either student-athletes in the study were uninterested, lacked the time to engage, or were unaware of the sponsored programming.

As mentioned above, the NCAA conducted two longitudinal studies to learn more about student-athlete experiences in 2006 and 2010 entitled the GOALS and SCORES studies. These studies included a brief discussion on student services and access to services; however, these services mentioned were specifically for academic purposes. Unlike Crawford's (2007) study, the NCAA's studies did not specifically inquire about Life Skills programming, the experiences of current or former student-athletes within these programs, or whether any of these services contributed to the student-athletes' (current or former) ability to transition and make life and career decisions. Therefore, scholars have found it challenging to measure and assess the skills gained through career development programming (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Naemi, Burrus, Kyllonen, & Roberts, 2012; Stecher & Hamilton, 2014). Nonetheless, since the NCAA has mandated such programming, it is important to know what student-athletes are saying about it. Much of the research regarding life after college has focused on outcomes such as job placement and social mobility (Bresciani et al., 2009; Mayhew et al., 2016). However, little research has been conducted on the experiences and perspectives of former student-athletes on outcome-based programming such as NCAA Life Skills (Fox, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand better the experiences and perceptions of student-athletes who have participated in Life Skills programming as it pertains to transition and career development. The study findings enhance both practice and policy creation related to student-athletes and their overall development and experiences in programming.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study were:

1. What is the structure of experiences and perceptions of former NCAA Division-I student-athletes in Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programs?
2. What is the essence of former student-athletes' experiences in Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programming regarding their career development and transition out of college?

Significance of the Study

Career development and the transition out of college for both athletes and non-athletes continue to be an area of priority for colleges and universities. The professionals who facilitate career development within student-athlete development programs play a significant role in helping student-athletes identify their interests while providing latitude to accommodate the athletic demands that may inhibit an athlete's ability to explore academic and career options fully. However, there is still a need to examine further how student-athletes experience these services if they participate at all (Crawford, 2007). In addition to aiding N4A professionals with the restructuring of Life Skills programming, this study could inform practitioners and scholars of how student-athletes experience the current state of student-athlete development programming in the hope of offering better ways to engage student-athletes in career development initiatives as they prepare for the transition to life after college.

It is my goal, as a practitioner-scholar, to understand better the experiences of former student-athletes in student-athlete development programming to shape change in

practice based on my new understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2016). Specifically, the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology illuminated sensitivity to the topics under study. With the newly found knowledge shared by former student-athletes in this study, I now have a deeper level of understanding to better serve, advise, and prepare current student-athletes in the area of career development and transitioning out of college. My hope is to improve existing programming based on the experiences of those who have lived and experienced it. To proceed, it is imperative that I clarify the terms used in this study.

Definitions

The following section encompasses the definitions of key terms most closely related to this study:

Athletic academic advisor—Sometimes referred to as an athletic academic coordinator, this professional works within the institution’s athletic department and is responsible for assisting student-athletes in identifying resources necessary for their academic success. This individual also monitors degree progression and completion in an effort to comply with the member institution and NCAA policies and procedures.

Career Development—One’s ability to build and implement one’s self-concept (Super, 1990)

Career Readiness—“the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workforce” (NACE, 2020, p. 1)

C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program (i.e. student-athlete development programs) – A structured program, comprised of five components, designed to help student-athletes develop skills necessary for life after sports, and enhance their well-being and overall college experience. C.H.A.M.P.S. stands for Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success (NCAA, 2019f). One modern term commonly used to describe this type of programming is student-athlete development.

Division-I—The highest level of NCAA collegiate sports programs and competition. The colleges and universities that participate at this level typically comprise the largest and most complex budgetary, facility, and scholarship resources. In accordance with the NCAA principles, equality in competition and educational experience are integral to all levels of intercollegiate athletics. Additionally, the Division-I level serves two primary purposes: (1) to generate revenues through the sponsorship of sport and (2) gain national excellence and prominence through the sponsorship of sport (Covell & Walker, 2016; NCAA, 2019e).

Hermeneutic phenomenology—Intended to understand “how one orients to lived experience” through the “interpretation of text,” emphasizing daily life phenomena (van Manen, 2016, p. 4).

life skills—“The abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO, 1999, p. 1). Lowercase usage denotes the term as defined by the World Health Organization.

Life Skills coordinator—The professional title of the individual identified within the institution’s athletic department responsible for creating, implementing, and assessing the events and activities utilized to assist student-athletes in building a skill set that encompasses the five components of the Life Skills program to include personal, career, leadership, and community. These individuals may work alongside academic advising staff but are not responsible for monitoring progress toward a degree, academic eligibility, and other academic procedures. These positions are also referred to as directors of student-athlete development.

Member institution—A college or university that is voluntarily affiliated with the NCAA and has organized sports offerings regulated by the NCAA.

NCAA—Founded in 1906, this organization was initially established to combat the physical injuries and deaths of football players. Today, as a voluntary governance association, its purpose is to maintain athletics as an “integral part of the educational program,” integrate student-athletes into the student body, and maintain a distinction between amateur and professional athletics (Covell & Walker, 2016, p. 26; NCAA, 2019e). Currently, the Association has over 1,100 member institutions and almost 500,000 student-athletes in 24 sports (NCAA, 2019h).

Revenue-generating sports—Sports programs that expect to generate profits and support the financial well-being of non-revenue-generating sports. Traditionally, these programs receive the most notoriety. Historically, football and men’s basketball

have generated the highest revenues for their respective universities (Beamon, 2008).

Phenomenology—“The systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” (van Manen, 2016, p. 10).

Student-athlete—An individual who is enrolled full-time (i.e., 12 credit hours) at a college or university as a degree-seeking student and participates in an intercollegiate athletics program sponsored by a NCAA member institution.

Transition—“Any event or non-event [an event that is expected but does not occur] in an individual’s life that alters one’s roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions” (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 33). Examples include entering the workforce from high school or college, becoming a parent, joining the military, and retiring.

Summary of Delimitations

This study only included former student-athletes. These individuals have completed the college athletic experience, but this does not guarantee degree completion, as some may have left the university prior to degree completion. Also, preference was given to those who attended a NCAA member institution that is a member of one of the five Division-I autonomy conferences (i.e. Power Five): The Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), The Big Ten, The Big 12, The Pac 12, and The Southeastern Conference (SEC). This was a deliberate choice, as many of the institutions within these conferences have designated specific budget lines and human resources to facilitate development programming for their student-athletes. The departments have separated student-athlete

development from academic support services, which was also a criterion for this study. Last, though many terms have been used to describe Life Skills programs, the term *student-athlete development* is a more contemporary term used by some professionals in the field. However, Life Skills (capitalized) was used throughout this study, as it was the term my collaborators were most accustomed to using and was the term utilized at their respective institutions.

Though this study intended to engage recent former student-athletes (no more than two years removed from college), this required them to reminisce and recall experiences and memories from the past. Its purpose was to enrich the literature and capture the true essence of those who experienced a phenomenon that previously has been minimally explored.

Summary of Introduction and Organization

Unlike the NCAA policies that have governed academic reform for intercollegiate athletics, the practice of offering student-athlete development programs specifically for college student-athletes is in its early stages, with formal beginnings in the 1980s with Dr. Homer Rice and the Total Person Program. The implementation of student-athlete programming, its best practices of monitoring student involvement, identifying assessment tools, and measurable outcomes are still under development. Since there is little known about student-athletes and their experiences participating in student-athlete development programs provided within the athletic department, I intended to gather and share the perspectives and experiences of former student-athletes to inform practitioners, policymakers, and higher education leaders to shape future practices. To best educate

and guide those in the field, it is essential to listen and learn from those who have direct knowledge and experience to share.

Chapter One provided the background, purpose, and significance of the study, along with key terms used throughout its texts. Chapter Two highlights many scholars who have provided an overview of the primary factors that have shaped intercollegiate athletics and its relationship with higher education, both historically and contemporarily, along with an introduction to Life Skills. Also, in Chapter Two, I explore my epistemology and the theoretical framework that appropriately shapes my understanding of the subject matter. Chapter Three details my positionality as the researcher, the methodology for my study, along with an explanation of the methods selected, and details the plan for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four reveals the findings from the perspectives of my collaborators related to their experiences in Life Skills. Finally, Chapter Five provides an interpretation of the findings, including a discussion of overarching themes, macro-analysis of the findings, and reflection on the essence or mean-making of my collaborators' experiences.

Chapter Two—Literature Review

In the previous chapter, I provided a synopsis of the current environment and issues within intercollegiate athletics, specifically detailing the background and significance of a study on development programming for student-athletes. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of existing literature that informs my study and understanding of the many factors that influence intercollegiate athletics, its history, and structure. I also discuss academic reform and how it has led to the introduction of Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) education to the NCAA operational structure. Last, I discuss my epistemology and my understanding of theory, which have helped shape my perspective on this topic.

History of Intercollegiate Athletics

Unlike most countries in the world, the higher education system in the United States offers a unique relationship between academics and athletics (Suggs, 2006; Thelin, 2019). Extracurricular activities, including intercollegiate athletics, were initially created and governed by students, providing them additional avenues to gain skills, exert physical activity, and build relationships (Covell & Walker, 2016; Thelin, 2019). The exertion of physical activity among classmates led to formal competitions between students from other schools leading to camaraderie and school pride (Horowitz, 1987; Thelin, 2019). The first formal sports competition was a crew match in August of 1852 between Harvard and Yale (Covell & Walker, 2016; Smith, 2011). The excitement surrounding the

occasion led to the expansion of formalized competition between universities and grew to eventually include more sports such as baseball, rugby, lacrosse, and soccer-like football (Covell & Walker, 2016; Smith, 2011). However, despite its growing popularity among participants and spectators, athletics also drew criticism from those within and outside the university community. Faculty members indicated concern about its similarities to professional sports: the inclusion of non-students in college sports, the payment of players, and the amount of time students spent playing sports versus studying (Covell & Walker, 2016; Savage, Bentley, McGovern, & Smiley, 1929; Smith, 2011). In addition to concerns over commercialism and its purpose within a higher education environment, many male participants were experiencing injury and even death while playing American football (Covell & Walker, 2016; Smith, 2011; Thelin, 2019).

National Collegiate Athletic Association

In 1905, in an attempt to reform football and decrease the “violence and unsavory practices” within the sport (Smith, 2011, p. 3), presidents from Harvard, Yale, and other prestigious institutions met with the president of the United States, President Theodore Roosevelt. As a result of the meeting, the members formed the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) in 1906, later becoming the NCAA in 1910 (Smith, 2011). The structure of intercollegiate athletics slowly evolved from being student-controlled to the involvement of university administrators and the hiring of professional coaching staff (Covell & Walker, 2016).

Today, intercollegiate athletics is a multi-billion-dollar industry. Though there are multiple governance organizations, the NCAA is the most well-known and

publicized, with almost 500,000 participants arranged into three divisions (NCAA, 2019h). The Association sponsors 24 sports and has over 1,100 colleges and universities, referred to as member institutions (NCAA, 2019h). Specific individuals at the member institutions (e.g., university presidents, faculty athletic representatives, athletic directors) are responsible for implementing and monitoring the processes and procedures related to intercollegiate athletics. The NCAA provides a significant amount of financial resources for student-athlete scholarships, programming, and initiatives; one of the largest funding sources is the television broadcast of the NCAA Division-I men's basketball tournament, better known as March Madness (Covell & Walker, 2016).

Along with the Association's ability to provide financial support for scholarships and other academic services, there is also criticism of commercialism and exploitation of college sports in higher education (Beamon, 2008; Branch, 2011). Myles Brand, former NCAA president, stated that commercialism of intercollegiate athletics was acceptable as long as it was consistent with the academic mission of higher education (Sack, 2008). Such a statement would counter the findings and discussions among many scholars and higher education professionals, as concern continues to grow surrounding time commitments required of student-athletes, lack of academic preparedness of some student-athletes, low graduation rates of athletes from some sports, and underdeveloped career exploration among college student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Dee, 2009; Feltz, Hwang, Schneider, & Skogsberg, 2013; Shulman & Bowen, 2011; Simons et al., 1999). Over the last 60 years, the evolution of the NCAA, intercollegiate athletics, and the Association's reform efforts have continued to evoke criticism and concern from

scholars, sports analysts, and higher education professionals as the focus has seemingly shifted to prioritize raising revenue, spurring competition, and commercialism for many of the nation's colleges and universities rather than the well-being and development of student-athletes (Harper, 2016; Sack, 2008; Smith, 2011; Smith, 1988; Staurowsky & Sack, 2005; Thelin, 2019).

NCAA academic reform. In addition to providing physical protection for student-athletes, a significant visible role of the NCAA has been academic reform. Scandals and the debate surrounding athletics and academics are not new phenomena in the world of intercollegiate athletics and were discussed in Savage et al.'s (1929) document *American College Athletics*. The authors referenced "academic engagements are seldom permitted to interfere" with intercollegiate athletics (p. 20). Furthermore, its influence was evident even in relaxed admissions standards for athletes who displayed athletic potential in the early 1900s (Savage et al., 1929). This directive suggests athletics often supersedes academics in many facets of higher education.

The NCAA's first attempt at academic reform focused primarily on first-year eligibility. Initially, institutions deemed first-year students ineligible for play to acclimate to college life (Byers, 2010). In 1965, the NCAA enacted the "one six hundred rule." To be considered for eligibility and grant-in-aid the first year, students entering a NCAA institution would need to demonstrate they were "likely to achieve" and maintain a 1.600 college grade point average (GPA; Byers, 2010, p. 158; Covell & Walker, 2016). This policy was implemented in 1965 and vetoed at the 1973 convention, as many member institutions opposed the requirement (Byers, 2010). By 1983, however,

members voted to implement a standard exam minimum and a 2.0 high school GPA rule with no high school curriculum requirement, commonly known as Proposition 48 (Byers, 2010). Some African American coaches and administrators viewed the policy change to disproportionately impact the recruitment of students of color from lower achieving academic school districts (Byers, 2010).

By the 1980s, college athletics was plagued with notable scandals, including an infamous case involving the football program at Southern Methodist University (SMU). There were such gross negligence and repetitive offenses in the program that the NCAA implemented the Death Penalty rule, terminating the Mustangs' 1987 football season (Byers, 2010). SMU followed by canceling the 1988 season as well (Byers, 2010). This was the only time the Death Penalty ruling has been used. During this same timeframe, a lack of academic oversight was widespread; some college players were entering and leaving college functionally illiterate. For example, Dexter Manley of Oklahoma State University publicly announced his inability to read. After a successful NFL career with the Washington Redskins, he spoke about his inability to read articles regarding his team's success on the field (Nyad, 1989). When Manley shared his story with Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, she stated, "You didn't fail, sir. The system failed you" (Byers, 2010, p. 298). A similar case occurred in the same timeframe with Kevin Ross of Creighton University, who sued the institution stating a breach of contract (Mount, 1989). Ross believed that Creighton did not uphold their commitment to provide him an education though he faithfully played basketball for Creighton.

Such extreme cases of academic abuse led the NCAA to introduce major academic policies to counter the very public narrative that student-athletes were not attending colleges and universities for educational purposes, but solely for athletic endeavors. Prior to the NCAA's first major academic reform in the 1980s, many student-athletes were simply taking classes. The courses were not necessarily aligned with a particular major, and course schedules were designed to maintain an athlete's eligibility for athletic competition because the only basic requirement for athletic participation was enrollment. These incidents highlighted the need for the NCAA to implement academic reform. One of the most notable reforms was Proposition 48.

In 1985, Proposition 48 was adopted to place parameters on the recruitment practices and eligibility requirements of first-year students (Byers, 2010). Being eligible to play a sport required that the student had to complete 11 high school core courses as prescribed by the NCAA, along with scoring a minimum 700 SAT score (Byers, 2010). Further iterations of the policy were introduced in the 1990s with Proposition 16, which instituted a sliding scale between the high school GPA and SAT/ACT standardized exam scores, and raised the high school core requirements from 11 to 13 courses to be considered to play at the NCAA Division-I level (Byers, 2010). In 2016, the NCAA increased the initial eligibility requirement from 14 to 16 high school core courses and a minimum 2.3 core GPA for a full qualifier (NCAA, 2019c).

In 2003, the NCAA ushered in a tool to measure academic progress called the Academic Performance Rate (APR). This equation considered the team environment and attempted to hold athletic and institutional administration accountable for student-athlete

progress toward degree (PTD) completion. For teams that did not meet the minimum standards, financial and athletic sanctions were put into place. Second, by introducing the APR, the NCAA changed the requirements student-athletes needed to meet to remain eligible in their sport. Initially, to maintain eligibility, student-athletes had to complete 25% of their degree by the end of their second year, 50% of their degree by the end of their third year, and 75% by the end of their fourth year. Despite the rule, athletes were not graduating. Again, in 2003, the NCAA increased the percentage rates at which an athlete had to make progress through their degree to 40%, 60%, and 80% (NCAA, 2019c). Critics of the APR contend that the method used to calculate degree progress creates barriers to academic exploration; in comparison to their non-athlete counterparts, it requires student-athletes to declare a major prematurely. Given the expedited timeline for major declaration, often, their major selection may align more with their athletic schedule versus their career aspirations (Friedman, 2008; Gurney, 2011; Wolverton, 2014). Despite critics of APR, it has remained a primary tool for measuring degree progression and monitoring eligibility.

The Student-Athlete

At the foundation of the collegiate athletic structure are its participants, athletes, more commonly known as student-athletes. Almost 500,000 students participate in sports sponsored by the NCAA in hopes of excelling in a sport, building friendships, showcasing school pride, and for some, a chance to play at the professional or Olympic level (NCAA, 2019h; Suggs, 2006; Thelin, 2019). Why do colleges, universities, the NCAA, coaches and fans refer to these individuals as *student-athletes*? Where did the

term originate? This term did not exist until the 1950s when former NCAA Executive Director, Walter Byers, purposely crafted the term in an attempt to reiterate the amateur status of the athlete and protect the NCAA and its member institutions from worker's compensation claims (Byers, 2010; Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). The terminology has been upheld in courts to the detriment of college athletes as "student" is intentionally written first to suggest the primary focus is of academic pursuits; however, the "propaganda" surrounding the use of the term does not negate the emphasis placed on student-athletes to perform athletically and generate revenues for their respective institutions (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005, p. 104).

In addition to legal protection, the use of the descriptive is the NCAA's attempt to prioritize academics over athletics; yet, it also inhibits an athlete from receiving any type of compensation for their talents and services to the university, which is another contentious issue, as this stipulation is not placed on any other segment of the college student population. Some scholars question the use of the label by providing evidence why the term should no longer be used; it perpetuates a message that this particular group of students should be treated differently, in some ways unfairly, in comparison to their non-athlete counterparts (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). The term can carry a stigma, as detailed by Steele and Aronson (1995), when they defined stereotype threat. In 1995, researchers Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson initially coined the term after conducting a study utilizing a standardized exam and the participants' perceived outcomes based on race and ethnicity. Stereotype threat is the fear of affirming a negative label that may be perceived by others and directly linked to the degree in which an individual identifies

with the group(s) that is affiliated with a specific stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Such a theory also alludes to the existing social perceptions that may preclude some individuals from actively pursuing roles outside of the social norm (Cooper, 2012; Dee, 2009; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Researchers who have applied this theory to the student-athlete population found that student-athletes who identified more with the athlete identity tended to have a lower performance on the academic study exam (Dee, 2009; Feltz et al., 2013; Shulman & Bowen, 2011). The theory also alludes to some perceptions held by some members of society, including faculty and students, who believe student-athletes are not as academically strong in comparison to their non-athlete counterparts and are primarily focused on athletic endeavors (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). As a result of this perception, some athletes may be detoured from taking an academically challenging course load in fear of affirming such a stereotype (Dee, 2009; Feltz et al., 2013; Simons et al., 1999). Nonetheless, the student-athlete label is commonly used and accepted among higher education professionals and those in the college sports world to identify these individuals. However, depending on the audience, some may argue the reverse of the label (i.e., athlete-student), as it points to the influence of college sports within modern society and how some students view themselves.

Athletic identity. The social identity of a student-athlete is purposely hyphenated to suggest the individual has two identities: A student first and an athlete second. This title creates a perceived dual identity that can inadvertently produce an environment for dueling roles and role engulfment (Adler & Adler, 1987; Simons & Van Rhee, 2000).

This means that one identity may be more prominent than another. Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) coined the term *athletic identity* referring to the level at which an individual identifies most strongly with the athletic role versus any other identity. They created the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), which measured self-perception and perceived importance of certain factors such as body, strength, and performance that impacted the identity. Brewer et al. (1993) found a significant correlation between the athlete's perception of performance (i.e., being good at the sport) and level of athletic identity.

Additionally, three studies found that participants who had a strong sense of athletic identity experienced a decline in their academic performance (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Simons et al., 1999). This also tends to differ depending on race and sport (Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011). Furthermore, Feltz et al. (2013) found a significant difference in athletic identity between Division I and Division III as the participants at the Division-I level tended to identify with their athletic identity more than their academic identity. However, those who experienced a decrease in their athletic identity also experienced more clarity in career choice (Lally & Kerr, 2005).

Many scholars recognize athletic identity as a significant factor that can influence the college experience (Adler & Adler, 1985; Brewer et al., 1993; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Navarro, 2015). Brewer et al. (1993) defined athletic identity as the level in which an individual associates with the characteristics and traits of an athlete. Robinson (2015) stated that this identity is shaped by athletes' worldview: the ideas and beliefs that

influence behavior. The athletic identity and worldview are ignored, at times, by academic practitioners who fail to recognize the significance of this identity and how it shapes the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of an athlete. Furthermore, the athlete's worldview is directly linked to how an athlete views and experiences the world (Robinson, 2015).

Specifically, Lally and Kerr (2005) and Petitpas and O'Brien (2008) explored the role that identity and athletic participation played in an athlete's personal and career decision-making processes. Athletic identity did impact career exploration and the decision-making process, adding that individuals who possess a stronger athletic identity may also experience identity foreclosure (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008), which is defined as committing to one identifiable role while failing to explore fully the other identifiable roles that exist (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008). This type of foreclosure for an athlete can lead to the premature or ill-advised selection of an academic major (Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008), the over-reliance on athletic staff for support and direction (Navarro, 2014, 2015), and lower levels of career maturity, career planning, and decision-making self-efficacy (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008). Student-athletes who had a higher level of athletic identity tended to be the least prepared for college, did not allot the adequate time needed for academic endeavors, were most reliant on academic staff for major selection and progress, and did not feel confident exploring majors or career choices (Adler & Adler, 1991; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; LaForge & Hodge, 2011; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Navarro, 2015; Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008; Simons et al., 1999). Ultimately, the literature provides

evidence of challenges for student-athletes that significantly affect the student-athlete's ability to prepare for the transition effectively out of college, including competencies in career development.

Time demands. The NCAA provides detailed guidelines that outline the operations of intercollegiate athletics. While a team is in their season of competition, Article 17 of the NCAA Division-I Manual stipulates that student-athletes spend no more than 20 hours per week on athletic-related activities (NCAA, 2019d). Athletic activities such as practice, team meetings, exercise workouts, and film review are some of the added responsibilities for student-athletes; however, the hours spent completing these activities, in many cases, well exceed the 20 hours allotted by the NCAA. Some scholars have estimated that many student-athletes spend 40-50 hours per week on their respective sport (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Simons et al., 1999). For those associated with one of the revenue-generating sports, such as men's basketball and American football, the level of preparation and social pressures increase, as these two sports, in particular, are very visible and are responsible for generating funds in support of other departmentally sponsored sports (Covell & Walker, 2016; NCAA, 2019e).

Though some scholars have spoken to the positive attributes that such a schedule can produce, such as discipline and perseverance (Rothschild-Checroune, Gravelle, Dawson, & Karlis, 2012), other scholars have demonstrated how the time conflict and saturation of athletic obligations can inhibit the student-athlete's ability to establish a healthy balance between academic and athletic endeavors while stunting career development (Adler & Adler, 1985; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Navarro, 2014; Simons et al.,

1999). Consequently, Weiss and Robinson (2013) specifically investigated active and former student-athletes and some of the factors that persuaded the former student-athletes to leave their sport. For those who choose to leave their sport, the challenge of balancing their academic and athletic endeavors, along with the inability to participate in extracurricular activities, such as internships, were determining factors.

Academic preparedness. The academic preparation at the K-12 level is another factor that directly affects college preparedness and graduation rates (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Simons et al., 1999). The variance between educational environments at the K-12 level is well known. A school's approach to academic preparation is even more unique, as each student is shaped by varying missions, purposes, goals, teacher experiences, resources, and curriculum designs. Johnson (2013) identified factors that encouraged strong predictors of academic preparation. Specifically, these factors include the type of courses taken during high school (e.g., International Baccalaureate, honors, remedial, Advanced Placement), teacher/student relationships, standardized tests, and GPAs. These factors are not all-inclusive but do provide some guidelines to predict a student's preparedness for college.

Many studies have noted that GPAs are lower and that the academic preparation of student-athletes lags behind their non-athlete counterparts (Adler & Adler, 1985; Harper, 2016; Johnson, 2013; Simons et al., 1999; Southall, Nagel, & Sexton, 2016). In some cases, the lack of preparedness may be attributed to unsolicited assistance from high school teachers. Adler and Adler (1985) found that the student-athlete population interviewed in their study was not accustomed to studying in high school since the

teachers were cognizant of their athletic responsibilities and were amiable to provide additional time and assistance on homework. This expectation can carry into college. The same study found that some of the participants valued more their athletic responsibilities because they were planning to play their sport professionally, so the academic component was not as important. The issues surrounding balancing academic and athletic obligations, lack of academic preparation, and time constraints are some key components that have led to the development and exposure of many academic fraud scandals that have been noted at many universities. Unfortunately, some high school and college administrators enable some student-athletes based on their athletic prowess not to complete academic responsibilities for the sake of eligibility, thus, hampering academic preparedness (Navarro, 2015; Simons & Van Rhee, 2000; Wolverton, 2014).

Academic major mismatch. A reoccurring debate is about the quality of college education and post-college preparation for student-athletes. Ultimately, the pursuit of a four-year degree is perceived to increase the likelihood of productivity, and economic and social stability; however, college and university missions may be more challenging for some student populations, such as student-athletes, given the potential for academic mismatch (Navarro, 2015; Wolverton, 2014). The major selection may not support their career goals. For example, some participants in the related studies found it easier to select an academic major that was conducive to their athletic schedule versus their genuine interest (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Simons et al., 1999). Additionally, Adler and Adler (1985) found that due to their significant athletic time obligations, athlete participants realized they were not going to be able to continue

studying in the academic major they selected upon entering the university. Furthermore, another study indicated that to pursue their true academic interests, some participants ended up leaving their athletic responsibilities behind (Weiss & Robinson, 2013).

Moreover, some student-athletes may be swayed to pursue studies with more flexibility in structure, schedule, and course selection by athletic and academic staff (Feltz et al., 2013; Terrell, 2012). As a result, perceived easier majors are an alternative choice that may or may not link to the student's career pursuits (Navarro, 2015; Terrell, 2012; Wolverton, 2014). Also, the pursuit of such a major may inhibit a student-athlete's ability to secure a job that fits their interests and skills upon graduation (Wolverton, 2014). The debate surrounding degree attainment and its link to career development and fulfillment invokes the critical question of whether student-athletes are truly students or solely athletes.

Life Skills

The term life skills (lowercase l and s) is a broad term with varying definitions and practices. Its roots are in humanitarian work, providing people the tools to deal with and recover from crises. Organizations such as WHO (1999) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2003) defined life skills as a psychosocial skill or competence or "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior, that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (WHO, 1999, p. 1).

Using a premise similar to that identified by WHO and UNICEF, Danish, Forneris, Hodge, and Heke (2004) defined life skills as:

Those skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live such as school, home, and in their neighborhoods. Life skills can be behavioral (communicating effectively with peers and adults) or cognitive (making effective decisions); interpersonal (being assertive); or intrapersonal (setting goals). (p. 40)

Gould and Carson (2008) defined life skills as transferrable from a sport to non-sport setting; skills that are “internal personal assets, characteristics, and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and are transferred for use in non-sport settings” (p. 60). Gould and Carson’s (2008) definition is most closely aligned with the definition used with NCAA Life Skills programming (i.e., student-athlete development programming), which is designed to help student-athletes develop skills necessary for life after sports, and enhance their well-being and overall college experience (NCAA, 2019f).

Though these definitions have some similarities in descriptive words, such as competence, skill-building, coping, and adaptive behaviors, the meaning and term itself can cause confusion, as there is variance in the many cultures and settings in which life-skills-type programming takes shape (Hodge, Danish & Martin, 2012; Swan & Arminio, 2017; WHO, 1999). To broaden the use of the term, life skills has also been referred to as social-emotional learning, emotional intelligence, positive psychology, resilience, and character education to fit the workplace and educational settings (Hodge, et al., 2012). Organizations such as the WHO have differing definitions for the term life skills, but the outcome goal for those who participate is the same: to gain a skill set to cope with

challenges and enhance the overall well-being of the individual (NCAA, 2019f; WHO, 1999).

Given the multiple terms used, professionals and scholars have identified the competencies underneath the term of life skills. These competencies have also been referred to as soft skills, core competencies, non-cognitive skills, life skills, and 21st-century habits of mind (Hora et al., 2016; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2017; Swan & Arminio, 2017; WHO, 1999). The WHO identified five core competencies necessary for individuals to “deal with everyday challenges”: (a) decision making and problem-solving, (b) creative thinking and critical thinking, (c) communication and interpersonal skills, (d) self-awareness and empathy, and (e) coping with emotions and stress (WHO, 1999, p. 1). In the education arena, NACE expanded these core skills to include aptitudes applicable for the college-to-career transition, such as teamwork/collaboration, career management, and professionalism/work ethic (NACE, 2020).

The intentions by scholars and practitioners to define and identify competencies necessary for life bode with the neoliberal approach, an increasing influence on higher education since the 1970s and 1980s (Hora et al., 2016). In response to “the vocationalist perspective,” colleges and universities have created formal departments and programs designed to engage students in gaining the essential skills for personal and career development (Bembenutty, 2009; Hora et al., 2016, p. 5; Navarro, 2015). Neoliberal is defined as a politically and economically driven viewpoint that emphasizes the free market and privatization (Hora et al., 2016). This philosophy has raised concerns among scholars, as it deemphasizes knowledge creation and well-rounded curriculum, such as a

liberal arts education, to prioritize course structure and program outcomes that are directly linked to job skills and attainment (Hora et al., 2016). This position has also fueled the debate surrounding the skills gap among graduates as well; some employers suggest recent graduates lack the necessary tools (e.g., interpersonal, soft, non-cognitive) for success in the current job market. However, Hora et al. (2016) argued that the debate surrounding the skill set is not a skills development or attainment argument, but a cultural one. The cultural divide between educational institutions and industry not only which competencies are (or should be) most valued in the workforce, but *who* and *what* cultivate said skills; classrooms, neighborhoods, religious organizations, and familial units all play a role in the cultivation of skills. This notion further supports the perceived skills gap and the variance in generational approaches to career development and job attainment (Hora et al., 2016). The programs most commonly designed through Life Skills programs (i.e., student-athlete development programs) within intercollegiate athletics have adopted the neoliberal approach to skill building. The foundation of such formal programming for student-athletes was created to complement athletics and prepare them for life after college sports.

History of Life Skills within intercollegiate athletics. Student-athletes should develop intellectually, interpersonally, and physically; moreover, many scholars have stressed the importance of career development as well (Beamon, 2008; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Navarro, 2014,2015; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Robinson, 2015). In addition to the academic reform structures and academic support programs of the NCAA, scholars have also posited for many years the importance of co-curricular programs in

career exploration and development designed specifically to the targeted population (Dudley, Johnson, & Johnson, 1997; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Navarro, 2014/15; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Robinson, 2015).

Total person program. The architect for the current structure of the NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program was Dr. Homer Rice. As the former athletic director at Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), he created and implemented a comprehensive program intended to enhance the personal well-being of student-athletes beyond their collegiate sports career; to foster success and “balance on all areas of a student’s life” (McGlade, 1997, p. iii; NCAA, 2019f). Beginning in 1981, he called it the Total Person Program (Georgia Institute of Technology, 2009a).

Dr. Rice envisioned a program that would introduce student-athletes to learning opportunities beyond the classroom and playing field, setting a foundation for success, both professionally and personally (Georgia Institute of Technology, 2009b). Academic excellence, athletic achievement, and personal well-being were at the core of his program. To structure his program, he utilized the four-square model, by William H. Danforth (1870-1955), who authored the book *I Dare You!* (McGlade, 1997). Danforth believed that success in life was the result of a balance consisting of four areas: mental, physical, social, and religious. First, one’s mind was just as important as one’s body, personality, and character development. Second, healthy habits were important to Danforth, along with a person’s ability to interact and engage with others in social settings, determining their disposition, and social mobility. Finally, he also used Christian ideals to establish methods for teaching responsibility and leadership.

Danforth's work was instrumental in Dr. Rice's personal life; therefore, he utilized the same philosophy when creating the Total Person Program for the growth and success of student-athletes at Georgia Tech (McGlade, 1997).

In addition to Danforth's work, Dr. Rice also understood the importance of assisting athletic administrators in how to implement his program best. In his own publication prior to the establishment of the Total Person Program, Dr. Rice detailed strategies for curriculum planning, goal setting, attitude and thinking techniques, and follow-up evaluations in his work called *The Attitude Technique* (McGlade, 1997).

Implementing the first seminars and workshops in 1981, Dr. Rice structured the program in phases to include: personal growth, academic growth, career planning and placement, health and nutritional wellness, spiritual fulfillment, and emotional stability (McGlade, 1997).

Witnessing the success of the Total Person Program in hopes of modeling similar programming at other institutions, the NCAA requested Dr. Rice's assistance in establishing the C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program that is currently in use today at 1,200 NCAA member institutions (NCAA, 2019f).

NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program

In 1991, the NCAA used the Total Person Program as a model to establish the Challenging Athlete's Minds for Personal Success or NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program. Very similar in scope to the Total Person Program, its initial purpose was to support student-athletes and enhance their overall educational experience through several goals:

- promote student-athletes' ownership of their academic, athletic, career, personal and community responsibilities,
- meet the changing needs of student-athletes,
- promote respect for diversity and inclusion among student-athletes,
- assist student-athletes in identifying and applying transferable skills,
- enhance partnerships between the NCAA, member institutions and their communities for the purpose of education, and
- foster an environment that encourages student-athletes to access campus resources effectively. (NCAA, 2008, p. 1)

In 1994, the NCAA held a conference to officially introduce the Life Skills Program with 46 schools in attendance (NCAA, 2008). Today, each of the 1,200 member institutions has been charged with offering some type of Life Skills and student-athlete development programming. Based on Dr. Rice's areas of importance from the Total Person Program, there are five areas, referred to as pillars, that are the foundation of the program.

The five pillars. The five areas that shape the foundation for C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills are academic excellence, athletic excellence, career development, personal development, and community (e.g., service and involvement). Each pillar is a commitment to creating well-rounded programming that fosters the holistic growth of student-athletes (NCAA, 2008). Though career development is the third pillar in the C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program structure, it is the final pillar discussed in the next section, as it is the primary focus of this study.

Academic excellence. Throughout the history of intercollegiate athletics, fraudulent actions in the area of academics have been committed by coaches, administrators, and athletes. Lenient admissions standards for athletes who displayed athletic potential were evident even in the early 1900s (Savage et al., 1929). In the 1980s, prior to the establishment of continuous academic progress rules, scandals noting college athletes leaving the institution functionally illiterate were surfacing. Academic integrity plays a significant role in the first pillar of student-athlete development. Its focus is to ensure student-athletes are held accountable and gaining the necessary skills to be successful in the classroom. In addition to skills, there are institutional methods used to measure academic excellence; the PTD calculation, APR and graduation success rate (GSR) are three assessment tools commonly used within academic services departments to serve as benchmarks in comparing student-athletes' academic success with their non-athlete counterparts.

Progress-toward-degree. To combat previous cases of student-athletes simply taking courses for athletic eligibility and not obtaining degrees, a PTD requirement, commonly known as the 40/60/80 rule, stipulates the student-athlete must be making progress toward the completion of an academic degree offered at the institution (NCAA, 2019c). To measure a student-athlete's academic progression, the NCAA requires a certain percentage of the degree program credits to be completed by the end of each academic year. For instance, prior to the beginning of the athlete's fifth semester (third year), 40% of the credits required for the selected degree program must be completed by the student to retain eligibility (NCAA, 2019c). The same is required to reach 60% and

80% degree completion. In certain circumstances (e.g., a student who is a few credits below the percentage count based on their program of study), an application for a waiver with adequate documentation can be submitted on behalf of the student-athlete and considered by the Academics and Member Affairs division of the NCAA. Substantial evidence showing the likelihood of degree completion is necessary for consideration by the committee; however, there is no guarantee that athletic eligibility will be granted (NCAA, 2019c).

Academic progress rate. The APR measures the retention and eligibility of NCAA scholarship student-athletes. Each scholarship recipient (i.e., grant-in-aid) can earn up to four points per academic year: two points for retention from semester to semester and two points for remaining athletically eligible. The analysis is also used to predict graduation rates per team. A team with an APR of 930 is considered to have a predicted team graduation rate of about 50% (Hosick, 2019a).

Graduation success rate. In 2002, the GSR was created by the NCAA to measure graduation outcomes of student-athletes (NCAA, 2019). Unlike the federal graduation rate, which only tracks full-time students at their first institution of enrollment, the GSR accounts for the graduation of student-athletes who may transfer between institutions and in good academic standing. Per the NCAA Division-I Manual, Article 14, good academic standing is “interpreted at each member institution by the academic officials who determine the meaning and application of such phrases for all students” (NCAA, 2019c, p. 134). Since implementing the GSR in the early 2000s, the NCAA has shown a steady increase in graduation rates, currently at 89% (Hosick, 2019b).

Athletic excellence. The athletic excellence pillar of Life Skills is defined using some of the NCAA's principles of sportsmanship, equity, equal playing field, and integrity addressed in the Association's manual (NCAA, 2019e). As athletics has expanded to include women and a wide array of sports activities, so have the efforts to provide all student-athletes the opportunity to perform at their full potential in their respective sport. The inclusion of professional coaches, athletic trainers, sports psychologists, nutrition professionals, and other sports support staff assist in furthering the mission of athletic excellence.

The most publicly recognized component of intercollegiate athletics is athletic excellence through the NCAA's unit devoted to championship coordination and implementation. The NCAA sponsors 90 championships in 24 sports between the 3 sports divisions (NCAA, 2019h). These widely publicized events provide student-athletes a platform to compete at the highest levels of their respective sport, many earning recognition for their athletic accomplishments through national recognition and awards.

Personal development. Personal development is an important element of student-athlete development. Similar to the C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills' mission statement, Robinson (2015) defined personal development as "improving awareness, defining identity, developing talents and potential . . . enhancing quality of life" (p. 29). It is often a term used to accompany leadership development for student-athletes as well (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Loughhead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006). Loughhead et al. (2006) researched leadership from a team perspective and how some student-athletes are perceived as leaders among coaching staff and teammates based on internal and external leadership

roles. Though the authors explored the traits that seem to be ideal within a team setting, they did not identify the ways in which student-athletes can build and acquire these traits to become leaders. Navarro and Malvaso (2015) and Kamusoko and Pemberton (2013) argued that these traits could be fostered through adequate advising and mentorship for student-athletes.

Well-being is another term used to complement personal development, which suggests the personal development process is holistic (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015) and should lead to a healthy and balanced lifestyle (Robinson, 2015). A balanced lifestyle denotes mental, physical, and emotional stability, allowing a person to make sound decisions to pursue one's goals. The development process should provide athletes the ability to garner transferrable skills, talents, and abilities that are valuable and utilized in sports, yet applicable in career pursuits and life. However, Robinson (2015) argued that these efforts to create student-athlete development programs are not as effective if the programming is intermittent and the student's athletic identity is not an integral part of the program design. This idea also suggests that those within leadership must acknowledge the value in student-athlete development, allowing student-athletes to take full advantage of opportunities that are outside of academics and athletics (e.g., internships, study abroad, student organizations).

Community. The word community is defined as “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals” (Dictionary.com, 2018). Crawford (2007) and Harper and Quaye (2014) defined community as being internal to the university (e.g., student organization, faculty/student interactions), while

Renford (2017) defined it to include external entities (e.g., towns, organizations, businesses) and social activism. Based on the literature, most student-athlete development programs define community from an external point of view, as many activities and events are created to promote community service and volunteerism for student-athlete participation outside the institution.

Student retention is affected by a university's ability to foster an engaging community (Crawford, 2007; Le Crom, Warren, Clark, Marolla, & Gerber, 2009); so is a student's persistence through degree program (Ferris, Finster, & McDonald, 2004). Le Crom et al. (2009) and Crawford (2007) found that those who were not actively involved in campus extracurricular activities were more likely not to progress academically or remain at the institution due to community isolation. Student-athlete involvement in a campus-sponsored SAAC is not only personal leadership development, but it is also a part of the community pillar as they help student-athletes build community with one another.

According to Chen, Snyder, and Magner (2010) and Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009), sports participation had a positive influence on an athlete's decision to be involved in the internal university community. The studies revealed that despite the conflict between academics and athletics, it is worth noting that student-athletes do gain valuable experiences, not only through sports participation, but also directly through engagement with non-athlete peers, and involvement in educational activities with peers and faculty. To encourage student-athlete community involvement, Robinson (2015) and

Navarro (2014) emphasized the importance of faculty involvement and mentorship of student-athletes to facilitate the community building process.

Student-athlete development programs are multi-faceted, and the five Life Skills pillars are incorporated in the form of workshops, seminars, lectures, and activities created and implemented by student-athlete development professional staff. However, given the growing interest in assessing student outcomes in higher education, career development and preparation have become a focus of much of the programming created by practitioners. Unfortunately, for student-athletes, it can be challenging to engage in these activities fully.

Career development. Though the focus of this study, career development is the third pillar of the initial C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills program. Sears (1982) defined a career as a “sequence of experiences in the world of work with objectives and consequences” (p. 137), while Sullivan and Baruch (2009) defined it as “an individual’s work-related and other relevant experiences...that form a unique pattern over the individual’s life span” (p. 1543). Sullivan and Baruch’s (2009) meaning supports Super’s (1990) definition of career development—one’s ability to build and implement one’s self-concept—by incorporating the term lifespan. Self-concept refers to one’s view of self within life roles and situations. This definition and concept of career development, which is discussed further, complements Dr. Rice’s approach to structuring his Total Person Program.

As colleges and universities continue to quantify student outcomes beyond degree completion, some scholars have specifically voiced concern regarding the lack of career exploration and preparation of student-athletes and other possible obstacles that may

inhibit a successful transition after sports (Navarro, 2015; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004).

Some student-athletes have not taken advantage of the opportunity to explore more fully and prepare for a career after college through programming such as Life Skills, while others have pursued academic degrees that have not adequately prepared them for professional careers (Navarro, 2015; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004; Wolverton, 2014).

Lally and Kerr (2005) and Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, and Fletcher (2013) studied career development among college student-athletes. Lally and Kerr (2005) examined the career planning of fourth and fifth-year student-athletes. The researchers found that as student-athletes progressed toward graduation, they began to explore non-sport career options. Interestingly, the participants in that specific study found that sports participation contributed to the realization that pursuing an athletic career after college was no longer an interest. The participants consisted of primarily Olympic and team sport participants, suggesting that these specific participants did not experience identity foreclosure (i.e., the failure to explore other identifiable roles); however, other participants had yet to develop career goals despite the approaching end of their college career. The lack of career development was most noticeable among those with strong athletic identities (i.e., foreclosure). It should be noted that the study took place at a Canadian university, which does not provide athletic-in-aid to student-athletes.

Navarro (2015) found that student-athletes understood the value of earning a college degree, but failed to link their academic major choice to future career aspirations. In some instances, athletes selected academic majors that were of less interest to them to accommodate their athletic schedule at the recommendation of a teammate, coach, or

academic staff member (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Navarro, 2015). This finding suggests that some athletes are not taking the adequate time to explore the available academic majors, which can be linked to the time demands of athletics and NCAA academic policies that contribute to the lack of adequate career planning and development of college athletes (LaForge & Hodge, 2011; Navarro, 2015; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015).

My study focused on the importance of the career development component within student-athlete development programming; therefore, it was necessary to discuss one of the scholars most influential in career development theory within higher education: Super's life span, life space theory.

Super's life span, life space theory. Donald Super (1910-1994) is best known for his contributions to career development and exploration theory. Career development is a continuum; he posited that the development process spans over a lifetime and is formed in stages (Super, 1957). Ultimately, a person's career maturity or career readiness is determined, not by age, but by the person's abilities, career interests, and preferences (Super, 1990).

Super (1990) identified five stages of vocational development: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. Growth is the first stage and is experienced by children ages 4-13. Children initially learn about working and using their imaginations to dream of a variety of jobs that are interesting to them. They also begin to discover, hone talents, and take steps toward future goals. Authority figures

(e.g., parents/guardians, teachers) play a significant role in helping students discover and realize their talents during this phase.

Exploration (ages 14-24) is the second stage and the current phase of the ideal participants for my specific study. This phase emphasizes the importance of decision making, planning, and clarifying one's career preferences. Those who decide to attend a college or university find that many programs and activities offered focus on career maturity and readiness.

The third stage is establishment. For individuals ages 25-45, stability, consolidation, and advancement are essential. Once an individual begins a career, opportunities for self-concept are realized. Super (1963) defined self-concept as a "picture of the self in some role, situation, or position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships" (p. 18). This helps an individual establish a positive work reputation, resulting in ways to gain more job responsibilities, compensation, and promotion.

Individuals ages 45-65 are in the fourth stage, called maintenance. Updating and innovation are important in this stage, as some individuals are focused on relevancy in their current position or may contemplate a career change. Should an individual decide to change careers, this would result in reverting to an earlier stage (i.e., exploration or establishment). In the maintenance stage, individuals begin to mentor those of younger generations as well. Last is the decline or disengagement stage for those aged 65 or older. While some individuals begin to step aside within their professional roles,

concerns regarding physical and financial stability become evident as retirement is the next step.

Super (1980) also discussed life roles that influence how individuals construct their lives and approach to career development. There are core roles (e.g., mother, spouse, worker, student) and peripheral roles (e.g., friend, member of an organization); the salience of roles varies within a person's life span career development (Super, 1980). Additionally, individuals can experience conflict within their life roles related to their career development process; based on the literature, this observation can be accurate for many student-athletes.

Super's life span, life space theory has been used to explore multiple populations: White (2014) explored career development and the influence of gay and lesbian sexual identity on this process; Janeiro and Marques (2010) explored career attitudes among secondary-aged students (9-12 grades), while Ackerman (2013) explored factors affecting vocational identity and college student-athletes. Ackerman's (2013) study revealed pre-college engagement, parents' social engagement, coaches' attitudes on academics and career development, and tailored career resources and services as influential on student-athlete vocational identity. Since career development is a critical component of Life Skills programming (i.e., student-athlete development), this study focused on those career resources specifically offered within athletic departments for student-athletes who traditionally are in the exploration phase of career development.

Career readiness. Super's (1990) definition of career development is progressive in nature and is based on life role stages and situations; however, another term that is

regularly used to discuss post-secondary preparation and transition is career readiness. Much of the research regarding career readiness is often linked with college readiness, which is connected to kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) educational standards. Mishkind (2014) reported on college and career readiness as defined at the state policy level. Of the 37 states that defined college and career readiness, 33 have one definition for both terms; four states have separated the two terms. The NACE, a professional organization that provides a platform for researchers and professionals to assess best practices for both colleges and employers, has purposely separated the two terms. Career readiness is defined by the NACE as “the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workforce” (NACE, 2020, p. 1). The NACE’s definition of career readiness appropriately characterizes the goals of the NCAA’s Life Skills career development pillar and supports the neoliberal approach and outcomes to higher education.

Based on their 2015 study, NACE identified seven competencies to career readiness: *professionalism/work ethic* (e.g., punctuality, productivity, ethical behavior), *critical thinking/problem solving* (e.g., sound reason and decisions, analyze information), *oral/written communication* (e.g., public speaking, clear expression to others), *teamwork and collaboration* (e.g., collaboration, ability to negotiate), *digital technology* (e.g., effective problem solving, adapt to new technology), *leadership* (e.g., delegation, guide and motivate others), and *career management* (e.g., specify skills, career goals, and areas of development). In 2017, NACE added an eighth competency: *global/intercultural fluency* (e.g., value inclusion, respect individuality, and diversity).

There has been research on reasons for low career readiness: lack of exposure to the physical career services on college campuses (Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008; Sampson, McClain, Musch, & Reardon, 2013), lack of experiences and skills to adequately perform a job (Perrone & Vickers, 2003), lack of understanding the cultural differences between the classroom and work environments (Nystrom, 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Sleaf & Reed, 2006), which may lead to unrealistic career choices (Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008; Sampson et al., 2013; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). Sampson et al. (2013) summarized factors that contributed to one's inability to take advantage of career activities (e.g., lack of language proficiency, computer competency, familial challenges). Limited life experiences, lack of understanding of career options, and limited knowledge of self also created barriers to career readiness.

Today, colleges and universities offer a significant number of co-curricular events and activities to counter limited career readiness. These evolve around career exploration (e.g., meeting with counselors to reflect on interests and passions, and how to integrate them in a career, receiving mentorship to gain entry into an industry of interest, taking career assessments to identify interests and skills) and job search strategies (e.g., resume building, cover letter creation, mock interview exercises, participating in community service, and serving in leadership activities). According to Peck and Preston (2018), co-curricular activities around career exploration and job search strategies help to foster career readiness. The most significant factor in facilitating such development is one's knowledge of existence and accessibility; for student-athlete development programs, this

factor is still a concern though the activities and events are planned, promoted, and offered within the athletics department.

The new partnership and student-athlete development. Initially founded in 1975 by Dr. Frank Downing (University of Kentucky) and Dr. Clarence Underwood (Michigan State University) as the National Athletic Counselors Association, the association intended to provide a forum for academic professionals who worked in college athletics to enhance communication among academic and athletic professionals while improving the academic services and development opportunities for student-athletes (National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics [NACDA], 2017). In 1977, the Association changed its name to the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A). Its current preamble recognizes “Intercollegiate athletics places unusual demands on student-athletes. Athletic and academic interests compete for the student-athlete’s time, energy, and attention” (NACDA, 2017, p. 1). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, universities began to recognize student-athletes as a unique population within the university community, encouraging organizations to collaborate. The N4A professionals built relationships with other existing higher education organizations to address some of the development concerns facing student-athletes as well (NACDA, 2017). For example, N4A is now a member association under the NACDA, which serves as the parent organization to 17 affiliate athletic associations (NACDA, 2017). In 2017, to better reflect current issues surrounding college sports and the professionals who serve in the field, N4A adopted the name the National Association of Academic and Student-

Athlete Development Professionals; however, the acronym remains N4A (NACDA, 2017).

In 2016, the NCAA (Leach, 2015) formed a partnership with the N4A specifically for the C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills program. Scholars and practitioners from this organization are leading and contributing to the dialogue regarding Life Skills programs. With this transition to the partnership, N4A and NCAA changed the name from C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills to student-athlete development programming (NCAA, 2019f). In the summer of 2018, the NCAA officially delegated all programming initiatives for Life Skills to the N4A (Leach, 2015; NCAA, 2019f). However, it is important to mention that though the formal program is no longer mandated or implemented by the NCAA nor N4A, there is still an expectation that athletics departments offer development training for student-athletes. Though personal development and career-related programming for student-athletes have been foci for many athletics departments, scholars and practitioners are still researching ways to serve this specific population of students best. There is evidence that programming designed using the five pillars contributes to a student-athlete's ability to gain transferrable skills that lead to a healthier and more balanced lifestyle (Navarro & Malvaso, 2015; Robinson, 2015). When referenced in this study, the term *Life Skills* was utilized to refer to the current structure and programming being offered in colleges and universities. Also, it was the primary term used by the programs in which my collaborators participated.

Theoretical Framework

The evolution of intercollegiate athletics and its relationship within higher education has been significant over the past 100 years; the progress within the last 30 years regarding academic pursuits and student-athlete development programs has been most notable. The need to provide structured programming for student-athletes in preparation for the transition out of college and into a career has been recognized, as higher education continues to craft measurable outcomes to meet internal and external stakeholder expectations and pressures. Though the literature was imperative, it was also essential to frame my understanding as a researcher. To inform this study, I used Crotty's (1998) four elements of research design while drawing from Bridges' transition model to understand better the population selected for my study.

Crotty's (1998) four elements to research design ask the following questions: (1) "What epistemology informs this theoretical perspective? (2) What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology? (3) What methodology governs my choice and use of method? (4) What methods do I propose?" (Crotty, 1998, p. 2). Crotty's (1998) questions regarding epistemology and theoretical perspective are addressed in this chapter, while his questions on methodology and methods are addressed in Chapter 3.

First, I address my epistemology that informs my theoretical perspective. In other words, "How do I experience my sense of self? And who am I when I speak of myself as self?" (van Manen, 2016, p. 90). I have a specific way in which I view the world, and this perspective provides context for how I interpret my experiences. My personal beliefs, values, and experiences have shaped how I have interpreted my paradigm or

worldview (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Stearns (2003) acknowledged how culture helps to “shape the human condition” (p. 1) and the “intellectual community” tends to place more importance on science, which “ignores” and cannot account for culture (p. 6). My life experiences have been shaped by my social identities as an American, Christian, Black, heterosexual female from the Midwestern region of the United States. As a believer, my faith plays a significant role in my decision making, morally grounding me, and providing clarity on some of the complexities in life, such as purpose and reason for living. Also, given the significance of race and inequality in the nation, critical and systemic change has been obligatory. Admittedly, I have experienced covert and overt expressions of judgment and microaggressions as a Black, woman in the United States; however, these experiences do not overshadow the strength and perseverance displayed by my ancestors, ensuring my journey to fulfill my aspirations is a little smoother than the one they endured. Each social identity is valuable and provides context for my reasoning, decision making, and purpose for my life (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). Additionally, my connection to this specific research topic is unique, as I was not a college student-athlete, though I currently work with this population. I take the opportunity to explain this further in Chapter Three. My analysis of the world has been shaped by my core values, personal and professional life experiences that construct meaning and understanding (Patton, 2015).

Now that I have shared some of the experiences that have shaped me, I discuss the theoretical framework that provides the underlying structure of a study (Maxwell, 2013). For the purposes of this inductive and interpretive qualitative design, Bridges transition

theory is reviewed in-depth to contextualize the essence of the experiences of former student-athletes in Life Skills programs related to their transition out of college and career development. However, this theory is simply being used to inform me as a researcher and provide guidance for research questions; it is not used to frame my findings.

Bridges' transition model. Adult development theories are appropriate for this age group to understand best how they deal with change and transition. Unlike Schlossberg's transition theory, which focuses on the actual "event or non-event" that resorts in transition (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33), Bridges' model emphasized the end of an event, making a distinction between change and transition, "change is situational, while transition is psychological" (Bridges, 2019, p. xiii). Furthermore, a three-phase process, as shown in Figure 1, depicts "transitions start with letting go of what no longer fits or is adequate to the life stage you are in" (Bridges, 2019, p. 132). The three phases he identified were the ending phase, the neutral zone, and the new beginning.



Figure 1. Depiction of Bridges' Transition Model. Reprinted with permission from *Changing Factory*, by A. Grogan, 2014, retrieved from <https://www.changefactory.com.au/our-thinking/articles/hamish-goes-to-school-transitioning-thought-change/>

The ending phase. During the ending phase, the individual experiences a loss. Bridges' examples of loss included a family death, a loss of a job or a divorce; however, for a student-athlete, it could be the loss of competition, audience, or status of being a student-athlete due to injury, or the completion of athletic eligibility that can propel them into the ending phase. Bridges (2019) explained the five aspects to the ending phase: disengagement, dismantling, disidentification, disenchantment, and disorientation. The first aspect is a sense of disengagement or "unplugging" from the familiar circumstance or environment (Bridges, 2019, p. 116). The "disappearance of the old system" (e.g., the structured schedule of intercollegiate athletics, competition, practice, coaches, teammates) can lead to a change in behaviors and actions; feelings of grief, frustration, and anger can occur (Bridges, 2019, p. 115). Disengagement from the familiar signals the beginning of a transition.

The second aspect is the dismantling stage. Bridges (2019) defined this phase as the “mourning process” (p.116). Individuals begin to emotionally “unpack” the loss of the situation, person, or belonging and the uncertainty that comes with these feelings (Bridges, 2019, p. 117). For student-athletes, the inability to participate and perform creates a great sense of loss and at times, the foreseeable future seems uncertain without their participation in the activity.

Disidentification is the third aspect in the ending phase. As a result of the initial loss, the individual must make room for the new identity, yet in the interim, define a new label that is separate from the old role (Bridges, 2019). This can be challenging for student-athletes, in particular, as their level of athletic identity may interfere with this process. The ability to identify a new role can be extremely difficult for student-athletes who have experienced identity foreclosure and unable to envision their life without college sports (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Petitpas & O’Brien, 2008). Therefore, at the conclusion of their collegiate participation, the idea of not using the label student-athlete can be emotionally difficult, creating what Bridges (2019) would describe as “vulnerability” to others who are accustomed to the former label as well (p. 119). It is during this time in the ending phase that support structures (e.g., friendships, counselors, programs) are valuable and can assist the individual in finding alternative identities to replace the role they have recently lost (Bridges, 2019).

The fourth aspect is disenchantment. This is the time in the process when meaning-making becomes ambiguous since the individual has lost a position or identity that provided clarity and stability. A significant part of this aspect is one’s ability to

acknowledge that a portion of the old identity, or “old reality” was “enchanted” (Bridges, 2019, p. 123). For student-athletes, this unrealistic reality is manifest through the idea many have regarding their athletic careers; they are endless.

The acknowledgment of disenchantment leads to disorientation, the fifth and final aspect in the ending phase. This stage can be confusing; Bridges (2019) referred to disorientation as “I don’t know where I am” as one situation has ended, but the new has yet to be revealed (p. 125). Some individuals may also question the amount of time that now exist as the activity, person, job, or situation, no longer exist. Considering the substantial amount of time student-athletes spend participating in their sport, the absence of the activity creates a significant void. For student-athletes who have experienced, for example, a career-ending injury, the confusion that occurs during this phase can lead to intense feelings of isolation and the inability to conceive doing something else outside of sports. However, these five aspects of the ending phase are essential. Confusion can lead to disintegration, discovery, and reintegration, a time when the individual explores and seeks something new while a new identity emerges (Bridges, 2019).

The neutral zone. This second phase, the neutral zone, can be challenging, as it first requires the individual to acknowledge the inevitable shift. Robinson (2015) would refer to this phase as an in-between perspective for student-athletes. Bridges (2019) considered the neutral phase necessary and transformative, providing a space to “surrender” to the uncertainty (p. 143). This phase on the transition continuum is quite possibly the most difficult as some may attempt to accelerate the process or revert to their former role, identity or situation. For student-athletes who have reached the end of their

athletic career or experienced a career ending injury, the option to revert does not exist. Therefore, Bridges (2019) encouraged individuals in this phase to delve into activities that embrace “neutral zone experiences” (p. 148).

New beginnings. The discovery and revealing of a new identity is the starting point for new beginnings, the final phase. Within this phase, individuals are motivated and receptive to learning new tasks and skills. At this time, “stop getting ready and act” (Bridges, 2019, p. 174); the individual allows the old identity and role no longer to define who they are. This process is the evolution of a new identity (Bridges, 2019). Robinson (2015) found that independence was important for student-athletes, as it minimized the effects of the neutral zone or in-between perspective and the ability to begin setting long-term goals. Development programs like Life Skills are designed using this concept, creating programming that fosters independence and an ability to begin thinking about transitioning to the next phase in life after college sports. Whether consciously or subconsciously, every student-athlete goes through a variation of Bridges’ phases of transition. His model provides a practical tool for how to prepare and guide student-athletes through the impending transition. Purposeful programming within Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) can serve as a conduit to learning how best to handle transition.

Though an earlier theory, Schlossberg’s transition theory has been used to study former student-athletes who return to college after leaving it in pursuit of a professional career (Buckner, 2017), Bridges’ concept of beginning with the conclusion of an event has not been explored with this population. A significant amount of Bridges’ work

oriented from organizational change and its effect on employees, but for my study, I utilized his model to understand best the transition that student-athletes experience from college to career and to what extent Life Skills programming assists with this process.

Summary of Literature

Student-athletes are one of the most visible student populations on a campus and play an integral role within the university community. Some descriptors of an institution's culture can be attributed to the athletic contributions and achievements these individuals make (Suggs, 2006; Thelin, 2019). However, much of the literature presents a burdensome narrative for higher education professionals that many student-athletes continue to struggle in developing skills for career exploration and preparation and the next steps after college. This is linked to the pressures related to time demands and inability for student-athletes to prepare adequately for academic studies, possibly, inhibiting career development. Acknowledging this helps practitioners to prepare this population better for life after college athletics. Universities continue to prioritize the importance of integrating student-athletes into the overall university community (Navarro, 2014). In that regard, NCAA athletic departments have pledged to offer Life Skills programs geared toward assisting in the development of skills that propel student-athletes to the next phase in their lives.

The existing literature provides a basis for the importance of student-athlete development programming, as student-athletes struggle to focus adequately on career development. Building needed competencies provided in career readiness activities can be truncated by social and cultural limitations; the salience of their athletic identities,

along with the absence of time, have a significant role in this deficiency. There are still relevant questions regarding the rigor of some academic disciplines and whether they are facilitating the demands of athletics or truly fostering skills needed to be successful after college (Wolverton, 2014). More than ever, the need to incorporate career readiness activity into the regimen of athletics is essential given less than 2% will have the opportunity to play their sport beyond college (NCAA, 2019a). Though most NCAA member institutions are offering some type of student-athlete development programming, little is known regarding the student-athletes' experiences in said programs and how these programs translate to their ability to navigate career and life after college. This study sought to illuminate and inform this deficiency in the literature.

Chapter Three—Methodology

According to the literature, programming geared specifically for the development of life skills (lowercase l and s), referred by some scholars as non-cognitive skills or soft skills, is vital for professional success (Fox, 2011; Hora et al., 2016; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2017; Swan & Arminio, 2017). For programs tailored for college students, career development is a critical component of that curriculum (Bembenutty, 2009; Fallows & Steven, 2000; Navarro, 2012; Savitz-Romer, Rowan-Kenyon, & Fancsali, 2015; Shechtman, DeBarger, Dornsife, Rosier, & Yarnall, 2013). However, some scholars have found that certain populations, student-athletes in particular, may be lagging in the areas of career development because of time demands that lead to a lack of balance between their academic and athletic obligations, academic misalignment with career goals, and the overall lack of preparedness for the academic collegiate environment (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Navarro, 2015; Simons et al., 1999; Trahan, 2014). More recently, scholars have focused on the growing concern over college student learning outcomes and the college-to-career preparation gap (Hora et al., 2016; Navarro, 2015; Shurts & Shoffner, 2004; Wolverton, 2014). For student-athletes specifically, many college and university athletics departments have developed Life Skills programs to prepare student-athletes better when transitioning from college into a career. However, little is known about the program's influence on this transition process, nor its effect on

career preparation. How is it that students experience these programs? What meaning do they make of them?

Much of the literature about student-athletes, Life Skills, and college-to-career preparedness utilized quantitative methods of inquiry as well. To complement these findings and delve more deeply into the experiences of this population, it is essential to have direct knowledge from those who experienced the phenomenon. This study utilized a qualitative approach, specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology, to understand and make meaning of the student-athlete experiences in the Life Skills program.

In this chapter, I address Crotty's (1998) last two questions: "What methodology governs my choice and use of method?" and "What methods do I propose?" (p. 2). I discuss a rationale for a qualitative methodology, my positionality as a researcher, the methodology selected, and further explanation into why utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology was appropriate for this study. The methodological process is outlined, including participant and setting selection, data collection, and analysis procedures. This chapter concludes with the ethical concerns and limitations of the study.

Why a Qualitative Methodology?

Jones et al. (2014) proposed two distinct purposes to conducting qualitative research: (1) "to illuminate and understand in depth the richness in the lives of human beings and the world in which we live" and (2) "to use new understanding for emancipating [or effecting change in] practices" (p. 11). The following quote strengthens the argument for qualitative research:

A growing recognition that some individuals or groups have been left out of the study of human development has resulted in new scholarship which pushes at the veneer of silence and utilizes the metaphor of voice to describe the experiences of those not previously heard in ways consistent with their numbers. (Jones, 1995, p. 1)

Much of the research conducted on behalf of the NCAA has been structured using quantitative methods. This approach is widely accepted, yet fails to capture the essence, voices, and feelings of those it intends to serve and study: students. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasized the need for research from the participants' perspectives, with rich and detailed data. They also posited that a qualitative approach is necessary when "a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it" (p. 22). Though Life Skills programming was formally introduced by the NCAA in 1991, little is currently known regarding the experiences of student-athletes participating in Life Skills programming. Since I knowingly embraced an interpretive perspective for this study, I was most interested in studying a phenomenon that provided an in-depth look into the "lived experiences of the participants, giving them a voice" (Patton, 2015, p. 115). Therefore, it is important to understand better the essence of experiences of former student-athletes in Life Skills programming to understand its influence best. This study intended to learn from participants' experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided my study were the following:

1. What is the structure of experiences and perceptions of former NCAA Division-I student-athletes in Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programs?
2. What is the essence of former student-athletes' experiences in Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programming regarding their career development and transition out of college?

Phenomenology as Methodology

Polkinghorne (1983) posited that phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology should be referred to as methodologies rather than methods. Accordingly, "A methodology is . . . a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter" (p. 28). There are different approaches to phenomenology; for example, Osborne (1994) viewed it as a philosophy, while van Manen (2016) used it as a methodology. At its core is the universal acceptance of exploring the meaning of lived experiences (Heidegger, 1926/1962; van Manen, 2016). More specifically, "The term *lived experience* signifies givenness of internal consciousness, inward perceivedness" (Husserl, 1964, p. 177). Considered the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) emphasized the importance of essence; the essential structure, nature, or general experience of something (van Manen, 2016; Walters, 1995). The essence of a phenomenon is captured across experiences. For this study, phenomenology was used as a methodology.

The search to understand the essence of something is at the center of phenomenology. The significance of the essence of a person's experience becomes important to a researcher; therefore, researchers must bracket or set aside assumptions or

ideas to immerse themselves completely into the lived experience being studied. Husserl believed that bracketing allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and the person's worldview (Hopkins, Regehr, & Pratt, 2017). In phenomenology, the researcher (1) focuses on the individuals' lived experience, (2) serves as the primary data-gathering instrument, and (3) interprets and makes meaning based on the individual's lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016).

Hermeneutic phenomenology. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a mentee of Husserl and furthered the philosophy of phenomenology by focusing on individual human experiences to create meaning and understanding of that specific experience (Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology gives voice and meaning to the lived experiences traditionally through texts and interpretation of a phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Experiencing and meaning-making is a significant part of the overall human experience and influential in creating a worldview. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger viewed the bracketing process in a different way. Instead of ignoring one's experiences and assumptions as a researcher about a particular subject, researchers should acknowledge and engage with such experiences and assumptions to assist in the understanding of a particular phenomenon (Heidegger, 1926/1962; Hopkins et al., 2017). Phenomenology and hermeneutics can be used concurrently as "phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experiences; hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'text' of life" (van Manen, 2016, p. 4). The combination of the two aids in the way researchers understand and make meaning of lived experiences. Hermeneutics is a method of analysis as well; the interpretation of text and language plays a role in this

process. In using hermeneutic phenomenology, data collection methods may include conversations, memoing, journaling, observations, revisiting participants, settings, and documentation to generate a close connection and meaning for the researcher about the participants' experiences with a phenomenon (Lavery, 2003; van Manen, 2016; Heidegger, 1926/1962). Saldaña (2015) stated:

as qualitative researchers, we construct in our minds the natural experiences we observe . . . with our data . . . what we perceive and interpret about life is greatly influenced and affected by the lenses, filters, and angles constructs similar to a camera through which we view the world. (p. 5)

His statement supports van Manen's philosophy to consider one's view, hence, the use of hermeneutic phenomenology for this study. Furthermore, I discuss my worldview or positionality as a lens for my study, exploring the experiences of former student-athletes in Life Skills programming.

Positionality. Individuals enter into the world of research with assumptions about the subject they are studying, and what elements of the world influence the phenomenon (Hopkins et al., 2017). Some perceptions, assumptions, or pre-understandings, as termed by Heidegger (1926/1962), are known by the researcher while others may be subconscious and unrecognizable. In phenomenology, one's position provides guidance throughout the entire study (Hopkins et al., 2017). Hopkins et al. (2017) defined positionality as "the particular philosophical stance a researcher takes in relation to the various perspectives that underpin a research approach" (p. 24). It is important to recognize that the frame is not to illustrate polar opposites of concepts, rather to provide a

spectrum for how researchers can and should approach phenomenology (Hopkins et al., 2017). Interwoven throughout the framework is the emphasis on writing; this is the “+1” concept of the 3+1 framework proposed (Hopkins et al., 2017, p. 23). Figure 2 illustrates the “3+1” framework that depicts how researchers can best position themselves while conducting research (Hopkins et al., 2017).

First, phenomenologists begin with general and particular. As mentioned before, Husserl’s initial approach to understanding lived experiences was general, more universal, as he intended to capture the essence and make meaning of a human’s lived experiences. This was referred to as nomothetic (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Smith et al. (2009) also noted that more scholars are moving toward an idiographic or particular approach to phenomenology, as it is important to highlight the unique and individual lived experiences of each human being. Gadamer (1960/1989) posited the individual story could contribute to the good of the whole.

The second aspect of Hopkins et al.’s (2017) frame consists of reduction and reflexivity. Husserl embraced a process referred to as *epoche*; scholars must “bracket” or isolate perceptions and assumptions to immerse fully into the essence of the lived experience of the studied phenomenon (Heidegger, 1926/1962; Hopkins et al., 2017; van Manen, 2016). Alternatively, Heidegger believed that the lived experience was a part of *Dasein*: the German word for *being*, acknowledging a human’s ability to wonder about one’s existence (Heidegger, 1926/1962). He believed it is impossible for a researcher to isolate one’s assumptions for the phenomenon being studied. His philosophy bodes well with hermeneutic phenomenology, as a researcher’s perspective can be used as a tool to

relate and connect to the phenomenon being studied (Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 2016). As a researcher, I follow Heidegger's position more so than Husserl's and so self-reflection became an integral part of the composition of my study.

Third in the framework is description and interpretation (Hopkins et al., 2017). This portion of the frame relates to why a participant's story is needed to understand the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) posited that description stresses the what and how of an experience with little emphasis on the researcher's position concerning the phenomenon; whereas, interpretation provides the researcher agency to make meaning while interpreting the lived experience. This process is best described by the hermeneutic circle; an iterative process used throughout a researcher's journey to interpret *Dasein* by using the stories and experiences shared by participants while reflecting on one's own experiences with the phenomenon (Hopkins et al., 2017). In other words, it can be used to dissect the meaning of the individual participants' experiences related to the overall phenomenon. Traditionally through the use of historical and poetic text, however, Heidegger was also hesitant to prematurely apply interpretation as he believed, "in interpretation, understanding does not become something different, it becomes itself" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 188). Therefore, the phenomenon is an integral part of one's ontology, also known as the "hermeneutic of dasein" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 61). Furthermore, understanding and interpretation is a way of connecting to the world; ultimately, "the term 'essence' may be understood as a linguistic construction, a description of phenomenon" (van Manen, 2016, p. 39).

To be guided by hermeneutic phenomenology, it is important to reflect on my position. I purposely utilized the word *reflect*, rather than *bracket* as hermeneutics allows for the researcher's experiences to support the study throughout the design, implementation, and analysis process. Using their framework, I shared my position.

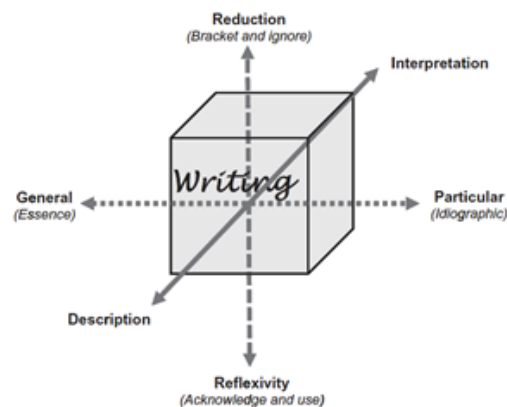


Figure 2. The “3+1” phenomenology framework. Reprinted with permission from *A Framework for Negotiating Positionality in Phenomenological Research*, by Hopkins et al., 2017, retrieved from www.tandfonline.com/loi/imte20

My positionality. Charmaz (2004) inspired researchers to “choose topics that ignite your passion [in order to] bring passion, curiosity, and care to your work” (p. 991). My reflection begins with my interest in sports when I was a young girl. I believe my interest stems from my father who was a track athlete, a jumper, and an avid fan of professional football, basketball, and boxing. Growing up, I remember him serving as a softball coach for a local team in our hometown. Though my own career as an athlete

was brief—I ran track for one year in middle school, and attempted to play tennis and volleyball—I must attribute my interest in sport to my father.

Once in college, some of my closest friends were student-athletes, and I noticed they were very busy and rarely available to socialize. They traditionally would leave their rooms very early in the morning for workouts, attend practice for hours at a time during the afternoons, and would venture out again in the late evenings for formal study hall sessions at the library. My friends would often look lethargic while in class and walking on campus. As a business major, I originally envisioned a career in a corporate setting, but I relinquished that plan to delve more into the world of intercollegiate athletics as I was compelled to learn more about this field and some of the issues facing college athletes.

While pursuing my master's degree, I incorporated my interest in college athletics. The assistant athletic director of academics gave me the opportunity to gain tangible experience by volunteering in the student-athlete academic services area. I spent about 10 hours a week monitoring mandated study hall hours, ensuring student-athletes were not surfing the Internet, talking on the telephone, or sleeping while completing their hours. The premise for mandatory hours was admirable, as it sought to establish a routine and emphasized the importance of academics; but according to the students' body and verbal language, I knew immediately that they were mentally elsewhere.

From that experience, I later pursued full-time positions within two Division-I athletic departments, one of which was a Power Five. While at the Power Five, I worked directly with the senior associate athletic director focusing on Life Skills activities and

programming for the department. In addition to my academic advising duties, it gave me a glimpse into the importance of college athletes building tangible and transferable skills outside athletics. This experience shifted my interests from purely academic-related services to personal and career development of student-athletes. I was fortunate to work there, specifically as they had the financial and human resources to adequately design a Life Skills division that incorporated the five pillars established by the NCAA. Most of the annual programming—career fairs, networking events, resume building workshops—was centered around professional and career development. At the time, most Life Skills development activities had mandatory attendance, which was enforced by the Life Skills and coaching staff. There seemed to be two types of attendees: (1) those who attended the events begrudgingly; texting, talking to friends, and sleeping throughout the program and (2) those who came prepared and found them useful and enjoyable in preparing for the next steps after college.

In addition to mandated departmental activities, we provided team-oriented and one-on-one services. One observation I had as a practitioner was that the student-athletes who routinely attended the voluntary activities appeared to be leaders, academically sound, and goal-oriented within the department. For example, I conducted resume workshops with individual teams. As the spring semester concluded, one of the members of the women's volleyball team stopped me to share her news of securing a summer internship after creating her resume. These student-athletes seemed goal-oriented, focused, and eager to share their successes. I wondered, how higher education engages the student-athlete who is less likely to attend voluntary events, has yet to dream

realistically about life after college, or who seems to feel such programming is not beneficial. As a practitioner, the answers to such questions were ambiguous and cumbersome to address.

Currently, I serve as a staff person in the student-athlete support services office of a Division-I athletics department. I oversee the administrative side of academic operations that includes monitoring students' degree progress, monitoring athletic eligibility as it relates to academic progress, staffing our tutoring services while directing the implementation of the Life Skills program for the athletics department. I also work with student-athletes who struggle to find an appropriate balance between dedicating time and energy to devote to their sport and academics. The spectrum varies greatly between those student-athletes who accept the reality that their sports career will end upon college graduation while others are foreclosed to the reality of life without sport. As a practitioner who is reestablishing a Life Skills program, my goal is to ensure the activities are meaningful and build students' confidence to thrive after their time in college.

As I have ventured into the scholarly work about student-athletes, it has become more evident that offering personal and career development programming for student-athletes is critical, and most importantly, engaging students at all levels in the development process is key. However, my concern as a practitioner is that despite the mandate by the NCAA to offer such programming and the subsequent efforts to comply, little is known about the existing activities' and initiatives' influence on the individual's transition out of college as it varies greatly in breadth, scope, and implementation. Also,

these activities can seem superficial and lack significant influence for those who participate (Crawford, 2007), compelling me to conduct this study.

From my own experiences and sharing my positionality, meaning-making is best when personal stories are shared; stories make the phenomenon relatable. This element is not only instrumental to hermeneutic phenomenology but is a core characteristic of my identity as a researcher. This study intended to identify the essence of Life Skills programming from the perspective of former student-athletes about their transition out of college including their career development.

Research Design

After establishing the purpose for using a qualitative paradigm, a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology, and my positionality for this study, “it is most helpful to be well-defined and well-focused in the choice of [my] topic; otherwise, one is quickly lost in the sheer expanse and depth of one’s question” (van Manen, 2016, p. 167). Van Manen (2016) detailed six phases for implementing a hermeneutic phenomenological study. His process provided a structure for my design:

1. turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (p. 30-31)

In the first phase, as the researcher, I must own the phenomenon as a committed area of inquiry and my position within the phenomenon being studied. Though I was never a student-athlete, my positionality statement conveys my interest in the subject.

The second phase provides guidance for data collection and identifying methods for focusing upon the phenomenon being studied (e.g., former student-athletes' experiences in Life Skills programming). Therefore, I detail my study's collaborators (i.e., participants) and setting selection, data collection process, and data analysis. Morse and Richards (2002) described this portion of a study as "scope of a study" (p. 68).

Collaborators. Creswell and Poth (2018) would recommend the use of a criterion sample, "meeting some [condition]; useful for quality assurance" (p. 158). Those I invited met my study criteria and were purposefully selected to participate (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Specifically, Maxwell (2013) identified goals of purposeful selection to include "achieving representativeness of setting, individuals, or activities", "deliberately selecting individuals" that can "illuminate what is going on", and finally, select individuals in which I, the researcher, can establish a "productive relationship to answer the research questions" (p. 98-99). My objective as a hermeneutic phenomenologist was to invite participants, also referred to as partners or collaborators (van Manen, 2016), who experienced the focus of the study, who were willing to talk about their experience, and who were diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience (van Manen, 2016). Therefore, I referred to my participants as collaborators as we worked together to

understand the Life Skills phenomenon, and their perspective was needed to “validate the phenomenon as described” (van Manen, 2016, p. 11).

The primary criterion for participation in my study was to be a former participant of a NCAA Division-I college or university that is also a member institution of an autonomy athletic conference (i.e. Power Five) because these athletics departments typically employ professionals whose sole responsibilities are with Life Skills programming. It was also important to include individuals who were no more than 2-3 years removed from their collegiate experience; their experiences were relatively recent, yet enough time had passed for reflection. Initially, I sought collaborators via email who were willing to provide relevant insight into the phenomenon, and explore the meaning of their experiences (Maxwell, 2013; van Manen, 2016). Participation in Life Skills was not a criterion for the study, because I was most interested in a wide range of perspectives, from those potentially very involved to those not involved.

There has been a great deal of controversy regarding the sample size in qualitative studies; the ability to provide reasoning continues to be challenged by scholars (Jones et al., 2014). Dukes (1984) and Patton (2015) supported small sample sizes, allowing for rich data and in-depth dialogue between researcher and participant. Polkinghorne (1989) suggested interviewing 5-25 participants who have all experienced the phenomenon being studied. In hermeneutic phenomenological studies, using the study’s purpose statement as a reference, the number of selected participants is based upon their quality or value added to the study (Jones et al., 2014). This is also referred to as coverage (Jones et al., 2014). Polkinghorne (1989) and van Manen (2016) posited participants should be

selected based upon their experience with the phenomenon, their willingness to talk about their experience, and the uniqueness of their story as it relates to the phenomenon. Morse (2007) referred to such participants as “excellent participants” who are experts in the studied phenomenon (p. 229). For this study, the goal was to attract an adequate number of quality collaborators (4-10 former student-athletes) who articulated their experience with the phenomenon of Life Skills programming as it related to their transition out of college into a career; ultimately, I had 5 collaborators participate in my study.

Former student-athletes who have participated in a variety of Life Skills program offerings at their respective institutions were selected as the collaborators for my study. As individuals who have experienced the Life Skills program, the reflection on their experiences was of most value, meeting the goals and purposes of this study (Maxwell, 2013). Also, listening to those who have experienced such programming, the hope is to create a structure of their experiences that inform practitioners on how best to construct Life Skills programs for current student-athletes. There was no career path specific to this study. Descriptively, there was no gender or sport-specific requirement for participation; however, my preference was to have a diverse pool of collaborators who represented multiple sports as many studies conducted on intercollegiate athletics have focused on one or two sports (football and men’s basketball). I believe this approach aided in the depth and richness of the data gathered.

The NACE recommends university career services professionals survey graduating students transitioning out of college six to nine months post-graduation (NACE, 2012). However, these professionals, along with alumni associations, are

finding value in tracking beyond the six-month threshold. Therefore, I invited potential collaborators who were no more than two years removed from their undergraduate experiences.

For ethical consideration, the selection of pseudonyms for my collaborators was important, as it protected their identity and was representative of the phenomenon under exploration (van Manen, 2016). Therefore, I asked each collaborator if they would like to select a pseudonym, or I assigned a pseudonym on their behalf.

Setting. For this particular study, the setting was not as important as the quality of the collaborators selected for the study. The setting was dependent upon the collaborators' alma mater, as they are intertwined. Therefore, the criteria for the collaborator was that they attended an institution that is a member institution of the NCAA at the Division-I level, with preference given to those who attended an institution within the autonomy conferences or more commonly known as the Power Five Conferences (i.e., ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac 12, SEC). Member institutions of the autonomy conferences traditionally have the most complex department structures and strongest budgetary and human resources among all divisions. The athletic department must include an active Life Skills program that employs practitioners (e.g., directors of Life Skills, Life Skills coordinators) solely in the area of Life Skills and that incorporates all five pillars in their curriculum detailed by the NCAA as described in Chapter Two. Preferably, the department does not employ academic advisors in a hybrid role as Life Skills coordinators, as this indicates the practitioner can focus solely on Life Skills programming. In 2008, the NCAA identified its members who actively participate in the

Life Skills programs (NCAA, 2008). Therefore, I solicited collaborators who participated in programs that have been identified as model programs or won awards for their program design and implementation efforts.

Gaining access required me to negotiate with gatekeepers. Generally, these individuals can “facilitate or interfere” in gaining access to participants for a study (Maxwell, 2013, p. 90). To gain access to the appropriate collaborators and settings, I utilized relationships with former colleagues garnered throughout my experience in the field and asked them to distribute invitations to participate. Those who responded, I followed up via email to solicit their participation (Appendix B). I also sent them the written consent form (Appendix C).

Data collection. Textual interpretation and interviews are the primary data sources in phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994). Using a traditional hermeneutic approach, my collaborators participated in a writing exercise followed by two face-to-face or telephone conversations for data collection. The writing exercise required my collaborators to reflect and write about their past experiences in intercollegiate athletics and Life Skills programming prior to our first meeting. The purpose of the reflection was to create dialogue for the first face-to-face conversation between researcher and collaborator, and van Manen (2016) believed writing prompted an attitude of deep reflection. Therefore, the writing prompt was sent to each collaborator via email upon confirming their willingness to participate in the study (Appendix D), along with a simple form of collecting demographic information (Appendix E).

After the collaborator returned the written prompts, unstructured interviews took place. In hermeneutic phenomenology, Gadamer (1960/1989) and van Manen (2016) referred to interviews as conversations or dialogue between the researcher and collaborator. According to Gadamer (1960/1989), “Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding” (p. 385). Conversations describe the core of meaning-making and interpretation. Therefore, the conversations were open and unstructured allowing the collaborator to contribute. I referred to the interviews as conversations because they served two purposes: (a) “a means to explore and gather experimental narrative material to develop a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” and (b) “a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a [collaborator] about the meaning of an experience” (van Manen, 2016, p. 66). To best engage participants and gain knowledge on their experiences, van Manen (2016) emphasized the need, as a researcher, to undoubtedly know one’s main question, record the conversation, frame dialogue to focus on personal stories, and prepare to reflect. Though sample questions were provided as a guide, an unstructured format allowed for in-depth dialogue, as my collaborators guided the conversation process and focused on the emerging human experience (Appendix F).

Benner (1984) emphasized the importance of how best to frame questions to encourage participation and elicit stories pertaining to the phenomenon. To provide some structure for the conversations, a conversation protocol was developed using Seidman’s (1989) approach of three in-depth interview levels. Seidman (1989) not only provided a guide for the conversations between collaborator and researcher but also provided a process for building rapport and trust. First, Seidman (1989) suggested the first interview

[conversation] should highlight past experiences. For this study, collaborators reminisced about their time as college student-athletes both in the written prompt and the verbal conversation. The written text generated discussion points for this initial conversation.

The second conversation combined Seidman's (1989) second and third levels of interviewing by focusing on the present experiences and reflection. The collaborators were asked to discuss their current experiences and circumstances post-college. This included discussions about their career as well. The final conversation also consisted of questions on how the collaborators made meaning of their experiences with the phenomenon (i.e., Life Skills programming) and its effect on their transition out of college and career development.

Data analysis. The data analysis process was iterative, and hermeneutics is considered an interpretative phenomenological method. Therefore, van Manen's (2016) last four phases fit appropriately for conducting the data analysis: (3) identify and reflect on themes, (4) write and (re)write, (5) maintain close proximity to the lived experience, and (6) balance between the collaborators' stories (the parts) with the overall phenomenon to identify meaning (the whole) (van Manen, 2016). However, Gadamer (1960/1989) offered a similar, more streamlined, interpretation of the hermeneutic analysis process: a researcher and participant collaborate to create meaning using readings, reflective writing, and interpretations. Kafle (2011) provided a depiction of this process described by Gadamer (Figure 3). Hence, I used the depicted hermeneutic circle for my data analysis.

Since I conversed a minimum of two times with each collaborator, I submitted each conversation to a third-party service for transcription. This process also minimized the time loss between conversations with each collaborator. As I moved between conversations, I performed extensive synthesis after each set of collaborator's conversations, reading and reflecting on their shared stories to identify emerging themes and make meaning through interpretation. This exercise served two purposes: (a) to assist me in preparing for each follow-up conversation and identifying areas for discussion, and (b) to increase the trustworthiness of my study.

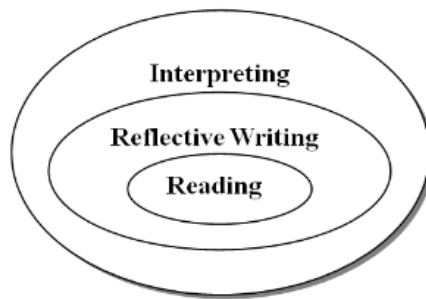


Figure 3. Hermeneutic circle. Reprinted with permission from Hermeneutic phenomenological research method simplified, by N. P. Kafle, 2011, retrieved from <http://www.researchgate.net>

For my reflection process, I voice recorded our conversations, followed by a recording of my own initial thoughts after each collaborator's conversation. Using this technique allowed me to hear my own ideas aloud and then evaluate how the overall conversation flowed, noting any adjustments needed in conducting future conversations. Since I recorded each conversation, I was able to listen to them multiple times as part of

the reflection process. Interestingly, each time I heard the conversation, I heard a word or phrase differently than the time before, honing in on words that were commonly recited and related to student-athlete development, Life Skills, transition, or career development.

Upon receiving the transcripts in written format, I read the conversations multiple times while listening to the recordings to ensure they were clear, and I could understand the conversations. I then highlighted and circled words and phrases that seemed important to the phenomenon. I also wrote many general notes in the margins that helped me to understand my collaborators' journeys better and began identifying overarching themes. From there, I began identifying quotes that I thought were memorable or meaningful to the phenomenon. I recorded them on a spreadsheet.

From van Manen's perspective, themes are a quintessential part of the analysis process. He defined them as "the experience of focus, of meaning, of point . . . a way to simplify . . . not objects or things . . . a means to capture the phenomenon one tries to understand" (van Manen, 2016, p. 87); and "the needfulness or desire to make sense . . . the openness to something . . . the process of insightful invention, discovery, disclosure" (van Manen, 2016, p. 79). They provide "control and order to our research and writing" (van Manen, 2016, p. 79). For analysis of the conversations and writing prompts, I reviewed the texts closely while clustering commonly used words and phrases that emerged into essential themes, or dominate ideas, thoughts, and beliefs that were key to my collaborators' experiences of the phenomenon. This thematic approach was implemented to guide my writings and illuminate each collaborator's story (van Manen, 2016). After a thematic analysis, the text was examined again with an interpretive

approach to extract the essence of the collaborator's perspective, to capture and interpret the essential meaning of their experience.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1999) identified credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability as standards for trustworthiness in qualitative research; however, van Manen (2016) recognized different terms—oriented, strong, rich, and deep—to characterize quality within hermeneutic phenomenology. The term *oriented* describes the researcher's closeness to the lived experience being studied. By purposely selecting hermeneutic phenomenology for this particular study, I did not bracket my professional experiences working within college athletics; I acknowledged and embraced them. Also, I did not personally know the collaborators who participated in my study. Therefore, my position as a professional in athletics was an asset and provided credibility to the study as an insider (Maxwell, 2013). Also, my professional experience with student-athletes and Life Skills programming played an important role during the conversations, building rapport and trust with my collaborators.

Second, van Manen (2016) used the term *strong* to acknowledge the importance of textual understanding (van Manen, 2016). I provided writing prompts to my collaborators prior to the first conversation, giving them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences while strengthening the analysis portion of my study, as text is fundamental to hermeneutics as a form of analysis (van Manen, 2016). As stated earlier in my collaborator section regarding criterion for collaborator participation, those asked to participate were no more than two years removed from their collegiate career to increase

the likelihood of recalling specific memories and experiences pertinent to their time as student-athletes. Last, the follow-up conversations using Seidman's (1989) interview approach provided me continuity in feedback from my collaborators.

Third, van Manen (2016) recognized the need for contextually *rich* descriptions to ensure a quality hermeneutic phenomenological study. The use of the hermeneutic circle for analysis requires extensive reading, (re)writing, and interpretation. The true meaning of the phenomenon was revealed through a rich analysis of the collaborators' stories. Confidentiality also contributed to the richness of the study as well. As previously mentioned, each collaborator signed a consent form and was given a pseudonym for the duration of the study. This was also an important component of my study, as some scholars have found that some current and former student-athletes were hesitant to share their experiences out of fear of coach and athletic administrator retribution (Cox, Sadberry, McGuire, & McBride, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Sorensen, Sincoff, & Siebeneck, 2009). During my professional career working in athletics, I have witnessed this situation.

Last, van Manen utilized the term *deep* to characterize the scope of the study. The collaborator selection process enhanced the breadth and scope of the study, recognizing the diversity in former student-athlete experiences. Each experience was unique and captured given the use of Seidman's (1989) three-level interview approach as well. Multiple conversations with my collaborators built rapport and added to the depth and quality of the interpretation and meaning-making of their experiences.

Limitations

Ideally, I would have preferred to meet each collaborator face-to-face; However, given my geographic location and the location of most Division-I autonomy conference (i.e. Power Five) member institutions, my collaborators were not in close geographic proximity to me. Given the expense of travel, my interview protocol allowed for conversations to be conducted via telephone or telecommunications application (e.g., Google Hangout, Skype, BlueJeans) as alternative modes of communication for data collection purposes. Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez (2015) purposely selected email interviews as the data collection method to highlight the use of technology in the data collection process; however, there are drawbacks. The ability to seek information from participants in a variety of geographic locations also inhibits the researcher's ability to read nonverbal language, cues, and voice inflections (Barratt, 2012; Opdenakker, 2006), and automatically disqualifies individuals who may not have access to technology (Egan, Chenoweth, & McAuliffe, 2006; Jowett, Peel, & Shaw, 2011).

Heidegger (1977) wrote extensively on the topic of technology and its interference with everyday being and human experience; he posited the essence of technology limits the ability to immerse into a phenomenon fully. Though preference was for face-to-face conversations, I incorporated technologies (e.g., telephone, Skype). It did not diminish capturing the collaborator's experience and allowed me to include collaborators who would otherwise be eliminated based on geographic limitations.

Last was the limitation of my collaborators for my study. Interpretivists are "committed to the philosophy of social construction" and believe that the social world is

“produced through meaningful interpretations” (Pascale, 2011, p. 22). With this epistemology in mind, I purposefully selected collaborators who could contribute to the discussion regarding student-athlete experiences in well-structured Life Skills programs within one of the five Division-I autonomy conferences, which affected coverage of my study (Jones et al., 2014). Therefore, former student-athletes who did not attend a university within the aforementioned conferences were not included in this specific study. However, it is also important to note that in spite of the purposeful selection, the experiences of the collaborators varied greatly, as individual athletic departments are responsible for how student-athlete development programs are implemented at the institutional level. The programming offered at the institutional level varies greatly in scope, structure, and execution, as priorities and resources, both monetary and human, vary greatly.

Finally, the collaborators’ ability to recall and willingness to disclose their experiences varied, as time affects one’s ability to remember, and the time to build rapport was limited. This study was not meant to generalize, as each story and experience was unique because my purpose was to capture or “illuminate” the individual experiences of my collaborators (Jones et al., 2014, p. 11).

Summary of Methodology

As a researcher using an interpretivist approach, worldview and the experiences that shape worldview are important. This perspective offers a basis concerning why phenomenology provided the best methodology to understand better the essence of the structure of Life Skills programs experienced by former student-athletes as they

transitioned and developed for a career. Focused on interpretation, Heidegger's approach to hermeneutic phenomenology allows researchers to utilize their own experiences. My professional experiences within intercollegiate athletics provided a sense of understanding and empathy and fostered accountability and trustworthiness with my collaborators. Their voices needed to be heard.

Chapter Four—Findings

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to answer the following questions: (1) What is the structure of experiences and perceptions of former NCAA Division-I student-athletes about Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programs? and (2) What is the essence of former student-athletes' experiences in Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programming regarding their career development and transition out of college? Five collaborators each completed a written prompt, along with two in-depth interviews (see Appendices D and F), reflecting on their experiences in Life Skills programming as the primary modes of collecting data. For analysis, the hermeneutic circle was used, incorporating reflection, writing, rewriting, and interpretation. First, the background of each collaborator is discussed followed by the findings presented using essential themes.

Demographic Background of Collaborators

Five collaborators were purposefully identified for this study, and their demographics are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

My Collaborators

Name	Gender	Race	Sport	Position	Location of Alma Mater	Conference	Current Job or Position	Grad Year	First Gen?
Jason	Male	Black	Football	Running back	West coast	P 5	Sport event Management	2016/2018	No
Jillian	Female	White	Softball	Infielder	West coast	P 5	In transition	2018	No
Justin	Male	Black	Football	Safety	Midwest and South	P 5	Entrepreneur/skills coach	2015/2016	No
Mollie	Female	White	Softball	First base	Midwest	P 5	Sport administrator	2016	No
Tim	Male	White	Track	Thrower	West coast	P 5	Sport broadcasting	2017	No

Each collaborator was given a pseudonym to protect their identities. Three sports were represented; two team sports (i.e., football and softball) and the third is considered an individual sport (i.e., track and field). Three of the five Division-I autonomy conferences were represented by the collaborators. Here is a brief introduction to each collaborator:

Jason—football player from the West Jason played football as a running back at a Division-I university in the West. Unlike most Division-I football players, Jason, was a walk-on to his team and later earned an athletic-in-aid scholarship. The term walk-on is used to describe student-athletes who are not actively recruited or offered athletic-in-aid by the sports program coaching staff to play the sport. When he realized the collegiate level was the highest level of football he would play, he began to look for opportunities outside of athletics; Life Skills programs became one area of interest. On occasion, he attended Life Skills programming, most notable was a dining etiquette

workshop. Jason also completed his undergraduate early and pursued his graduate degree. Professionally, he works at an entertainment company in event planning.

Jillian—softball player from the West. Jillian competed in softball at a Division-I institution in the West. Initially, her reason for participating in student-athlete programming was for social connection with peers and to partake in free meals, which were served at the events; however, as she continued to attend meetings and events, her interest grew and she assumed leadership roles on SAAC.

After obtaining an undergraduate degree, Jillian decided to pursue an opportunity that allowed her to stay connected to the game of softball and attend graduate school at an institution in the Midwest. Despite her transition to coaching, she ultimately decided it was not the best fit and moved back the West to pursue other career interests.

Justin—football player from the South. Justin was a football student-athlete at a Division-I university located in the South. He played the safety position. As a high school student, he was not as highly recruited as he anticipated, which resulted in him becoming a walk-on player to his college team. During his first year, he admittedly focused much of his attention on the game of football to earn an athletic scholarship. After completing his undergraduate degree in three and one-half years, he decided to transfer to another institution in the Midwest to pursue his masters and complete his final year of athletic eligibility. Throughout his time in undergraduate and graduate school, Justin was not as involved with the formal Life Skills programming and found opportunities for career development external to athletics. After completing his college

athletic career, Justin initially pursued a career in the NFL, but later transitioned to become an entrepreneur and own his own consulting business.

Mollie—softball player from the Midwest. Originally from the Southwest, Mollie enjoyed many sports; however, her interest in playing softball stemmed from watching her older sister play the sport. When selecting universities, she decided to continue her career in a lesser-known softball program. While playing, she experienced highs and lows: her team advanced to the postseason twice, a feat that had not been achieved for some time for the program. Unfortunately, Mollie experienced two nearly career-ending injuries. During her recovery, she remained involved in the sports community by mentoring and attending Life Skills activities.

During graduate school, Mollie accepted an internship at a financial firm but was quickly introduced to an opportunity by a mentor to work in college sports given her leadership involvement as a student-athlete. The connections she made with leadership while participating in Life Skills activities ultimately led to her first professional position at her alma mater. Mollie currently works in development in an intercollegiate athletics department in the Midwest.

Tim—thrower, track and field from the West. Tim initially desired to play football but believed “track and field *chose* me.” He competed primarily as a shotput thrower at a preeminent Division-I institution. Though initially offered a scholarship, he temporarily lost his scholarship after an injury and a decline in performance. Fortunately, the following season, he not only earned it back; he also became team captain. During his injury, he took refuge in Life Skills activities, establishing relationships with its

leadership and his peers. His involvement led to an international community service trip and mentorship program. Professionally, Tim took advantage of his connections and now works as a computer graphics and communications coordinator in the sports industry.

Structure of Conversations and Writing Prompts

I used the steps of the hermeneutic circle, as defined by van Manen (2016), to analyze the conversations and writing prompts collected for this study: reflection, (re)reading, (re)writing with each cycle making deeper and more clear interpretation. Prior to the conversations, my collaborators returned the writing prompts I had sent them upon my initial request to speak with them about their experiences. I asked that the total page length of their responses to the three questions be no more than two pages; some elaborated about their experiences, while others were brief. The prompts, no matter how detailed or generic, provided a foundation to begin our conversations as I circled specific phrases that they used within the writing prompts to generate dialogue. Their brevity or verbosity in their written responses also illuminated how relatable the questions were to their actual lived experiences and was reflected again in the one-on-one conversations.

In Heidegger's (1977) book entitled, *The Question Concerning Technology*, he suggested that technology was "a way of revealing" understanding, not simply a mode to complete a task (p. 12). Technological devices can be used as a means to interact and view the world. To contact my collaborators, the use of devices was necessary for the data collection process, as my collaborators resided in different regions of the United States. Therefore, I facilitated our conversations over the telephone or Skype. Fortunately, most of the conversations took place over the telephone, but my

collaborators were comfortable with either format. For the few that took place over Skype, the conversations were executed smoothly with little Internet network distortion and no lost connection. For the few times it occurred, I asked the collaborators to repeat their answers. To avoid too many distractions, I scheduled all the conversations in advance requesting they select a time when they were undistracted and could devote their undivided attention. With the exception of one conversation, all my collaborators were located in quiet environments and heeded my request. One follow-up conversation with Jillian took place while she was grocery shopping. To allow her to finish, I postponed the conversation and continued once she had concluded her errand. Though technology can facilitate communication, it can also offer impediments. I addressed this obstacle, built rapport, and pursued an authentic discussion with each of my collaborators.

During our first one-on-one conversations, my collaborators were eager to discuss their athletic experiences and recall how they began their athletic careers, how they selected their respective institutions, and their memorable experiences within their sport participation. It was evident in their voice inflections and body language; they spoke with enthusiasm, smiled, and chuckled as they retold their athletic experiences. My reason for beginning with their overall experiences was to build a rapport with them and gradually introduce questions on Life Skills, career development, and transition.

The second conversation consisted of my questions regarding their program's structure, level of involvement, career development, and the preparation to transition out of college. Though my collaborators provided useful, meaningful information, I thought their pauses and silences between my questions and their responses were as telling of

their experiences in Life Skills programs as their actual words. I attempted to capture these silences as well as their expressions in the descriptions of my collaborators' responses throughout the results section.

Essential Themes

Through the analysis processes detailed above, essential themes began to emerge. van Manen (2016) defined essential themes as those that support the “fundamental meaning” of the phenomenon (p. 107). Table 2 (see Appendix G) is an example of one of the essential themes identified during analysis. These essential themes became the structure of my collaborators' experiences. Ultimately, six essential themes emerged throughout the collaborators' conversations: living the dream, cadence and connection, hurdles: transition, detours, and roadblocks, the running lanes, a leap of faith, and it's a marathon, not a sprint.

Living the dream. Currently, there are almost 500,000 NCAA student-athletes (NCAA, 2019h). Of this number, 170,000 participate at the Division-I level; this is a smaller division by sheer participant numbers when compared to Divisions II and III, but the highest level of collegiate competition. When I asked my collaborators to talk about their memories of being student-athletes, they were eager to reminisce about this specific period in their lives. They used words such as “privilege,” “opportunity,” “lucky,” “blessed,” and “dream” to describe the feeling of playing college sports at the highest competitive level. They realized that many students never have the chance to participate in college-level sports, let alone Division-I athletics. These words, spoken by my collaborators, evolved the first overarching theme. I interpreted it as living the dream.

At work, I often see and greet many of the coaches as I enter my office suite in the morning. Living the dream is a response I hear from one of my coaches in the morning; he acknowledges the notion that the position to play (and coach) is realized by very few at the collegiate level. Using this phrase requires one to delve into the term of play or playing. The word play is commonly used as a verb to describe the physical activity of participating or taking part in a sport (Merriam-Webster, 2019). One definition, when used as a verb, is the action or manner of engaging in a sport or game; to engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose (Lexico, 2019). Often, at the Division-I level, the latter portion of this definition can be contradictory, as one of the primary purposes of Division-I is to provide financial stability for their respective departments (Covell & Walker, 2016). Hearing my collaborators talk about their experiences gives reason to believe their enjoyment of their sports were sometimes hindered by the overemphasis on athletically producing positive results, raising the marketability and financial profile of their programs. More specifically, this experience seemed especially true for those who walked onto their respective rosters, as they had to prove their worth (i.e., value) because they were not formally recruited into the programs. Sometimes, living the dream came at a cost, with its own set of challenges to belong and be noticed. However, these hurdles did not detour those with an athletic scholarship or the walk-on experience, as they knew the opportunity was lived by very few student-athletes. Living the dream was bigger than themselves and it propelled them to find a sense of belonging, a familiarity in their

respective athletics departments. Within the living the dream theme, there were two subthemes: following in their footsteps and uncharted territory.

Following in their footsteps. In following in their footsteps, my collaborators discussed the influence of family and friends on their decision to pursue a sport at its highest level. Stories were shared with me recalling the role family (e.g., parents, grandparents, siblings) played when deciding, consciously or subconsciously, to participate in a sport. Words such as “love, support, role model, guidance and influence” were used when describing their initial reason for playing sports. These words signify that the collaborators found connection and value in the person who encouraged their sports participation. For those whose family members or friends were former student-athletes, the idea of mirroring that individual’s experience by simply participating in the sport had significance. The notion of participating in college sports was an action bigger than themselves. It was an honorable act and served a larger purpose: to emulate those they valued and loved was important.

Playing sports was an integral part of my collaborators’ stories. As defined before, they all pursued sports as something they enjoyed; while pursuing Division-I, they realized the seriousness of the decision, which may have outweighed the enjoyment aspect. Despite this new reality, they realized their potential, and the pursuit to play a sport they loved at the highest levels was a dream come true. Every story incorporated some type of family support as integral to selecting a sport and pursuing it. Two collaborators spoke about their families as being athletic, multigenerational participants in intercollegiate athletics.

For instance, Tim, a Division-I thrower, came from an athletic family. Throughout their childhood, Tim and his sister played multiple sports: track, football, and basketball. His father played in college and coached high school basketball. Initially, Tim thought he would pursue football in college, but then he started to receive correspondence from coaches of track and field programs showing interest in his ability to throw. He also thought that he was a better thrower than football player. He knew the caliber of the track program at his alma mater and felt like “track chose him” as his love for the sport grew. He gladly discussed watching the Olympics growing up; athletes such as Usain Bolt caught his attention and inspired him to pursue track and field. His father’s example and advice propelled him to pursue sports at a high level. Tim stated, “My dad played basketball in college [and he told me], ‘If you can live without it, don’t do it; but if you can’t live without it, do it.’ So that was always my guiding force [in choosing track].” He further explained, “It wasn’t that I couldn’t live without track, but it was that I couldn’t live without competing.” Track happened to be the sport in which he loved to compete and he was good at it. He felt honored to be a track athlete, a thrower, at an iconic collegiate program.

Mollie, a softball student-athlete who attended school in the Midwest, stated, “I played all kinds of sports growing up and ended up choosing softball mainly because my older sister played softball and [I] wanted to follow her.” Also, growing up in the Southwest and playing the sport in a region of the country that is home to some of the most iconic college softball programs, Mollie, like Tim, fell in love with the sport. Mollie explained, “I watched it on TV every summer and dreamed of attending the

Women's College World Series." She knew she wanted to continue playing the sport at the collegiate level.

It is also important to mention the role that families and friends played in the lives of my collaborators, even if not directly related to athletics. During my first interview with Justin, a football student-athlete who attended school in the Midwest and the South, I recognized his determination, not only to attend college but also to pursue football and play it at the highest level. I asked him what or who he credited with his motivation and persistence to be successful, not only in the classroom but on the field as well. He stated, "I'll have to credit my mom." Justin was the son of a single mother and he recalled watching her work multiple labor-intensive jobs to provide for her family. "It was tough," he stated, "but her determination proved that I couldn't complain. I could do anything because she sacrificed everything for me to be here [in college]."

Footsteps to follow is a badge of honor, a responsibility to participate in ways that significant others have forged. The desire to carry on a legacy of loved ones or create one for their families was apparent as they recalled the importance of participating in collegiate sport at the highest level. I noticed there was also a sense of responsibility to represent their family and friends in a manner that brought honor and respect. This responsibility also created a heavy burden and unforeseen challenge, especially for those collaborators who did not initially earn athletic scholarships to play their sport. Also, one collaborator decided to carve her own path at a program that was not as well known for her particular sport— for some, an effort to live the dream included uncharted territory on the road to college sports.

Uncharted territory. The second subtheme captures two aspects of my collaborators' experiences: the walk-on experience and the road less traveled. The walk-on experience highlights the unique journey of two collaborators who were not actively recruited to play their respective sports at the institutions they attended. Instead, they decided to take a chance and try out for the team. Through the walk-on process, both expressed their feeling of living the dream with words such as "blessed," "lucky," "chosen," "few," and the phrase "once in a lifetime." Finally, the road less traveled describes how my collaborators reminisced about a time when they felt they reached the height of their sports career or a pivotal moment. Words and phrases such as "unforgettable," "indescribable," "memorable," and "reaching the pinnacle" were used to describe experiences that were unprecedented, atypical, or defining moments for the collaborators. The subtheme is described using my collaborators' words.

Though none of my collaborators were first-generation college students, some of them shared with me experiences that were unprecedented for them in their journey of entering college. The walk-on experience was an unexpected path for both Justin and Jason, as they were both top athletes in their respective high school football programs. Because of their high school status, the process of fighting for a spot on a roster was unfamiliar to them. Conversely, for Mollie, being a top recruit sought after by a program not as well known for softball was challenging as well. This was the reality for Mollie in that she chose a road less traveled. Consciously selecting a program to make a difference is also part of living the dream.

The walk-on experience. For some, the path to living the dream was not as clear. It required immense determination and just the right opportunity; some may say a hint of luck. For Justin and Jason, the process of pursuing Division-I football was atypical, as neither collaborator was highly recruited out of high school. Therefore, they had to prove their skills to earn a spot on the roster. The walk-on process is customary for many collegiate programs and allows individuals to try out, like an audition, in hopes of earning a spot on the roster and participating in a sport. If selected, this process does not guarantee any athletic scholarship funding, or equal access to the many resources afforded those who receive athletic-in-aid scholarships.

While in high school, Jason thought he would receive multiple offers to play football at the college level; however, he was not highly recruited and entered college with the general student population. In fact, he was told he was not talented enough to play Division-I ball. He explained, “The [high school] coach who knew me best was fired, so I had a coach who had only seen me during the summer and for five games and that led to his comment about not being a Division-I player.” Upon arrival, he decided to try out for the team. At the conclusion of the first tryout, unfortunately, he did not make the team. He said:

I was pretty sure I was going to make it, so it was kinda hurtful when I didn’t. I no longer was a part of a team, no longer a part of a community so I had to go seek out my own community. I now realized that I had the opportunity to attend school and learn about myself without the distraction of sports for the first time in my life.

Jason had the chance to focus on school without any athletic obligations for the first time in his life. This was a difficult, and in ways, unexpected, transition, as sports had been a significant part of his life since childhood. It also suggested that his level of athlete identity, as defined by Brewer et al. (1993), was high, as his participation in football played a significant role in Jason's identity and how he identified with his environment and worldview (Robinson, 2015).

After two semesters, he received an email from the football program inviting him to try out for the team again. He explained:

My university's football program was one of the top in the nation, so understanding that half the school population wished to be on the team, and I'm going to be one of those members of that prestigious team, was exciting, but it made me very humbled at the same time. Coming out of high school, I had a big head, so being humbled and being put in my place made me appreciate the opportunity that I was getting [to try out again].

After persistence and hard work, he secured his spot on the roster. He was appreciative of the time he had to learn about himself. He shared, "This email meant more to me than just a fulfillment of a childhood dream. It was a reminder that I could do anything I put my mind to." His dream was beyond football; he continued:

This email was the confidence booster that led to me being one of three African American males that graduated from the business school and one of two football players that graduated from the business school in the last two years.

The email was a symbol of Jason's determination to accomplish greatness both on and off the field. It was the impetus not only to make the roster of an elite football program but also to achieve academic goals he had set for himself as an African American male and student-athlete.

Justin, another male collaborator who also played football, had a similar walk-on story as Jason. He, too, wanted to live the dream, but to do so, he actively sought out football programs on his own. He detailed his experience:

I wasn't highly recruited, and I was a two-star recruit . . . it was a tough road for me to get recruited and convince, especially a Division-I institution, that I could play and play at a high level. The opportunity never really came to earn a scholarship out of high school, but I knew that I was capable. . . . I reached out to every single Division-I school and heard back from a number, but really the one that stood out as far as an opportunity to play and have an enjoyable college experience was my alma mater.

Football student-athletes are generally ranked in their recruiting classes by organizations that take an interest in prospects and their potential to play at the collegiate and professional levels. A scale using two to five stars is designed to rank athletes, with five stars being the highest ranking. Justin was a two-star, meaning he still potentially had the talent to play at the Division-I level, but it may be best utilized at a mid-level program. He continued to share his college process as a walk-on student-athlete:

I actually went through the general student process: I applied like a general student, went through general student orientation, arrived on campus at the end of

August with the general student population, worked out in the student gym for my first week of school, and then was [later] thrown into this Division-I football environment. You're expected to perform at a high level; yet, [you're] not given the same tools or resources to do so. I'm grateful for it and would say that the walk-on experience . . . it was a huge challenge.

His recollection of this experience was similar to other students who decide to walk onto a team; it mirrored the general college student experience. Unlike many of his scholarship, athletic-in-aid recipient teammates, he did not begin coursework in the summer, have access to athletic academic advisors, or tutoring support. He was not given access to the same dining facilities as the scholarship student-athletes, typically referred to as the training table. He lamented, "Honestly, I felt like a second-class citizen; I was at the very bottom of the totem pole." He further explained his comments:

As a walk-on, the program has no obligation to help you. The athletes on scholarship are the investment. They get first priority when it comes to coaches, treatment, equipment, food, academic support. There's definitely a hierarchy.

In turn, Justin was undeterred and utilized the resources he did have access to until he earned an athletic scholarship his second year.

Justin's acclimation process to his collegiate career was very similar to the general student body population. During our conversation, he spoke about this process with pride, as it was not ideal for either he or Jason because they both had successful high school football careers. Though Justin was not actively recruited by Division-I programs, he accepted this as an opportunity to take ownership of his athletic and academic journey.

The road less traveled. Mollie's most memorable experience was reaching the pinnacle of her sport, the Women's College World Series, with a program not as well known in the world of college softball. She stated, "Though I grew up in a state with a college with a strong softball program, I ended up choosing my school that was not really well known for going to the World Series." She described the moments that led her team to the Women's College World Series:

My sophomore year, we had a really young team, and everybody kind of counted us out and it would be a rebuilding year and we surprised everyone when we ended up being a really good team, being undefeated at home that year. I played first base and caught the final out that qualified us for the World Series. [It's] really one of my most cherished memories to reach the pinnacle of my sport.

For Mollie, living the dream was making her mark on a program less known in the college softball world. It was important to her. A momentous, unforgettable moment that was realized during the height of her collegiate career. The privilege to create an athletic legacy at a program not known for a strong softball tradition affirmed the distinct journey she chose as a student-athlete. Uncharted territory also opened pathways to forge meaningful relationships, ones that would last throughout college and beyond.

It was not lost by my collaborators that their athletic participation was the highlight of their collegiate experiences. Their roles as student-athletes were memorable and humbling, as they understood many could only dream of being in their position. Relationships with those both inside and outside of the athletic and college environments

played a key part—faculty, staff, coaches, mentors, and peers—contributing considerably to their positive words.

Cadence: Relationships and networks. Merriam-Webster (2019) defined cadence as the beat, time, or measure of rhythmical motion or activity. In sports, the term cadence refers to the rhythm, steps, and stride on the field. An athlete's motions and steps can be the difference between a touchdown pass and an interception, a home run, and a strikeout, a perfectly executed triple jump and a foul. For my collaborators, cadence was represented by the relationships and networks they built throughout their collegiate journey. It provided the foundation to navigate their college experience, assist with their transition out of college, and begin developing career skills. As I detail later in the section entitled Hurdles—Transition, Detours, and Roadblocks, the absence of cadence created some of the challenges they encountered during their college journey. For now, I share their connections related to cadence.

“My best friends were on the team.” Relationships among teammates were a significant part of my collaborators' experiences. I asked them about relationships and how they built community during their time as student-athletes. For Jillian, a softball player, her most important relationships were her teammates. She offered, “Probably two of my real best friends are from the team.” Her ability to build relationships was related to the amount of time she spent with her teammates. Specifically, she spoke about attending Life Skills activities to build community within the athletic department, for example, “There's a special bond that can be formed not just with teammates and friends, but also with coaches, as well.”

Similarly, Mollie shared her connections with her coaching staff, “I feel my coaches identified me as a leader on the team. They gave me different opportunities [to lead] and pushed me. They invested in me. Their job was not only to win but to develop student-athletes.” Her thoughts were a reminder that, often, student-athletes select a university, not because of the academic program or location of the university, but because of the individuals who coach the sport.

Jillian, too, found her coach “super supportive for my career on and off the field. I could reach out to him for anything.” The bond that is built between a student-athlete and the coach is treasured; when it is not nurtured, student-athletes may not have a positive experience, even to the point of quitting their sport (Weiss & Robinson, 2013).

“You seem to know everyone.” Tim seemed to find community, not only with his teammates, but also among his athletic peers from other teams. He laughed as he shared his experiences of building community. He was very involved in SAAC and many of his friends and network were highly involved in the organization as well. He recalled a time when someone from the department’s information technology staff asked him if there was anyone in the department he did not know, as he seemed to know everyone. His response was, “That’s a great question! Honestly, probably 95% of them I have some level of connection. From simply hello, I recognize you to very close friendships.”

For Tim, building rapport with both track and field teammates and peers from other teams strengthened his community. These relationships were also beneficial when promoting different Life Skills events and encouraging his peers to participate.

“My faculty were truly knowledgeable.” Collaborators spoke about their relationships with faculty and staff, especially when they were not involved with their sports teams. These connections were initiated as a result of a disconnect; though they were part of athletic teams, they did not feel fully supported by athletic staff and coaches. As a result, Jason and Justin both found networks outside of athletics, filling a void that athletics was not fulfilling at the time.

For example, when Jason first entered the university, he was not a recruited student-athlete. He attempted to walk on and earn a spot on the team his first year, but did not make the roster. He felt disconnected, no longer a part of a team, which he had for a good portion of his educational experience. His goal was to reach out to others, seeking community in the classroom, faculty, and business student peers. Fortunately, Jason found mentorship with faculty from within his academic major. He stated:

I built my own community. . . . I was able to connect with a mentor in my major that was extremely instrumental in getting me into the major I wanted. I visited with her more than I did the student-athlete services because she knew the department, the classes, and teachers I should take for my major. [As a student-athlete], she even knew which teachers would work with me.

His mentor provided the connection he needed, though he had yet to find the same comfort within the athletics department. She understood both worlds: Jason’s athletic responsibilities and academic responsibilities. This relationship would later prove important when Jason had to decide to either continue playing football or further his education.

Similarly, once Justin was granted access to an athletic academic advisor, he spoke about seeking community and building connections with them:

I would say my [athletic] academic advisors had just as much influence on me as my coaches. . . . They were really in the trenches with me whereas the student-athlete development, they weren't necessarily there consistently, so it's harder for them to speak into my life because they didn't actually understand the day to day.

Justin used a descriptive phrase when describing the connection he had with his athletic academic advisors "in the trenches." This phrase is typically a description associated with a war or a battle. In athletic academic advising, the term is often used to describe the day to day work that advisors handle when working directly with students-athletes. Many of the tasks performed by athletic academic advisors are unique to student-athletes because unlike their non-athlete counterparts, they have athletic responsibilities that require significant time commitments in addition to their academic tasks. In this context, cadence not only applies to being in step on the field; it also applies to being in step off the field, navigating college life and beyond.

For instance, Jason recalled a time when he met with an athletic academic advisor rather than his mentor, as she assisted him in picking courses that best fit best his athletic schedule. This is a very common practice by many athletic academic advisors with student-athletes to ease the conflicts that can occur between athletic competition travel and academic class attendance. They also mediate situations that arise between faculty and student-athletes. This was the case for Jason, who interacted with a few faculty members who were not as amenable to the schedules of student-athlete. For athletic

academic advisors, being in the trenches goes beyond simply knowing the sport their advisees play or their major; it is a critical part of my collaborators' experiences, creating a space of support and trust for them as student-athletes.

My collaborators' cadence was symbolic of their sense of connection, belonging to a community. Being in sync with other individuals—teammates, coaches, faculty, advisors, mentors—who played a key role throughout their journeys, both in and out of season, made them memorable. Many of their relationships were through athletics and were strengthened as a result of an athletically related event or experience. However, each of my collaborators also experienced challenges and hurdles. In some instances, these relationships were established and strengthened during the physically and emotionally challenging points in their collegiate sports careers.

Hurdles: Transition, detours, and roadblocks. Hurdles are an appropriate noun to describe the next theme, as in track and field, those who run hurdles must jump over a wooden barrier to proceed down the track to the finish line. There are 10 hurdles. One of the most memorable, yet disappointing, hurdle races occurred in the 2008 Beijing Olympics for American Olympian Lolo Jones. Jones was projected to win gold and on the second to last hurdle, her foot clipped the bar, sending her face-first into the pavement. Her dream of winning Olympic gold was over; however, Jones has still found opportunities to compete and make a difference in her sport of track and field.

Though the hurdles my collaborators faced were not witnessed by millions, they could still be described as setbacks, challenges, disappointments, or transitions throughout their time in college. While experiencing a setback not anticipated, like

Jones, each collaborator dealt with their particular hurdle differently. In retrospect, they described how their challenge was a pivotal part of their development as both an athlete and an individual. Some experienced more than one setback; yet, none of them regretted the experience. Surprisingly, they were each grateful for the hurdle. Also, the hurdle was the impetus for some being initially introduced to student-athlete programming or, through the hurdle, found more time to become involved with Life Skills activities. Here are some of the hurdles described by my collaborators.

“You’re done.” Injury was a significant hurdle that almost every collaborator faced during their collegiate careers. The injuries were all physical in nature and ranged in severity with varying recovery times. For example, Mollie experienced two potentially career-ending injuries; the worst injury was tearing her anterior cruciate ligament. She shared, “I was just hitting my stride as a hitter, building momentum, and then it happened. It was demoralizing.”

Throughout her recovery, she maintained a connection as a team captain by supporting and mentoring her teammates from the sideline. She would show up, though she could not physically participate, providing her teammates’ words of encouragement and motivation at practice and during competitions, explaining, “As captain, I had to find new ways to make an impact for my team—finding ways to lead off the field.” Mollie understood her role as a captain and though it would have been easy to step away from the team, it was important for her to maintain connection with her teammates and display how to overcome adversity. She said, “I look back and it’s one of the most pivotal moments in my life because as team captain, it forced me to not take that responsibility

lightly.” She set an example that not all leadership is in the form of doing or performing; providing words of encouragement and motivation to her teammates demonstrated her role as a captain as well. It also provided her intrinsic motivation to return to the field after her injury stronger than before.

Tim’s injury was also devastating because it occurred during his first year of competition. While attempting to throw the hammer (an apparatus with a ball at the end of a wired cable), the side of his foot slipped on the cement ring and he fell, awkwardly landing on his foot. He stated:

I didn’t think anything of it just because it doesn’t feel good when you fall. I got up and walked; it hurt, and I thought it would go away. [It was] when I got into the ring a second time, I tried to throw . . . there was so much pain.

After conversing with the training staff and doctors, Tim learned that there was a break in his foot. He lamented, “the trainer’s stated, ‘okay, there’s a break, so you’re done for the season.’ This was my freshman year, and I competed in only two meets. I was mortified.” The word mortified seems to denote two aspects of his experience: first, his description of the physical arena for track and field, as it was quite large and could hold thousands of spectators. The sheer number of people who attended the event and saw him become injured created a sense of embarrassment. The pit for throwers was in the center of the field and every spectator could see the pit from their vantage point in the stands. Second, he felt extreme pressure to establish his position on the team in his first season of competition. His competitive season was cut short as a result of suffering an injury at one of his first competitions as a first-year student; he could no longer compete.

For Tim, the overall experience created a feeling of humiliation, preventing him from pursuing his passion his first season.

Tim began the hard road of recovery to return for his second season. However, despite his efforts, his coaches did not renew his athletic scholarship, as they were not satisfied with his performance at the end of his second year. Depending on his performance in his third year, they may or may not have a place for him on the team. He stated, “There’s no way I’m letting you take [the scholarship] from me.” The process of earning and retaining an athletic-in-aid scholarship can be a test of emotional and physical strength. The idea of possibly losing a funding source toward one’s education can increase the stress of being a student-athlete. There may be someone better, faster, taller, and stronger to replace an athlete. Tim worked harder than ever to secure his position on his team and earn his scholarship back.

“I don’t have time. . . . Talk to a GA.” For many students, the feeling of getting lost among the sheer number of students who attend a college or university and simply being a number can be intimidating and difficult to navigate. Acclimating to a large school setting very different than high school can be challenging. The institutions that my collaborators selected for their educational experiences enroll tens of thousands of students and keeping track of and building a support system where all students feel welcomed and accepted presents its own challenges.

Though the number of student-athletes within an athletics department is smaller in comparison to the general student population at a particular school, student-athletes understand there is an established hierarchy when it comes to the athletes who are a

priority within an athletics department. It may never be verbalized, but the designation of revenue versus non-revenue sports affirms the distinction. A designation is also placed between those student-athletes receiving athletic-in-aid funding from the department and those who are not. This was the reality for Justin and Jason, as both began their careers as walk-ons.

Justin described the recruited student as a “protected investment.” The program’s financial and human resources have been devoted to this set of individuals more so than those who were not formally recruited and given athletic aid; in his words, he was “a volunteer.” He reflected on his walk-on experience and this hierarchy of student-athletes. As a very goal-oriented student, he took the initiative to reach out to those whom he felt could make him better. In most instances, the result was positive; for example, a professional introduction led to him securing an internship after his first year. However, one interaction with a coach was not as positive. He described:

During practice, my coach had made a statement encouraging players to come to his office to review film and offer guidance to be “coached up.” Hearing that, I went to my coach’s office after practice and said, “Hey coach, you know, I’d really like to learn how I can get better at tackling as I really want to improve and help the team.” In response, he pointed at his door and said, “Sorry man, don’t have time. Go see one of the interns or graduate assistants.” I was crushed.

Coaches are highly respected and often revered. For student-athletes, the coach is the individual whom they can trust to offer support, advice, discipline, and love. In this particular case, Justin felt isolated and betrayed by the individual who initially seemed to

offer his guidance to *everyone* at practice that day, not solely athletic-in-aid recipients. His desire to connect with a coach and his football program was not met. This experience even exacerbated the divide between the scholarship student-athletes and the walk-ons. Justin talked about the dynamic between players in the locker room. He said, “The starters came out [onto the field] with the practice squad; there was really no hierarchy. It was pretty horizontal in the locker room.” This would suggest that there is one team among the students. Anyone who wears the uniform is considered a full member of the team.

In retrospect, his coach’s response to his desire to learn about the game showed Justin the business side of college sports and the need to find support and guidance outside of athletics, especially as a walk-on. Justin stated:

The ability for a coach to keep a job and stay at the institution is purely based on the performance of 18- to 22-year-olds, so that coach has to invest in those who are going to perform the most. I didn’t take [his response to me] personal, but I did very much long for his approval.

This interaction with his coach reiterated Justin’s status as a walk-on and contributed to his desire to building community (e.g., cadence) within other areas of the university.

“I decided to finish my eligibility elsewhere.” For many college students, the decision to transfer from one institution to another can be daunting. There are a myriad of reasons a student may decide to transfer from one institution to another: (a) academic factors such as the former institution did not offer their intended major; (b) social factors such as the inability to build community, the student body was too big or too small; (c)

financial factors such as the former institution was too expensive or the scholarships earned were not renewable. For student-athletes, the reasons can also be athletic-related: not getting enough playing time, not making connections with the coaching staff or teammates, the athletic experience is not as anticipated.

Justin's decision to transfer was based on both academics and athletics. He completed his undergraduate degree in three years and fortunately had two more years of athletic eligibility remaining to play the sport he loved. Though the financial portion of his education would be covered through athletic scholarship, he was in search of an academically competitive graduate program. The decision to transfer presented its own set of challenges. The decision was not only to pursue a master's at an academically competitive institution, but he was also a participant on a football team, that at the time, was ranked number one in the nation. He explained, "I just felt like I was in over my head; I felt like I had bitten off more than I could chew."

Being a graduate transfer, as defined by the NCAA, is any student-athlete who completes an undergraduate degree before exhausting athletic eligibility. The student has a choice to still compete while pursuing a graduate degree either at the school in which they completed their bachelor's degree or at a different institution. As the academic progression standards and graduation rates continue to increase for student-athletes, little is known about this specific population as more student-athletes are taking advantage of the opportunity to pursue advanced degrees and complete their final year of athletic eligibility (Haslerig, 2017). In 2018, the NCAA (2019) found that 3% of its Division-I student-athletes were considered graduate transfers. Little is known about how graduate

transfers acclimate to their new universities, new academic programs, new athletic programs, coaches, and teammates. The original community, connections, and routines are lost and new ones must be established. From his experience, the adjustment period was difficult, especially to the new football program. Nevertheless, Justin was determined to continue his education and play the sport that he loved.

“This isn’t the major for you.” A significant amount of research deals with the complicated relationship between academics and athletics. For my study, I specifically referenced researchers who have studied the time conflicts and the inability for student-athletes to pursue their majors of choice (Adler & Adler, 1985; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Navarro, 2015; Simons et al., 1999; Wolverton, 2014) and the creation of schedules that complement their athletic pursuits versus career interests (Feltz et al., 2013; Navarro, 2015; Terrell, 2012). Jason shared his experience when deciding to pursue business as his major. He explained, “There were very few African Americans in the school of business, and *even fewer* student-athletes as well.” He went on to say:

My advisor did not advise me to take on the business school because of the level of course load and level of [academic] demand. I knew school had to be first, so I understood the priorities of the two departments [the business school and athletics department were different]. I realized what was best for me.

Jason was speaking about an issue that exists for many athletic academic advisors: finding the balance between allowing the student to pursue their academic interest and ensuring the student will be able to fulfill the NCAA’s established rules regarding PTD. I delve more into this subject in my final chapter.

He further reflected on his advisor's decision to steer him away from business: the academic demand, the athletic demands, and the atypical decision to pursue business as a student-athlete at this specific institution:

I was able to establish myself and show that I actually could do [business], and then [the academic advisors] were more supportive. Most of the time, I was telling my advisor the classes I was going to take, I already knew the [class] times and what I was doing [as a business major].

Once he declared business as his major, he had to overcome negative stereotypes that so often plague many student-athletes, especially those who participate in the higher-profile sports of basketball and football. He detailed his experience in choosing a major:

I started off as an accounting [major]; I was always good with math. Went into an accounting class, and the teacher flat out said: "You're not going to succeed in my class. Get a different schedule." So, I instantly dropped that class. I can't take a class with a teacher who said that to me, so I switched to finance since I liked math. I had an Asian teacher whom I didn't understand and I met with him [during his office hours] and he told me, "It is what it is," and I still didn't understand [the subject matter]. I ended up switching to general management, as I realized the courses I was studying, I didn't really like. Besides, the classes I was good at were sports business classes. But I ran away from those because it seemed, in a weird way, too typical for the athlete to take a sports business classes, but in reality, that is what I knew; that's what I was comfortable doing.

Jason's statement reiterates the challenges that students from underrepresented populations face when their multiple identities collide in academic spaces that have historically and consistently been marginalized. He was a Black, male, football student-athlete pursuing a major in the business school. The comments shared by his faculty were not unique and, sadly, reinforce the underlying racial biases and stereotypes that are held by some in higher education. Second, Jason gravitated toward sport-related courses because playing sports was a significant part of his identity. Yet, he was hesitant to take these classes because, simply, he was a student-athlete: it was expected. His resistance illustrates stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995), as he feared affirming a label that, as a student-athlete, he only had interests in one area, sports.

Jason also explained his time and experiences in the classroom in comparison to some of his athletic peers:

Most [student-athletes] are hand-held. Most don't even care to know [their classes]; they'll just take the schedule and sit. I was a little different, and I took pride in that. I understood that when I walk into class, the teacher already thinks, "all right, this one [student-athlete] isn't going to care or this student is just here because their coach will check on them."

Sadly, the issues involving stereotyping in academic spaces are not unique, and his experiences leave room for interpretation in my final chapter.

MBA or the gridiron. Jason continued to face hurdles when deciding to pursue a graduate degree. Unlike Justin, Jason decided to pursue a graduate degree at his alma

mater. He was offered admission to the MBA program; however, the offer was contingent upon him no longer playing the sport he loved, football:

I had one more year of [athletic] eligibility left, and I wanted to continue focusing on school but was put in a position where admission into the grad school depended on me not playing football. The administration actually said, “We want you in the program, but we want you to seriously consider not playing football.”

It was a difficult [decision].

With much thought, Jason accepted the offer. With that offer of admission came isolation from the football program, as he no longer had physical access to the facilities and services he used throughout his undergraduate work—the training table (dining facilities), weight rooms, academic advisors, coaches, teammates—they were all gone. Similar to his initial experiences as a walk-on while pursuing his undergraduate business degree, Jason was again faced with having no community and needing to build one. He lamented, “That community that I built, that support that I once felt, was gone in an instance.” He also discussed his struggle to find community *outside* of football and the difficulty in attending the football games while in graduate school:

I didn’t have game days or practice; I was a little lost. The hardest thing is, I could barely attend games. I think I went to three and it just wasn’t the same. I stopped going, stopped watching; it was hard to watch college football that year after.

This was the beginning of Jason’s inevitable transition; he prematurely discontinued participating in football to pursue another degree, and he underestimated the

emotion of not playing the sport. Not playing caused feelings of grief, loss, and isolation. If he could not be on the field as a participant, he did not want to be in the stands as a spectator. The transition process is often “neglected and ultimately regretted” by many student-athletes (Robinson, 2015, p. 85). This was the case for Jason.

The roadblocks and setbacks my collaborators shared with me were significant and were a reminder of the resilience of student-athletes to strive to be their best. Despite injuries or academic challenges, they continued to persevere. For better or worse, they were led to consider other avenues to stay involved with their athletic, academic, or university communities as a result of experiencing a hurdle during their college careers.

Coping with hurdles. All of my collaborators experienced hurdles; setbacks, challenges, and struggles were a part of the individual experience as student-athletes. They each had ways of coping and overcoming their hurdles. This is the time when some sought other activities inside and outside of the athletic department to find community. Tim and Mollie sought ways to cope with their season-ending injuries; unable to practice and compete, SAAC and Life Skills became their new interest. Jillian sought community and relationships with her peers through SAAC involvement as well. Interestingly, as a result of his walk-on status, Jason sought community as an active member of SAAC while also seeking connection with those within the business school. Justin sought community with faculty and advisors from within the school of education.

“I poured myself into SAAC.” Extracurricular and co-curricular activities became an important part of building relationships and community, especially when my

collaborators faced a hurdle or detour to their athletic or academic pursuits. They identified Life Skills and SAAC as new activities of focus.

Initially, Tim was not interested in SAAC but sought community within this organization as a result of a potentially career-ending injury. He revealed, “I don’t have time to do this, but when I saw [our Life Skills coordinator], she would say ‘you got to come. I think you’ll really love this.’” Plus, there was an incentive, Tim explained: “There was food, which was one of the things that got me [to a SAAC meeting].” He thought, “I have nothing to do. I need to stop making excuses and just go see what it’s like.” He defined further his reasons for participation:

It’s not that I doubted myself, but [becoming an Olympian] was just not going to happen. It was not in the cards. [So, it was time to focus on my] other goals and dreams. I needed to take advantage of every opportunity they gave me; I realized really early that although I was there for track, there were all these opportunities that they’re giving me. It would be stupid to not take them up on that . . . to better myself and try to get myself ready for after college.

Coming to this realization, Tim embraced the opportunity to explore other avenues for community and involvement. Tim learned the realities of college sports as well when he suffered his injury. I asked him the reasoning behind his decision to participate more, and he explained further, “College athletics is a business. Losing my scholarship and everything that came with that experience made me realize I was not the exception. I was the rule.”

Like the millions of student-athletes who participated in their sport before him, the dream of participating beyond the collegiate level seemed within reach. The actualization of the dream is the exception to which Tim is referring. Very few make it to the professional ranks; the rule or the usual outcome for most student-athletes is transitioning to another career field upon graduation. Tim knew his athletic career would eventually end, and he would need to shift his interests and energy toward a field that may not include track. Therefore, he ensured that his collegiate career included activities such as the mentor program, etiquette dinner workshop, and community service trip to South America that would foster a skill set to be successful beyond track. He later pursued a leadership role on SAAC's executive board, encouraging his peers to become more involved and that presented its own set of challenges.

Like Tim, Mollie experienced a season-ending injury. During her recovery, she felt it was also important to devote time to develop other skills and interests, therefore, becoming more involved in Life Skills programming and SAAC. Her participation and involvement in SAAC became an important part of her recuperation process. She shared, "The [injury] allowed me to slow down and focus on things outside of softball." Mollie took on leadership roles within SAAC, an internship at a transportation corporation, and also participated in an international community service project.

For Jillian, community on her team and within the athletic department was important, and she found those connections through SAAC. She stated:

[My initial reason for getting involved], I would say, was social and the free food.

I didn't have the same relationships my first two years on the team as I did the last

two. Then I just really enjoyed [SAAC] and knew I only had three or four years left to do those kinds of things. I was trying to make the most of the opportunities available.

Throughout my conversation with Jillian, I could tell that her relationships with her teammates were most important, as she attended her first SAAC meeting with teammates. The assumption is that strong bonds are built among teammates. Early and long hours are spent as a team in training, planning, and competition. However, Jillian's first two seasons on the softball team did not offer the support and community that she longed for; in her opinion, there was a lack of leadership from the upperclasswomen on the team, so she sought support, leadership, and community with a few teammates and peers from other teams who attended SAAC meetings. Her experience was similar to Jason, except he connected his involvement with SAAC to his identity as a walk-on. He stated:

It was more of a personal [choice]; I wanted to be a part of something. Me wanting to get involved a little bit more because, quite frankly, being a walk-on, I didn't really see myself as a typical student-athlete because I didn't have a scholarship. I didn't even live with athletes, I lived with people I connected with my freshman year who weren't athletes. So, I just went for it and joined SAAC.

The word typical, in this context, is synonymous with words such as normal or regular. The assumption by many in society is that *all* college student-athletes are receiving a scholarship to play their sport. This assumption is quite misleading, as most student-athletes do not receive athletic-in-aid support. Like their non-athlete counterparts, they receive financial support from other sources: academic scholarships,

family, work, and financial aid. As for football specifically, a majority of participants do receive athletic-in-aid support, and in Justin's eyes, that was normal, to be expected. Full athletic-in-aid (i.e., tuition, housing, books, and fees) was given to the student by the institution in exchange for his performance on the field. However, he was not receiving an athletic scholarship. Therefore, he did not feel like a typical football student-athlete, though his daily routine full of classes, workouts, meetings, and practice would undeniably prove otherwise. However, the distinction of earning an athletic scholarship was important to him and since he did not receive the same benefits as his scholarship recipient teammates, he still yearned for ways to be connected to the athletics department. SAAC was his connection.

His SAAC involvement led to his interest in a leadership role. He explained, "The [Life Skills] staff encouraged me to apply for a SAAC position. I applied and was offered the position. This was a good way to meet more people, meet more athletes, which was [initially] hard to do." For Jason, SAAC provided a way to connect with more student-athletes that he may not have had the opportunity to meet simply as a walk-on. In his role, he was now privy to many of the Life Skills programs being offered through the department as well.

Athletic activities were an integral part of my collaborators' daily routines. After their injuries, SAAC served as a way to remain connected with their peers. Though they did not recognize it at the time, they were preparing for the transition out of college by becoming involved with activities other than the physical activities of their sport. I believed it was important to note that though my study explored Life Skills related to

transition and career development, some of my collaborators combated their setbacks by seeking guidance and community from outside the athletics department and not through Life Skills programming.

Outside the circle: Community and opportunity outside of athletics. For two collaborators, building community outside of athletics departments became more important as they navigated their overall college experience, involvement opportunities on campus, and the pursuit of advanced degrees. As far as their college experience, both Justin and Jason began their athletic careers as walk-on players, which led to them seeking mentorship, community, and connections outside of athletics, as the resources afforded to their scholarship recipient counterparts were not readily available to them. For instance, Justin discussed the advisement model at his first institution. Since he was a walk-on, he did not have access to an athletic academic advisor until he was offered an athletic scholarship:

I truly owned my academic experience because, for a time, I was paying for it. If I'm paying for it, I was taking out student loans, so believe me, I'm going to get the most out of that opportunity. I had such a desire, hunger, drive to create my own experiences because I didn't feel like I would get them if I just left it up to someone else.

For Justin, the idea of finding community and connection outside of athletics came naturally. As a walk-on at his undergraduate institution, he was not provided the same access to athletic advisors, so his use of the word "own" suggests that he intrinsically took responsibility and pride in shaping his academic journey. I asked him where his

intrinsic motivation and drive to do well come from; “my mother,” he said. He went on to explain:

My mother was a housemaid until I was in middle school, and from the time I was born, she worked 14, 16 hours a day. So, I felt that I didn’t have the right to complain. I grew up in a very blue-collar town where you earn your keep. So, once I got to the Division-I level, [as a] walk-on, I didn’t have the luxury of taking days off because they could cut [me] from the team without penalty. I had to prove myself every day. And financially, when you’re paying for something, you treat it a little bit differently.

While Justin was explaining to whom he owed his work ethic and drive, I was thinking to myself, “*Wow, there aren’t too many students, who understand, at the age of 18 or 19, taking full responsibility for their educational process.*” What does full responsibility mean? For Justin, it was not only taking ownership in the school he selected to attend or the major he pursued; it was also making mature fiscal decisions. It was fostering strong relationships with faculty, staff, and finding career professionals who could offer support, and it was proudly representing individuals, like his mother, who worked tirelessly for him to achieve a goal of attending college, a goal of which they only dreamed.

Justin’s journey had its challenges, as he also shared that once he did earn an athletic scholarship, he succumbed to academic clustering in some of his course selection, and like Jason, witnessed some of his teammates being led by athletic advisors into degree programs that did not interest them. This was also Justin’s reason for utilizing his

departmental academic advisors more than the athletic advisors because he believed they knew him better as an individual and student. Therefore, he gravitated toward his professors and departmental academic advisors specifically, as he felt their support was not based on his football performance; they wanted to see him do well as a student and an individual person. Their involvement influenced his career choices as well. He divulged, “I knew my professors had my best interest in mind. Not that my athletic advisors didn’t, but I viewed my professors as industry experts.” These connections led to career opportunities he may not have had if it were not for the faculty within the college of education.

In addition to joining SAAC, Jason recalled finding support and mentorship with faculty in the school of business as an undergraduate. He did not have many teammates in the same academic discipline, so his community became other business major students and faculty. He explained:

My freshman year, I was able to connect with a mentor in the business school who was extremely instrumental in getting me into the business school [as an undergraduate]. I went to her more than the athletic academic advisors because [I felt] she was more beneficial to me. She knew the department, what teachers were good, which majors catered to my strengths. She helped me write my resume freshman year as well. So, everything I explored in the student-athlete support [department] that didn’t surpass her services, I didn’t do it.

Encouraging students to have a holistic experience while in college was important to also finding the balance between athletics and academics. Given their walk-on identities,

Jason and Justin found it necessary to build community outside of the athletics department to further their overall success in college.

Get set . . . go! In every sport, it is important to be ready and in the proper stance when the whistle sounds, signaling the competition to begin. However, not being prepared and ready can result in a false start, a disqualification from the race in track, a blown tackle in football, or a strike in baseball or soccer. Because I wanted to learn more about their experiences in Life Skills at their respective institutions, it was important for me to understand better the structures of the different programs that were represented by my collaborators. I also wanted to know more about the structures that encouraged (or hindered) them in their preparation for the next phase of development.

The purpose of my study was not to assess or compare Life Skills and student-athlete development programs, but it was important to note that all their athletic departments had some type of student-athlete development programming. This section details some of the program offerings my collaborators experienced, along with three subthemes: Oh, the memories, memorable activities pertaining to career development; No Thanks, but Maybe Next Time, my collaborators' hesitance to participate; and herd mentality, my collaborators' perspectives of their peers' resistance to Life Skills participation.

At first glance, the programs seemed similar in structure with emphasis placed on career readiness, leadership, and community service. There were differences, however, in promotion, implementation, and level of engagement in activity offerings. For instance, Justin's program at his first institution still relied quite heavily on academic

support staff to implement Life Skills workshops, seminars, and events. He recognized the dual role of the practitioners as a challenge, saying, “There seemed to be a lack of opportunities.” As a result of this structure, Justin thought the program lacked promotion and “impact.” He said:

In the game of football, we’re expected to learn [a play or position] and then do it almost immediately. I sometimes got frustrated in [Life Skills] programming because it was a little bit slow [for me]; the classroom or workshop-type programs seemed elementary.

However, his second university had a devoted staff specifically for programming and made an effort to speak face-to-face with respective teams to promote programming. He revealed, “They would physically get in front of us to speak at team meetings, letting us know what was going on. There was no excuse [not to participate].” Hence, he appreciated his second institution, which also offered hands-on internships within the athletic department:

I did take advantage of the student-athlete internship program where they placed student-athletes within the department to gain practical experience in the areas of compliance or the business office or even fan experience. It was rotational. I enjoyed it and developed my own skill set. It was a speed and scale that suited me.

Speaking with Justin, I was amazed at his level of ambition and desire to have meaningful experiences while in college. In contrast to the programming offered at his undergraduate institution, the internship was designed for students to gain hands-on

experience and rotate to different departments, learning the multiple sides of intercollegiate athletics. From marketing and promotion, to ticketing, compliance, and administration, Justin began to contemplate a career in intercollegiate athletics after finishing his master's degree.

Tim's program structure emphasized the importance of staff reaching out to students directly through face-to-face communication and encouraging participation in activities and events. There was some verbal encouragement from the coaching staff once an activity was announced, but most of the direct communication was from the Life Skills staff. He stated that he initially attended the program not only because of free food but not to disappoint the Life Skills coordinator. Tim said:

In my mind, I was busy, and I didn't have time. Every time [the Life Skills coordinator] would see me, she would encourage me to participate. One evening, I had nothing to do and finally decided to go and there was dinner!

He later went on to explain how his interest in the program activities grew:

The coordinators offered opportunities for us to hang out with other student-athletes outside of athletics, from visiting corn mazes to community outreach and fun team competitions. They offered several events too. One was on finances, and [the presenter] discussed 401k and Roth IRAs [individual retirement accounts] and how to use them. There was also a workshop on professional dress for interviewing. The Life Skills program also offered a mentorship program. My mentor was amazing and super helpful. She helped me with job interviews, gave me a letter of recommendation. There were many committees as well.

During my time in school, the student-athlete's voice was on the rise [and being heard] and I realized then that my involvement in something made a difference. Without being prompted, he automatically answered my follow-up question with this response:

I thought to myself, "I need to take advantage of every opportunity they give me because some people are so dead set on their sport that they push to the wayside all this other stuff [i.e., Life Skills activities]." Although I'm here for track, I would be stupid to not try to better myself and improve myself and be ready for after college.

Like Tim, initially, Jillian chose to get involved because of the free food, but also because she knew she would not have access to such programming upon graduation. She explained, "There was programming for resume building and creating LinkedIn profiles. I didn't know anything about that on my own." She also said, "I realized that I wouldn't ever have that opportunity to meet up with 50, 60 student-athletes every other Wednesday after I graduated, so making the most of that as well." Community and relationships were a large part of Jillian's college experience. Strong bonds with her teammates were important to her and I later discovered that the absence of community and relationship contributed to her difficulties in transitioning away from college and the softball field. Before learning about their transition experience, I wanted to learn whether any programming was memorable.

Oh, the memories. Before delving into the transition process and career development of my collaborators, I first wanted to learn if there were any memorable

programs or activities that they attributed to their transition or journey out of college and career development. Though the level of participation varied among my collaborators, they each were able to reminisce about a particular program as it pertained to their transition out of college and career development.

Jason and Tim discussed in their prompts and our conversations their experiences with etiquette dinner workshops. These types of career and personal development workshops inform students of the socially accepted rules when eating with colleagues or potential employers. Jason thought this program not only provided a free meal, but it also provided the knowledge to know what food items are appropriate and how to eat depending on the situation. He stated:

You don't want to sit with a huge burger at a business meeting, having a conversation. You don't want to slurp pasta either. I'm very conscious of what I'm going to order. For my job, I have many lunch meetings. Having that knowledge alleviates the stress in those situations.

Jillian and Mollie both enjoyed opportunities to gain leadership skills. Mollie discussed a program that involved planning a leadership conference for her peers. She not only had the privilege to plan the conference but also speak in front of her female peers. I later found out that the opportunities she garnered as an undergraduate were noticed by top administration in the athletics department. Unknowingly, Mollie's interpersonal and communication skills were being recognized, which eventually led to her being offered a full-time position in her alma mater's marketing department.

Jillian had the privilege of meeting a very well-known and influential female sports broadcaster, advocate, and cancer survivor. She challenged the young women to pursue their dreams in a male-dominated industry. Jillian remembered, “It was pretty exciting and empowering [to hear her speak]. She broke barriers to get to where she is now. It was great to learn about her career path and how it can help student-athletes.” The event opened her eyes to the possibilities that existed beyond the softball field.

Community service is one of the former NCAA Life Skills five pillars and has continued to be a focus for athletic programs, offering student-athletes opportunities to travel and participate in service projects. Both domestically and internationally, it was a large part of each of my collaborators’ programs, and they spoke about the numerous opportunities to serve others. Tim and Mollie both had the chance to participate with their respective departments and discussed the benefits of international travel and participating in community service projects with other student-athletes. Tim shared:

Our athletics department partnered with an organization that builds courts in different countries. We went to Panama to help in a remote location. We slept in a school with mosquito nets and showered in the river. The people spoke Spanish, and I’m not very good at Spanish, but the language barrier was not much of a problem. The community completely embraced us. [Once we finished the court], we had a big celebration and the community bought a cow to have a big fest for us.

He further reflected on the experience to participate in a service project abroad:

For me, I think what hit me most was they bought the cow to have this feast for us despite the community being very, very poor. The kids, they didn't think they were poor. It didn't matter to them because they seemed happy. Not that I'm super focused on material goods, but it gave me perspective and definitely one of my highlights from my time in college.

Mollie shared her service project experience to a rural area of Nicaragua. She said:

The experience was not glamorous, but it was amazing. It was a chance to leave my comfort zone and experience the community as is. We slept 9 people to a room on cots with mosquito nets in 99 degree and 99% humidity. Our project was mixing concrete for a building foundation. I realized the value of education because the community didn't value it, as they did not have access to it, nor did it guarantee better employment. We were all soon-to-be college graduates, and it's just expected [to attend college]. What a privilege.

While there, they both had cultural excursions such as dance lessons, zip-lining, and visiting a coffee plantation. They both recognized the privilege of traveling abroad and serving others. It was not taken for granted, as it was an experience very few student-athletes could have. Though there were memorable programs, they also shared with me their struggles to participate in Life Skills programming as well.

“No thanks, but maybe next time.” Though my collaborators were able to recall a memorable program or activity, their involvement in Life Skills programming varied; some only attended an event on occasion while others devoted a significant amount of time to such activities, even assuming SAAC executive board positions and event

coordination. Overall, my collaborators were honest about their lack of participation, and with reflection, now that they had graduated and were in the workforce, shared with me how they should have participated more. However, Justin had a unique justification for his lack of participation in formal programming; yet, he seemed to fulfill his personal and career goals by building a network with individuals outside of the athletics department.

It is well known and practiced among student affairs professionals that incentives encourage college students to participate in programming; food is a very common incentive. This is also the case for encouraging involvement within athletics departments, which is housed under student affairs at some colleges and universities. Tim and Jillian both mentioned being persuaded to attend a Life Skills event or SAAC meeting because of free food. Jillian admitted, “Honestly, the free food is literally why I started going.” Fortunately, Tim’s interest grew beyond the incentive of free food, and he began taking on leadership roles and encouraging his peers to attend. He recalled, “There were times when I felt like I was begging people to attend, but after they came to an event, they were more apt to come back. That felt good” Luckily, for Tim, his ability to build relationships with his peers was valuable, especially when garnering participation for SAAC and Life Skills participation.

Interestingly, Tim also brought up a theory about athletes’ lack of involvement: As driven as student-athletes are, they can be so dang lazy. They don’t have much downtime, so when you have it, you want to have the downtime. So, getting them off their behinds to get to the [event, activity] is like pulling teeth sometimes.

Furthermore, he went on to say:

All athletes, people, in general, are just tired, but athletes are doing so much and they have so much on their plates that when you finally get some time to yourself to take a nap or just relax and decompress, everyone wants to take that moment. In my mind, 95% of the time, you had the time. It's just that this [activity] wasn't a priority.

This sentiment was expressed in some way by each of my collaborators and shared by Life Skills and student-athlete development professionals. Mandating too many programs is a concern because it typically will conflict with an athletic obligation and tends to diminish the value of the activity. Also, students do not feel motivated to attend, nor will they seemingly be willing to take ownership of their way of learning. The very few minutes they do control and can use how they see fit, they like to use in ways that benefit them, at least in the short term. Anyone who has spent time with, worked with, and supported student-athletes knows that they are far from lazy. For context, Jillian described her daily schedule while a student-athlete:

A day in our life, I would wake up at 5:45 a.m., weights from 6:15-7:15 a.m., breakfast with the team at our training table. Then, I would have two classes in the morning from 8:30-11:30 a.m. I would have lunch around noon and then head to practice from 1:00-4:00 p.m. Then, I'd head over to our academic center for two or three hours to work on homework. Then, eat dinner, hang out with friends, if I had time. If I didn't have more homework to finish, I would go to bed [10:00-11:00 p.m.].

Her day, along with the days of all her student-athlete peers, were jammed with academic and athletic-related obligations. There was very little downtime to relax and reenergize. However, when they were given the opportunity to choose what they would like to do, sometimes, the road of least resistance was chosen. For example, the option to catch up on sleep, socialize with friends, or surf the Internet and social media was harder to resist versus choosing to attend a Life Skills activity.

This also pointed out a general skill that many students struggled with, like Tim stated: prioritization. In the moment, the opportunity to catch up on sleep or socialize with friends may be the immediate priority; however, the opportunity to network with potential employers or learn essential interview skills does not seem as important in comparison to sleeping or socializing while still being a student in college. This is not to say that students do not have the ability to prioritize, but the inability to decipher long-term benefits over short-term gratification was apparent while conversing with some of my collaborators. In hindsight, my collaborators were able to verbalize how their lack of participation did not dawn on them until they were preparing to graduate and seeking internships or full-time employment.

Justin's participation in Life Skills was determined by level of motivation and time availability. He said:

For the [programs] that were offered, I was in class until 1:00 p.m. and in practice until 8:00 p.m. every day. It didn't create a lot of opportunity to take advantage of programs, and therefore, I wasn't looking for them.

Admittedly, he also discussed his lack of involvement in the programming provided by the athletics departments at either institution. His undergraduate athletics department lacked the human resources to provide in-depth programming, as the advisors did much of the Life Skills program management. Once he transferred to his graduate institution, the programming was more structured with a dedicated staff; however, Justin chose not to be as involved and continued to gain skills through departments and individuals external to athletics:

For me personally, [Life Skills programming] wasn't high skills programming as much as it was [basic] skills coordination. The program didn't always connect with me, but the people involved did. Meeting people at a high level in a variety of diverse careers, I was exposed to research, pitch competitions, and other professional working events.

His sentiment may be linked to his initial introduction to athletics as a walk-on, as he was not granted access to athletic facility and support staff and initially built relationships with non-athletic support staff, faculty, and general body students. His point of view also spoke to his background, working hard, and being resilient, like his mother. This also translated into how he sought career development opportunities, as he took it upon himself to meet new people, expanding his community, and encountering new experiences outside of athletics. In reflection, Justin stated:

I picked up so many little things that you don't always learn in school through the pursuit of these experiences [outside of Life Skills]. Be exposed to people at a high level and a variety of careers: athletic directors, coaches, business owners,

people in private equity. I wanted to learn and be exposed. I also picked up so many different intentional people skills, communication skills, the ability to persuade, and influence. It was a mixture of exposure, but also prior knowledge and learning.

While talking about his own customized skills development approach, Justin continued to use the words “exposure” or “exposed.” Etymological definitions are an important analysis technique because “the meanings we bring to the surface” are reflected in the words selected to use to describe it (van Manen, 2016, p. 54). Considering the origin of words and their definitions encourage researchers to analyze more deeply and creatively about the lived experience. Hence, the word exposure means “the state of being subject to some effect of influence” (Merriam-Webster, 2019, p. 1). It is often used when discussing subjects about photography (e.g., the negative exposures) or the protection of something (e.g., a social security number should not be exposed). Exposure stems from the Latin words *exponere* and *expositus*, which mean to “put” or “set out.” In Old French, *exposer* to “reveal” and *poser* to “place” (Lexico, 2019). Based on its root meanings, in many ways, Justin purposely “set out” to meet people and be “put” in places to support him in revealing his strengths, best traits, and characteristics. He learned about what he did not like and certain individual challenges as well; it was true exploration. Justin was on the path to career development (Super, 1990).

Conversely, when I asked Jason about his level of participation in Life Skills, he hesitated in responding. Since our conversation was via Skype, I could read his body language; he was looking down, knee-shaking, tapping a pen on the desk. He answered,

“I honestly didn’t go to a lot of them. It wasn’t because I was not able to; they weren’t as beneficial to me, I would say.” Like Justin, Jason had to find his own community and support system because he did not enter the university as a member of the football community his first year. His community, comprised of roommates, faculty, and staff from the business school, were his support base and it carried him throughout his undergraduate career.

Herd mentality. Now that I learned about my collaborators’ participation and reasons for the involvement level they chose, I decided to ask them, in their opinion, about their teammates’ perceptions about Life Skills programming. They each affirmed the level of involvement for many of their teammates and other athletic peers varied greatly; some were just as involved while others were nonexistent. I proceeded to ask, from their perspective, what were some of the reasons for the varying levels of involvement. I found their responses very telling about access and the current structure of intercollegiate athletics.

When asked about her teammates’ and peers’ participation and perceptions of Life Skills programming, Jillian said:

I was probably one of the most involved people. I would have to make an effort to be able to have time to go. There were a couple of other people who were super involved as well. I had a couple of teammates who never went to anything, a couple of teammates who’d go to stuff here and there. I would say it was all over the spectrum.

Tim said:

[From my perspective], I would say their involvement was very mixed, and it varied by team. Women's lacrosse and women's gymnastics were super involved. A majority of the teams would be at the events in some form or another. Whereas football and men's basketball, those sports make a lot of money, were not as involved. Getting involved was very mixed just based off of people's mindset.

The word *mindset* connects back to prioritization, which Tim found to be one of the challenges in persuading his peers to participate, "When people would say they didn't have time, I would think, 'Yeah, you do. Instead of playing Call of Duty for an hour, you could just come [to an event].'" His sentiment was shared by the other collaborators as well. The word *mindset* also signifies an element of social pressure that some student-athletes may feel about attending (or not attending) Life Skills events. Participation is dependent upon the agenda of the activity and who plans to attend. My collaborators believed that for a student-athlete who aspires to continue playing their sport professionally, skills fostered through Life Skills programming are for traditional workspaces and not deemed as important for a professional sports career. To combat the effects of peer persuasion, staff utilize the influence of coaches to encourage participation. When an event attendance is not mandated by the Life Skills professional staff, coaches' support of an event or activity can often increase the likelihood of a student-athlete's attendance.

While discussing peer participation, Mollie revealed that revenue-sport participants were not as involved. She said:

What I saw within my own experiences in participating, there seem to be the same group of student-athletes that were involved in all the different events. There was a group that got a ton out of Life Skills because we were the ones who were motivated and ran with it. But then there was the group who, you know, didn't really get that much because they either didn't, you know, get identified [by coaches or staff] or they didn't step up on their own. So, that is one area where I felt there was that disparity. Either you got a lot out of the experiences, or you got little if you only attended the events that were required.

Mollie's comment about participation and those who may not have been identified and encouraged to participate was enlightening and concerning. It was enlightening to hear her statement, as such leadership programming can propel a student to recognize and assume leadership roles. In Mollie's case, her coaches identified her as a leader, both on and off the field.

However, her comments are also concerning. The same students are afforded the opportunities to be involved in leadership roles. Therefore, those who may benefit most may never participate. The students who are involved in an activity regularly recognize others who participate and those who are absent. The absence of others can be perceived as the activity or event was unimportant. Mollie alluded to the "disparity"; the same students are afforded the opportunity to learn and grow, build a network and skills. The message, though perhaps unintentional, suggests that Life Skills staff and programming foster personal development opportunities for very few students: those identified by coaches and staff or those who naturally gravitate toward student involvement activities.

The assumption is that those who are unable or unwilling to attend will inevitably miss learning opportunities.

It also delves into a deeper issue regarding the funding structure of Division-I athletics. The two sports mentioned by my collaborators as not having attended Life Skills activities often were participants of men's basketball and football. At the Division-I level, athletics departments are responsible for generating revenue, and one of the primary ways they generate funds is through gate receipts, ticket sales; the ticket sales of men's basketball and football account for a significant amount of those revenues (Covell & Walker, 2016). I did not assume that the current structure intentionally precludes these sport participants from fully participating in activities outside of their sport, but given my experience as athletics staff, and the perspectives shared by my collaborators, this may highlight an area that needs further evaluation by athletic leadership.

When I asked Jason about his perception of his teammates' level of Life Skills participation, he added:

You had the individuals who knew the benefit of [the programming]. I think what lacked is the connection of why it was important. It always seemed like an extra thing we had to do. We already had practice. We had to wake up early. We had to study, and now you want us to go to a workshop? The connection that I think was missing in Life Skills [programs] for the student-athlete is they don't see the purpose, the benefit. Plus, it's hard to get 120 guys in a room and let them know that they're going to need this [skill] in the future and why they should take it serious now. I think that's what's lacking [in the programming].

The purpose of Life Skills programming is to support student-athletes in developing competencies necessary for life after sports and enhance their overall college experience (NCAA, 2019f); however, some student-athletes are unable to conceptualize the added value. This leads to a poignant point by Justin, who added:

As far as my teammates, we all came from diverse backgrounds; a majority of which came from very low-income communities. I would say they just didn't have a ton of exposure. They didn't have a sense of urgency or desire because of lack of exposure. A lot of my teammates cared deep down inside, but if I'm honest, I got made fun of a lot because of the choices I made regarding career development. On game days, I would help my teammates tie their ties because they didn't know how or I would help them during my senior season write their resumes. I probably did just as much tutoring as the tutor coordinators and the athletic staff! If you don't see it growing up, it's hard for you to grasp that concept of why [exposure to different experiences] should be important.

The diversity of the athletics community is invaluable. Students come from around the world to participate in college sports in the United States as one avenue to continue education is through sport participation. Justin articulated more about his perspective on exposure; some of the most talented athletes were unable to reach their full potential as a result of lack of exposure to cultural, educational, and social lessons, which could be essential to their success beyond sports. A challenge that he alluded to is the role athletics plays in compensating for socioeconomic disparities. As Justin stated, "They did not know, what they didn't know."

While discussing participation levels of their teammates and peers, Jason and Tim both mentioned the NCAA ads that talk about 99% of student-athletes go pro in another field other than sports. Jason stated, “They hear the numbers; 1% of college athletes are going to make it to the NFL, and they all think they’re going to be that 1%.” His comment emphasized the dreams and aspirations of thousands of student-athletes: to be able to continue playing their respective sport beyond the college years. Institutions like those my collaborators attended knew individuals who pursued the professional ranks. Jason and Justin both wanted to pursue the NFL; Justin had the chance to train with a team, but the likelihood of being selected was very small. Hence, the core function of Life Skills was fostering their potential for success after sports by providing opportunities for student-athletes to learn and gain experiences they otherwise may not have had if it were not for sports.

Each of my collaborators admittedly discussed their challenges to participate in Life Skills programs and activities. Although they each recalled a particular program or event from their Life Skills program that was memorable, their responses were brief and not as detailed in comparison to their athletic experiences. My collaborators, admittedly, were not as involved, given lack of interest, time constraints, and lack of clear purpose in student-athlete programming. It appears that the influence of peers and social pressures were instrumental in their decisions to get involved (or not get involved) in Life Skills, hence, the herd mentality. In hindsight, each collaborator wished they would have had higher participation in the program offerings, especially related to their transition out of college and career development, preparing for their next steps out of college.

A leap of faith. Hearing my collaborators speak about their experiences, both difficult and triumphant, was heartwarming as a higher education professional because I could hear in their voices that they truly enjoyed their time in college. They made lasting friendships and memories to share for the years to come. I hoped to hear the same enthusiasm as they discussed preparing to transition away from sports and away from college life. In what ways did their Life Skills experiences shape their transition out of college? A leap of faith, the fifth theme, delves into these experiences.

In general, some felt “confident, ready, and prepared” to enter the world post-graduation while others were “hesitant, anxious, and fearful.” Each collaborator shared feelings, challenges, and way(s) to cope with the transition. Perception versus reality, what am I going to do now?, and my fake real world are subthemes of the leap of faith. These sections detail factors that hampered or nurtured their transition out of college.

Perception versus reality. For Jillian, as mentioned earlier, community within athletics with teammates and other peers was important to her and she desired to remain connected to softball in some way after school. I asked her how she had spent her time since graduating from college. She said, “I spent some time playing on the national [softball] team and also professionally.” I could tell through the pauses and breaks in her response that she was still grappling with the idea of being away from college and more specifically, softball.

I proceeded to ask her about her graduate school pursuits that she wrote about in her prompt and her steps to pursuing graduate studies. She offered, “I had an older friend who told me about this opportunity. At first, I was not interested.” It was an opportunity

to remain connected to the game of softball as a graduate assistant coach and earn her master's. She continued, "But I went ahead and spoke with the softball coach at the university and I liked her." However, then Jillian sounded like she regretted the decision to go back to school, saying:

But I feel I may have listened to [my friend] too much because it was not what I wanted. I was simply worried about my life after college, not having softball.

That was a big fear for me, and I didn't know what I would be doing. So, for me, it was a safe option because my life would still revolve around softball

Ultimately, she concluded, "I didn't enjoy the college coaching environment. The idea of coaching did not match the realities of coaching. I missed *playing* softball."

For Jillian, in her attempt to delay the inevitable (i.e., not playing softball), she considered an option for graduate school that was not the best option in a pursuit to maintain a connection with softball. The sport was a critical part of her identity. Her story is not unique and is common for thousands and thousands of graduates every May: "Now that I've graduated, what's next"? Though it is an inevitable part of the adult journey, the realization of no longer having a class schedule, an abundance of friends and social opportunities, or their sports routine, did not register for some of my collaborators until after graduation. Jillian said, "It only took me about three weeks to a month to decide to go to graduate school because I didn't have any other options at the time." I then asked her when did she realize graduate school was not the best option. She said:

I was in graduate school from August to early March and realized it was not for me. I was not sure why I chose educational psychology. I liked psychology and

sociology, but not educational psychology; it was not my thing. Also, socially, I went from being around my teammates and friends every single day to being in a place far away from family and friends.

She shared with me that there were no particular Life Skills activity or workshop that helped her find her way out of graduate school, but relationships with friends and family helped her through the transition, as initially, it was difficult to leave behind earning a complimentary degree and stay in a softball environment. “I had to make a decision where I was happy.” It was still an exploratory process for Jillian.

From our conversation, she seemed the least prepared to transition into a life without her sport. Softball provided a sense of belonging and she was still searching for that again. At the time we spoke, she was in the process of moving back closer to family to pursue a newfound interest in the health field. Her transition continues.

“What am I going to do now?” Mollie described her transition out of college, as she still had a drive to compete and finding ways to feel a void. When describing her transition period, she asked, “What am I going to do now?” “You’re wired to perform. . . . You were on a platform. You have fans, a team, and getting recognition. [I had to] find something new, a new dream to really work towards.” Consequently, Mollie continued school and began her MBA immediately after graduation. After completing her MBA, it was four months between graduating and accepting an internship close to the town where she went to school. She shared, “It was lonely, and honestly working a 40-hour job was way easier than the student-athlete schedule.” I asked her to describe how working a 40-hour job was easier than being a student-athlete. She responded, “As a

student-athlete, your entire day is planned out down to the minute. It was like that for five years. Now, I have a lot more time on my hands, but I also don't know what to do with it."

In hindsight, she was grateful for the internship, as it provided a grace period to truly figure out her passion and interest. She added, "I don't really know where I would be if I had gone to get a job and enter the workforce directly after undergrad. I think I'd be on a completely different path." As a finance major, there were several paths she could have chosen: corporate, banking, planning. There is no set path. She used her internship to transition to the position she has today in development and fundraising. Uniquely, her involvement as a student with professional and leadership development programming at her alma mater led her back to the position in that, she was "drawn to the professional development [programs]; leadership, character and diversity initiatives." These programs brought her opportunities to present at speaking engagements and hone her interpersonal skills, "I felt like Life Skills did help me with being polished and to improve my public speaking."

"My fake real world." Per the NCAA manual, Bylaw 12.8.1, student-athletes are permitted five calendar years to complete four years of sport competition and participation (NCAA, 2019b). There are circumstances when a student-athlete may have an additional fifth year to compete: suffer an injury, ability to focus on academic pursuits to acclimate to college life, limited opportunities to play the sport. Given the season-ending injury of his ankle, Tim was able to take advantage of an additional year. It aided in his confidence to move from college to the real world. He explained:

I always called college my fake real world; I was kind of a grown-up, but not really because if something went wrong, there was someone there to help, but in the real work, there's not always going to be someone there to help. You have to figure it out. . . . I got injured my freshman year, so I did not compete that year. Honestly, it helped my transition because if I left [college] after four years, my first "senior year," I would not have been ready. I wouldn't have felt ready. I still wanted to be there; there was more.

His statement about wanting to be there hinted at his desire to remain in a familiar environment, foster a skill set for the workforce, and continue competing. He also appreciated the nurturing environment that is created for student-athletes—being around friends, staff and coaches who provide understanding and extensive support. In ways, as a result of his injury, he took the extra year to seek direction for a career and prepare for his transition out of college.

Tim's journey to pursuing athletics at the highest level also contributed to the challenges he faced when transitioning out of college and into the workforce. He longed for competition. Tim shared, "That's been kind of a hard thing for me post-college in trying to satisfy that competitive aspect." His response speaks to the difficulty many college students face when transitioning away from being in the educational environment. For student-athletes specifically, their days are highly regimented, with almost every hour being filled with an activity. The regimen and preparation of the day culminate in competition—the adrenaline to compete against other student-athletes, the drive within oneself to always do better, and ultimately the desire to win. All my collaborators shared

the same sentiment regarding the time spent in athletic-related activities and the longing to find a competitive replacement after college.

It's a marathon, not a sprint. In addition to the transition out of college, the second part of the Life Skills phenomenon I was most interested in was career development, and how, if at all, Life Skills programming contributed to this aspect of the student's experience. Career-related activities and events are a significant part of the current programming structure for Life Skills. Many of the activities and events my collaborators spoke to or wrote about in their prompts were regarding career programming. As described earlier, though they each could recall a particular program or Life Skills experience in their prompts, when I asked to link their participation in these particular activities to their career development process, they found it difficult to discuss, as their level of participation and involvement varied. For those I Skyped, I could tell by their body language that they either were unsure of how to answer the question or they were hesitant to truthfully state that they were not as involved as they wanted to be or should have been in the Life Skills program.

After conversing with my collaborators, I learned that career readiness was a large component of each department's programming. Career readiness is defined as "the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workforce" (NACE, 2019, p. 1). However, the term career development is very commonly used among Life Skills professionals, which Super (1990) defined as a process; one's ability to build and implement one's self-concept. Hence, my final theme, *It's a marathon, not a sprint*, details my collaborators'

experiences in career development. This section concludes with a subtheme entitled the student tag.

My collaborators discussed networking events with potential employers, resume building workshops, mock interviews, and etiquette dinners as activities that introduced them to a skill set that would be useful after college. One program offered incentives for attending Life Skills events. Students could earn points each time they participated. Students would accumulate points until they could redeem them toward an item that could help them achieve a career or academic goal. Jason gave the example of a student majoring in photography who accumulated enough points toward a new camera lens to be used for a class project. Another student redeemed his points for materials to assist with a major research project. Jason exclaimed, “It was a great incentive to be involved with Life Skills.” These workshops, seminars, and activities reflect the hard work and dedication from Life Skills staff to offer programming that is outside of the realm of sports and academics in preparation for the transition out of college and into their careers.

Tim brought up an important point when preparing for the career development journey. He stated, “I think my school did a really good job of preparing us to leave. You can only be so prepared until you actually experience it because there’s so many things that they [Life Skills staff] can’t prepare you for.” I asked him to explain:

I felt comfortable when I got my job, going to work, and feeling like I go to work overdressed. Being a college athlete prepared me to manage my time because if you don’t, you’re going to sink. But Life Skills programming couldn’t prepare me for living on my own or living life *without* college.

The world's fastest runners routinely run a 100-yard dash, a commonly known sprint distance, in less than 10 seconds. Like a sprint, the skill set that is associated with much of the career readiness programming—promotion of self, interpersonal skills, professional dress, exposure to industry, networking building—does not prepare students for their own career journey. It is structured to introduce students quickly to many competencies in a condensed amount of time. However, career development is similar to a marathon. It is not a destination. It is a journey that takes time and persistence, a journey that changes depending on one's role in life and self-concept. Since my collaborators were just at the beginning of their career journeys, I came to realize that it was unfair to ask about career development. Super (1990) suggested that development comes with maturity and life experience. I strongly agree.

Four of my collaborators had varying degrees of exposure to activities to garner career readiness competencies as detailed in Chapter Two. However, of all the collaborators, I found Justin to be truly on a career development path. He embraced the non-traditional route to being a student-athlete and throughout his time in college, he had organized multiple informal informational interviews with individuals he wanted to meet or was interested in their job position. For example, Justin stated, "I had at least one hundred professional informational interviews. I even left practice early to drive to Indianapolis to meet with an individual at the NCAA simply to learn more about the organization." After a six-month pursuit of the NFL, he quickly returned to the sidelines as a college coach, "I found myself really enjoying the conversations and connection aspect of what I did as a coach more than the game itself." He then ventured from the

sidelines to administrative responsibilities, but quickly learned that he could touch more students by working for himself as an entrepreneur, “Not everyone supported the idea [of working for myself], but it’s something I believed in.” Justin stated that his journey post-college was unconventional, but he reflected on the many choices he made by saying, “I didn’t allow athletic identity to determine my curiosity.”

Justin could see himself in more than a football helmet and pads; he wished more of his teammates could have envisioned life beyond the field as well. He understood that even if he made an NFL roster, he would eventually have to move beyond the field, “I believe there’s a 70/20/10 theory; 70% of learning comes through experience, 20% comes from other people, and 10% of learning comes from the classroom setting.” Through the myriad of experiences he made for himself, he made the decision early in his collegiate career to “show up and be present.” Though his experiences were primarily outside the scope of the Life Skills programs at his alma maters, Justin intentionally sought opportunities to be present and gain skills that continue to benefit him along his career path.

For the others, overall, participation in career-related activities was not deemed as important as their involvement in their sport. While in college, most expressed an inability to link the programming to how it would prepare them for a career and wished they would have attended more of the events and activities hosted by the departments. Like a marathon, career development requires continual attention, dedication, and time. Yet, my collaborator’s approach to development was more like a sprint—quick and short amounts of time. Tim and Mollie, who were the most involved in SAAC and Life-Skills-

related activities, did not fully recognize the importance of the activities at the time. However, Jason recognized the value of simply being a student, leveraging the title to improve career readiness and the exploration phase of his journey.

“The student tag.” Merriam-Webster defined a student as a scholar, learner, one who attends a school, who studies (Merriam-Webster, 2019). This definition is a label that some of my collaborators described as an advantage in relation to feeling better prepared to transition from college. Jason learned the value of being a student; he referred to it as the student tag:

When you’re a student, everybody wants to help you out as you’re in school; you’re not a threat. Use that to your advantage, as it could help set you up in the long run. The moment you graduate, everyone gets a little quiet with the information they have, as you are now a competitor.

I asked him when he knew he could use the student label to his advantage. He said:

I don’t think I realized it until graduate school, as my teachers kept saying it. It was the first time I experienced that and it made sense. If I would’ve known freshman or sophomore year, I would have spoken with a business professional. I might have known that certain paths might not have been for me and possibly found my way a little earlier.

Jason recognized that an advantage that students have is the title of student. Most of the opportunities to garner the experiences he needed to secure a job successfully, he discovered in his capacity as a student.

From my collaborators' perspectives, the Life Skills program structure introduced them to skills that were pertinent for their transition and career development; however, like a sprint, the skill introductions were brief and quick. Staff may have failed to emphasize the importance of continual involvement and nurturing of new skills.

Summary of Findings

In their own words, my collaborators provided insight into their unique journeys as student-athletes and their perceptions and experiences in Life Skills programming at their institutions. Whether as scholarship recipients or walk-ons, athletics participation played a significant role in how they built community and dealt with setbacks throughout their collegiate careers. These setbacks were the catalyst for seeking and discovering other areas of interest and involvement, including Life Skills programs but were mediated by peer influence. My conversations revealed that though some participated in Life Skills activities and events, their career development journey, however, was still in its beginning stages. Based on scholarly work, the final chapter provides a more in-depth analysis and reflection of the established themes to illuminate further, on a macro level, the experiences my collaborators shared with me.

Chapter Five—The Structure, Essence, Discussion, and Conclusion

In my final chapter, I discuss the meaning or essence of the experiences my collaborators shared in the previous chapter. It is important to note again that hermeneutic phenomenology leaves room for interpretation and the lens in which I, the researcher, view the phenomena. In Chapter Three, I openly acknowledged my positionality as an athletic department practitioner, while in Chapter Four, I detailed my collaborators' collegiate experiences. Now, I intend to unpack the essence of my collaborators' experiences in Life Skills, broader issues in higher education, and recommendations related to their transition out of college and into career development.

Though Life Skills and student-athlete development programming are widely offered at NCAA member institutions, little is known about the experiences of student-athletes who participate in said programming. The purpose of this study was to illuminate, through my collaborators' eyes, their experiences in the programming while gaining a better understanding of the activities and events pertaining to their transition out of college and into their career development. It is my hope that my findings improve the policy and practices at the institutional level to best assist our student-athletes with two pivotal parts of their development journey.

My research questions were:

1. What is the structure of experiences and perceptions of former NCAA Division-I student-athletes in Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programs?
2. What is the essence of former student-athletes' experiences in Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programming regarding their career development and transition out of college?

The Structure: Key Points from Essential Themes

According to van Manen (2016), the essential themes illuminate the structure of the phenomenon. My collaborators were very vocal about their experiences as student-athletes. Their journeys to become great athletes was a testament to their perseverance, drive, and desire to accomplish the goal of not only becoming a Division-I student-athlete; it was the realization of representing others—family, friends, communities—who had supported their dream of attending college and participating in sport at the highest collegiate level. They were living the dream for themselves and others. It is important to note that their experiences prior to entering college were influential in how they viewed and participated in Life Skills activities.

Justin and Jason were also quickly introduced to the business side of intercollegiate athletics (e.g., the management, structure, revenue generation). The student-athlete hierarchy as the recruitment process did not materialize for some of my collaborators, an eye-opening experience that paved an unexpected path through the walk-on process. Though little is known about the experience of walk-ons, based on my collaborators' words, the walk-on process does differ from the scholarship recruitment process. For some walk-on student-athletes, this status may impede their ability to fully

participate in Life Skills activities. Nonetheless, both Jason and Justin were introduced to the stark difference between high school and Division-I athletics: increased time demands, athletic obligations, and pressures to perform (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Feltz et al., 2013) though they had limited access to resources to foster their success.

Therefore, relationships were essential and central to their ability to navigate the athletics department and university life. Building community was pivotal to their sense of belonging and supports Bridges' (2019) disidentification aspect of the ending phase, especially as the uncertainties of college life arose. For instance, Justin spoke specifically about the challenges he had in building connections with his coaching staff. His experience was a factor Weiss and Robinson (2013) found when studying reasons student-athletes leave their sport. They posited the coach and student-athlete relationship is primary to a student-athlete's decision to remain on a team. Fortunately, Justin persevered in finishing his degree and maintaining his position on the football roster with the mentorship of faculty and role models from outside the athletics department. The essence of cadence was needed to find trust and rapport; relationships with faculty, mentors, especially teammates and coaches were vital when they experienced a hurdle, and for some, these connections propelled my collaborators to pursue Life Skills activities.

Ultimately, the uncertainties or hurdles—an injury, a loss of a scholarship, a loss of a connection with a coach, missing a spot on the team roster—were a large portion of my collaborator's telling words. They each experienced a period during their career in which sports were temporarily taken away. It was also a glimpse into how life would be

at the conclusion of college, as only Justin and Jillian would participate in their respective sports after college. Their professional athletic careers were brief. The hurdles opened doors to explore other avenues outside of athletics, and Life Skills was one extracurricular activity within athletics. Hurdles also prompted participants to recognize qualities in themselves that they may not have previously realized (Chen, et al., 2010; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Loughhead, et al., 2006). The hurdles, in retrospect, were essential to their growth and development as young adults, preparing for the next phase in their career journey and life.

The Essence of Life Skills

The essence is the essential structure, nature, or general experience of something (van Manen, 2016; Walters, 1995). It is important to note that the interpretation is representative of my collaborators' experiences in Life Skills throughout their collegiate careers. Most student-athletes are recruited to the institution for athletic purposes. Concerning athletics, one of my collaborators stated, "it's a really, really cool vehicle that opens the door for education." The athletic obligations and responsibilities that a student-athlete participates in are centered around attaining present-day goals; the regimen of athletics fosters an environment to learn skills such as self-discipline and teamwork, but the ultimate goal is bringing notoriety and accolades to self, the athletic program, and the university community. The activities that come with athletic participation—travel, practice, film review, workouts, and training—were deemed necessary, mandatory, and obligatory by my collaborators to reach the aspirations and goals set by oneself, team, and university.

Life Skills, conversely, prioritizes future goals; one's ability to garner a skill set that will propel one to confidently transition out of college and (in most cases) live a life that is no longer dominated by sports activity. Though my collaborators had varying degrees of Life Skills participation, from very little to regular attendance, the programming itself was deemed optional, voluntary, and trivial in relation to their status as students, and more importantly, student-athletes.

The conclusion of their collegiate athletic careers was inevitable; some came to this realization earlier than others. Some experienced physical injuries, while others made decisions that required them to relinquish their athletic careers earlier than expected. Regardless of the factor(s) that led to this conclusion, my collaborators were faced with the reality that participation in sports would no longer be a significant part of their lives. Hence, the search for ways to channel their innate desire to compete and belong; for some, Life Skills, served in this capacity.

Initially, Life Skills was viewed as a time filler (or waster). A set of activities they participated in until they could return to their respective sport or a way to maintain that sense of routine and connection to the individuals and activities they enjoyed. It was a way to stay connected to the original activity that brought them to the institution, sports. Along the way, some realized the skills and competencies they were introduced to through these programs were meaningful and helped them achieve both short- and long-term goals: preparing for a job interview, crafting a resume, traveling abroad, building lifelong relationships, and service. The most difficult part to listen to my collaborators describe was their inability to recognize the importance of Life Skills before the

inevitable happened (e.g., injury, graduation). Hence, the transition period from college to the next opportunity, or the time spent in the neutral zone, as Bridges (2019) would say, lasted longer than expected. Many factors led to my collaborators' entrance into the neutral zone, and subsequently, they each wished they would have been more involved in Life-Skills-related activities, more focused on long-term goals, but it simply was not a priority at the time. They were pouring their energy into athletics.

Athletic activities were viewed as mandatory; Life Skills activities were viewed as optional. It was secondary to their own personal development until they recognized the fleeting status of college sports participation. As one collaborator stated, "I was not the exception; I was the rule."

Reflection on Collaborators' Broader Experiences in Higher Education

The experiences my collaborators shared with me also illuminated overarching issues. First, some of the historical, systemic challenges within higher education were revealed during their experiences. There has been a significant number of research studies on the perceptions of faculty regarding student-athletes (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007; Tovar, 2013); most have examined the population from a deficit approach. Jason was experiencing discrimination based on his status as a Black male student, a student-athlete, and a football player at a predominantly white institution. He was steadfast in his desire to earn a business degree at a university that did not see many like him in pursuit of that particular degree. From his perspective, he not only felt the pressures to perform well given his multiple identities, but he also felt that if he did *not* perform well, then he

would affirm the thoughts his faculty had already shared with him; he did not belong, he was not smart or determined enough. These pressures and thoughts felt by Jason also illustrate Stereotype Threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). As noted earlier, his hesitance to take sports-related coursework stemmed from the fear of affirming thoughts regarding student-athletes who enroll and take interest in such subjects and courses.

Despite some of the comments he heard from faculty and staff, he earned both his undergraduate and graduate degrees in business. Unfortunately, his experience is not unique, especially for many who have similar backgrounds to Jason, and his situation reaffirms student-athlete bias held by faculty in the classroom (Comeaux, 2010; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Simons et al., 2007; Tovar, 2013). The need for full inclusion is a continual fight for minoritized students and must be a priority for all stakeholders in the field of higher education.

Second, it also highlighted the realities of intercollegiate athletics as a business. For instance, the differences in coach interactions and allotted resources based on the type of recruitment (athletic-in-aid recipient verses a walk-on). Little is known about the experiences of walk-ons in intercollegiate athletics, but my collaborators who experienced it both pointed out their feelings of disconnect and the relationship hierarchy that existed between coaches and student-athletes based on the monetary investment. This was their primary motivation to seek community and cadence in other areas outside of athletics.

Another topic that reiterates intercollegiate athletics as a business is the ill-advisement by academic advisors of student-athletes throughout the major selection

process. Even Adler and Adler (1985) found the men's basketball student-athletes they mentored were not receiving adequate academic advice, leading some to be significantly short in credits when the time came to apply for graduation. This example may sound extreme under today's NCAA academic standards and policies. However, the problems of ill-advised student-athletes still persist.

In Jason's case, he was not a scholarship student-athlete. Therefore, his academic progress was not monitored as closely as his scholarship counterparts; however, this did not negate the advisor's caution to allow him to take business courses. His advisor's approach also included an assumption he would not be successful based on race and sport affiliation. Furthermore, it alludes to the tendency for athletic academic advisors to advise toward majors that are more conducive to the athletic schedule, a schedule that allows for more flexibility for course times and elective selection (Feltz et al., 2013; Terrell, 2012). Some of the advisement is purely based on the foreseen time demands of playing a sport. Therefore, some student-athletes are steered away from certain majors and funneled into others for simplicity of advisement practices, to increase the likelihood of maintaining eligibility and avoiding too many time conflicts between academics and athletics (Feltz et al., 2013; Navarro, 2015; Terrell, 2012; Wolverton, 2014). For example, disciplines such as business may not allow for as much autonomy when building a semester course schedule around weekly practice, training, and competition activities. The alternative is to persuade a student to consider majors that will allow for a flexible schedule. These conversations reaffirm the emphasis on athletics over academics.

It should also be mentioned that ill-advisement can hinder the quality of a student-athlete's educational experience. When student-athletes are dissuaded from pursuing their major of choice, it ultimately hinders their educational quality, career development, and overall personal development as an individual (Navarro, 2015; Terrell, 2012; Wolverton, 2014).

Also, the business model of intercollegiate athletics emphasizes the time and daily routine required to maintain dominance in the Division-I space. Therefore, services—advising, Life Skills programs, community service, and experiential learning experiences (e.g., study abroad, internships)—are appreciated, as long as they do not interfere with athletic-related activities and obligations (e.g., training, meetings, practice travel, competition). NACE has strongly recommended experiential-based learning such as internships and study abroad to build career competencies (Salvadge, 2019). These types of experiences are essential to students gaining skills that are transferrable to a professional work setting; however, the emphasis for athletes, especially at the Division-I level, is on athletic competition and revenue generation (Covell & Walker, 2016; Sack, 2008). This factor played a role in my collaborators' inability to thoroughly engage in Life Skills programs at their respective institutions, as they were all representatives of autonomy (i.e. Power Five) conferences.

Though the intense and crowded athletic schedule was found to create discipline and time management skills (Melendez, 2007), it also hindered athletes' ability to take full advantage of the non-athletic activities offered in their athletics departments. Very early mornings, very late nights, multiple hours of daily practice, and travel away from

campus are required and expected of all student-athletes. As a result of the regimented athletic obligations, there was little autonomy in their own schedules. Therefore, when given one moment to choose their involvement, some student-athletes opted for activities that seemed mundane or unproductive at the given moment (e.g., check social media or socialize with friends). This was the rationale behind Tim's comment about student-athletes being lazy; they are far from lazy, but when an athlete has an opportunity to control part of the daily schedule, short-term temptations step in. If they do have some downtime, for many, their preference is to relax. This is consistent with scholars who have studied the schedules that many student-athletes maintain (Beamon, 2008; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012; Simons et al., 1999). Class, workouts, practice, and competition leave very little room for Life Skills participation and career development opportunities (Adler & Adler, 1985; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Navarro, 2014; Simons et al., 1999).

It was also difficult for my collaborators to link how a particular student-athlete development activity could be beneficial in the long term. For instance, resumes are important, but for student-athletes who are not working a formal job, crafting a resume, as an undergraduate student, may not be deemed important. This can especially be the case for those whose goal is to remain in athletics and matriculate to the professional level. At the time, their athletic participation was deemed most important to propel them to the professional ranks. When given the opportunity, there is a lack of understanding of the importance of nurturing career competencies through Life Skills programs related to long term goals and career development.

Fortunately, I had two collaborators who played football, and based on their perspective, it was apparent that they would be the least likely to participate in student-athlete development activities because of the athletic-related time demands, which was to their detriment. My collaborators who participated in football both hinted that many of their teammates were uninvolved and did not understand the importance of activities outside of their sport. This type of reasoning can be linked to the negative effects of athletic identity, and possibly athletic foreclosure (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008). This level of identity foreclosure and lack of exposure to activities outside of athletics prevented them from making alternate plans in case their dreams of playing professionally were not realized. It also speaks to the priority placed on a student-athletes' athletic performance while participating in Division-I sports.

Finally, the athletic identity, for most student-athletes, is a core quality of who they are (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Robinson, 2015). It was difficult for my collaborators to envision the importance of participating in a nonsport-related activity (i.e., a Life Skills program) when most of their other activities were sport-related. Their reasoning for not participating serves as an example of how student-athletes' worldviews are synonymous with sports participation. Robinson (2015) stated, "Most collegiate officials believe having a degree, internship experience, and a resume are enough preparation for the exiting student-athlete. [They] do not address the thoughts, feelings, behavior, or worldview of the student-athlete regarding sports participation and exiting athletic identity" (p. 83).

“Not the exception, but the rule.” The NCAA circulates commercials during the men’s basketball tournament that takes place in the spring, better known as March Madness. They depict the multitude of student-athletes who “go pro,” as the commercial states, in areas outside of sports. Though less than 2% are afforded the opportunity to play their sport at the professional level, how prepared are the other roughly 98% to make the transition out of college into the workforce?

Despite the ambiguous direction of Life Skills related to its universal implementation at the institutional level, it is mutually accepted among intercollegiate athletics professionals that such programming is vital for the well-being of student-athletes. Tim’s sentiment of “being the rule” reiterates this notion. The NCAA commercial emphasized that most student-athletes pursue careers outside of sports. Tim was aware that his future would not include track and field; however, the realities of that transition, a life after sports, were challenging.

The “exception” refers to the very narrow path for few student-athletes who are extraordinarily and athletically skilled to pursue sports professionally. The commercialism that surrounds revenue-generating sports would suggest that these participants are almost all destined to become exceptions. Whereas the “rule” refers to the inevitable path that exists for most student-athletes: they will study, participate in a sport, then graduate, leaving little room for pursuing sports beyond the college level. Life Skills programming is designed for the “rule,” for student-athletes to gain a foundation of basic career competencies to transition out of college and live a life not as an athlete. Based on my collaborators’ experiences, they eventually realized they were

the definition of the rule as they etched closer to graduation or experienced an unanticipated athletic setback. Despite the NCAA commercials, many student-athletes still ignore the reality of not playing their sport at the professional level. Therefore, the idea of attending a Life Skills program may be a symbol of, or the acceptance of, failure; succumbing to the reality of not becoming a professional athlete. Robinson (2015) spoke to this population as he discussed the transition out of sports and the significance of the athlete's worldview.

Career development vs. career readiness. It is important to discuss my initial research question to explore Life Skills programming related to career development. Super (1990) defined career development as one's ability to build and implement one's self-concept or understanding of self. Career readiness was defined by NACE (2019) as "the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workforce" (p. 1). Of NACE's eight competencies, athletic participation tends to foster some, such as work ethic, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and leadership traits. Based on my conversations with my collaborators, I concluded that the current structure of Life Skills programming (i.e., student-athlete development) facilitates career-readiness competencies as defined by NACE such as professionalism, leadership, career management, and global/intercultural fluency. Fortunately, my collaborators were given opportunities to participate in programming, introducing them to these skills. However, these competencies are not career development as defined by Super (1990). Despite most athletics departments referring to said programming as career development, Super (1990) found that

development is a continuous process dependent on one's role (e.g., father, son, student) and self-concept (how one views himself or herself). For instance, a traditional, full-time student, between the ages of 18-22, may feel prepared to explore employment opportunities without geographical boundaries as they have the confidence in self and the autonomy to relocate and establish their career without the obstacles of a family. For student-athletes, he or she may participate in the draft or combine event, showcasing their physical talents and abilities. This is an act to declare their interest in establishing a professional level sports career. Their role as a student-athlete determines their ability to explore this career path as an option.

Super's definition is important to note, as the tenure of a student-athlete's career is typically four to five years; this is the time for exploration. However, the current structure for Life Skills programs takes a macro approach, large programs with generic overviews of career topics, to quickly introduce student-athletes to career readiness competencies throughout their time in college. My collaborators recalled such macro-structured programming during their experience—networking nights, etiquette dinners, resume building workshops—to gain skills necessary for their transition into the workforce.

The concern with the macro programming approach is that it fails to recognize that one size does not fit all. There are varying degrees of knowledge and diversity in the background and experiences of the student-athletes within an athletics department. Justin mentioned this when he was discussing the exposure or lack of exposure for some of his teammates. For instance, he did not think the Life Skills programming was as beneficial

for him, as he had gained much of his career readiness competencies through the examples of his mother's strong work ethic and the relationships he built outside of athletics. However, he still realized that many of his teammates would have benefited from participating, but they did not recognize its importance for two reasons: (1) they came from environments that did not foster being inquisitive outside of the athletic arena and (2) their athletic identity inherently prevented them from recognizing the need to be exposed to programming that could be beneficial to their transition and career pursuits (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008). Many of them aspired to play football professionally and had not considered the reality of their failure to do so.

The three groups of student-athletes: The benched players, the rookies, and the starting lineup. Overall, I am confident that athletic identity and athletic time demands played a role in Justin's teammates' decisions not to participate, and as found in previous studies, hampered their transition and career readiness (LaForge & Hodge, 2011; Navarro, 2015; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015). Justin did mention that some of the Life Skills programming would, at times, overlap with practice times. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the programming for my collaborators did not overlap with practice, class, travel, or competition, and they did not attend programs as they should have. Why? Based on my collaborators' experiences, I was able to pinpoint three groups of students: the benched players, the rookies, and the starting lineup.

In the article, *Inhabit the Gap*, Komives (2000) discussed how individuals know what they *should* do, but still, their behaviors and actions do not reflect their knowledge. One of the examples used to explain this phenomenon was eating habits; though it is best

to eat leafy greens and whole grains, many individuals continue to eat foods filled with fats and sugar. Simply knowing food items that define a healthy diet does not equate to actually performing the action of eating said items. Her example translates to partially understanding the lack of Life Skills involvement for my collaborators and some of their peers. A behavioral change must occur.

Deci and Ryan (1985) defined intrinsic motivation as completing a task or activity for the sake of doing it. Three components of intrinsic motivation are autonomy (the choice to complete a task), mastery (the confidence to complete it), and connection (the feeling of purpose) Kinley & Ben-Hur, 2015). Though Kinley and Ben-Hur's (2015) work was specifically about employees in the workplace, it is transferrable to student-athletes. These characteristics—autonomy, mastery, and connection—were clearly defined.

In ways, my collaborators mimicked benched players; those who know all the plays and strategies to win, but the coach has to take them out of the game for lack of performance and not executing appropriately on gameday. For Life Skills, they understand the importance and its purpose for introducing them to skills they will later utilize to transition out of college and into the workforce; however, some student-athletes fail to act and participate despite knowing the importance of such programming. Ironically, these same student-athletes gravitate toward activities that enhance their athletic performance and, at times, have difficulty translating their skills into a different environment. These behaviors—the early mornings, late nights, daily workouts, and practice—attributed and naturally suited the prominence of the athletic identity

(Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Robinson, 2015). Therefore, students who relate to this description would benefit most from individualized career-related assessments to reach their personal goals and aspirations; they seek autonomy and ownership in this process.

Second, rookies are brand new to the entire intercollegiate athletics system; the style of play, the culture, their teammates, and coaches are all unfamiliar to them. They must learn a great deal quickly. These are the student-athletes that Justin pointed out who simply do not know the importance of gaining career readiness competencies, as they simply have not been exposed to mentors, activities, or environments that encouraged such exploration. This population may also be more susceptible to identity foreclosure and the idea of a life solely *with* sports. The height of one's athletic identity can impede one's ability to nurture other identities (Brewer et al., 1993; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Petitpas & O'Brien, 2008), making the transition out of sport difficult (Beamon, 2008).

While talking with my collaborators, I concluded their level of athletic identity was high given the prominence of sports at the highest Division-I level. This level of competition also contributed to feelings of grief, loss, and sadness during a time of transition away from their sport for student-athletes (Falls & Wilson, 2013; Fuller, 2014). The notion that some student-athletes are simply not interested in Life Skills programming may be an unfair description. Therefore, rookies would benefit most from programming that focuses on building a knowledge base, introducing the long-term purposes for Life Skills. Also, building their connection and exposure to introductory career-readiness competencies is important at the beginning of their journey. Like some of Justin's teammates, perhaps those who relate with the rookie profile simply do not

know what they should know. I maintain that these are the student-athletes who would benefit most from early intervention Life Skills programming.

Finally, there is a third group who is reluctant to attend Life Skills programs as well, the starting lineup. These student-athletes have mastered their craft well enough to be the players a coach calls upon to begin every game. They often serve as mentors to other teammates. They are knowledgeable and confident, and in ways, have surpassed the basic skills needed to excel in the sport; they are ready to be challenged, athletically. This is the group with whom Justin was affiliated; student-athletes who have been exposed prior to college to some of the foundational career readiness skills and competencies generally introduced through traditional Life Skills programming. He did not find the existing programming meaningful, therefore, he did not make a concerted effort to participate. Robinson (2015) spoke about this specifically as it pertained to student-athlete programming. It may not be as effective if the programming is inconsistent and not purposeful. Justin's perceptions and experiences would affirm this notion and suggest that the current programming does not capture the varying backgrounds and experiences of its students, nor provide a progressive curriculum to build skills beyond basic competencies. Student-athletes who relate to the starting lineup profile would benefit most from mastery in activities and experimental learning experiences; opportunities to practice and apply their skill set. They could also be instrumental in a peer mentorship capacity; to encourage their peers to participate in Life Skills, share the benefits of preparing for the transition out of college and learn career-readiness competencies.

So Now What?

From a policy and student well-being perspective, it is advantageous to continue Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programming; however, not in its current state. It is also important that Life Skills practitioners provide purposeful, timely programming that is truly meeting the needs of the population served. These recommendations should promote behavioral change, leading to intrinsic motivation and a desire for further exploration.

The first recommendation is to embrace the shift in communicating with student-athletes about events and activities in Life Skills. My collaborators understood the programming was important, but in addition to time conflicts, it was not always presented in the most appealing manner. Therefore participation, in some ways, was deemed optional. Today, social media has transformed the way in which our society communicates, and most student-athletes have a social media presence. Platforms such as Instagram and Twitter provide spaces for live events, virtual chats, short films, and podcasts, allowing student-athletes to access micro-experiences at their leisure and in a digestible manner. Large-scale programs – networking nights, guest speakers – are important, but often times do not take into consideration the diversity in learning styles and challenges of planning around athletic obligations. Also, large-scale events can present human and financial hurdles at limited resource institutions. Therefore, social media platforms can alleviate some barriers to implementation, provide participation analytics for assessment, and allow practitioners to inform and engage student-athletes

quickly in ways they have grown accustomed. When used effectively, social media can increase communication and participation.

The second recommendation supports the need to facilitate purposeful events and activities specifically targeting student-athletes who participate in the revenue-generating sports of football and men's and women's basketball. Though they are extremely talented from an athletic perspective, many revenue-generating sport participants may resemble characteristics of a rookie in relation to leaving their sport and gaining tangible experiences towards career development. It was evident through my conversations with my collaborators who participated in revenue-generating sports that their sport activities were their priority. Moreover, my collaborators who did not participate in a revenue-generating sport noticed the disconnect and lack of participation in Life Skills activities from their revenue-generating sport counterparts. Tim specifically recalled seeing his counterparts from lacrosse and gymnastics during SAAC events, but his counterparts from football and basketball were visibly absent. According to the literature, it is evident that the pressures to win within a revenue generating program are substantial (Beamon, 2008; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Covell & Walker, 2016), but the societal cost are even greater for its participants who are ill-prepared to transition away from the sport into a career (Adler & Adler, 1985; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Navarro, 2014; Simons et al., 1999).

Therefore, early and continual interventions – summer programming, strength and career assessments, individual mentorship – with revenue-generating student-athletes are key. Coaches and Life Skills coordinators must be transparent and realistic about the effects of athletic identity, athletic foreclosure, and the low probabilities of playing

professionally, while providing ways to explore career alternatives. Additionally, educational opportunities for those who are seeking to play professionally should be presented as well. The development of student-athletes is a community effort; a unified message to the participants of the revenue-generating sports that their participation in activities beyond sports is very important and vital to their successful transition out of college and career development.

Student affairs professionals often discuss the holistic development of students; administrators play an important role in this development process. Therefore, as a third recommendation, athletic directors and university presidents must feel empowered to hire coaching staffs with resumes that demonstrate a commitment to student-athletes' development beyond the game. I refer to them as holistic coaches who not only understand winning on the field of play, but they also prioritize the importance of their student-athletes being exposed to opportunities related to their career development and preparation to transition away from college and the sport. The amount of time spent on athletic-related activities limits their time spent with career-readiness programming. My collaborators' experiences not only confirmed the literature in the area of time demands (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Simons et al., 1999), their stories also spoke to their need to be introduced early and often to said programming within the parameters of their sport. A hurdle should not be the main impetus to seeking ways to garner skills for transition and career. Though time demands of athletics will continue to present challenges for Life Skills, coaches who are willing to allot time for team-oriented Life Skills activities –

workshops and speakers – alongside their daily athletic activities serve as an example of the coach's commitment to the overall development of their student-athletes.

Experiential learning opportunities (e.g. shadowing, internships, study abroad, community service) can increase one's confidence in transitioning out of college, providing space to discover a new and exciting identity (Bridges, 2019). Coaches must encourage and allocate time for their student-athletes to take advantage of valuable experiential learning opportunities throughout their careers. A concerted effort must be made by athletic leadership at the institutional and national levels to ensure student-athletes can take time away from their athletic obligations, especially during summer and holiday breaks built into the academic calendar, to nurture interests beyond sports. All five of my collaborators spoke of their experiences either with internships, study abroad, or community services that made a significant influence on how they began to think about life outside of sport. Coaches should be the biggest advocates of such experiences.

A fourth recommendation is to discontinue Life Skills programming that is solely managed and implemented by athletics departments. An interdepartmental approach would increase transparency and collaboration efforts among historically siloed areas on a university campus. It is important to note that some athletics departments have previously offered or currently offer formal credit-bearing Life Skills courses in an effort to integrate career-related activities into the athletic space and increase exposure for student-athletes. Though these formal courses can complement the structure that student-athletes are accustomed to throughout their day, fewer departments are offering such courses because of human and financial constraints, which can affect the quality of the

curriculum offerings, and adversely isolate student-athletes from the overall college environment. Therefore, collaborative efforts between the institution's departments of athletics, student services' professionals, and academic affairs' professionals could build rapport, share resources, illuminate the realities student-athletes face on their respective college and university communities, and the need for formalized curriculum.

For example, a three-credit course that includes opportunities for micro-experiences, experiential learning, and competency development would demonstrate an institution's serious commitment to address the developmental gaps within the student-athlete experience as it relates to their transition and career development. Not only should the course objectives align with the mission and values of the departments involved in its construction, its curriculum should be scaffold throughout their four-year career, to assess their needs and prioritize the specific issues that student-athletes encounter as it relates to their academic and athletic journey: major exploration, challenges with time demands, athletic identity, importance of career development, and preparedness for the transition out of college. In addition to the interdepartmental partnerships, it is imperative that collaboration efforts involve both coaches and Life Skills staff, who play pivotal roles in the overall holistic development of student-athletes. A formal curriculum can also help increase intrinsic motivation, especially when thinking about the types of student-athletes being served (e.g. rookies, benched players, and starting lineup).

Ultimately, in order to introduce a comprehensive curriculum to member institutions in an objective way, financial and human resources must be addressed.

Currently, resources vary greatly among athletics departments with vastly different approaches to introducing student-athletes to Life Skills. Based on my collaborators' experiences, those who benefited most participated in departments that had professional staff who were solely responsible for Life Skills, as their primary focus was on the creation and implementation of the programming. Also, they were able to offer individualized services and genuine assistance to student-athletes to identify their strengths, interests, and transferrable skills.

Therefore, to establish consistency and best practices across member institutions, the fifth and final recommendation is that the NCAA must formally reclaim Life Skills programming from a promotional, programmatic, and financial standpoint. The current state of Life Skills as a formalized structure is uncertain. This level of investment would symbolize that the NCAA is truly vested in the holistic development and futures of its student-athletes beyond athletics. For example, since the establishment of the universally implemented APR measures for degree progress and attainment in 2003, the NCAA has seen exponential improvements in the areas of matriculation, retention, progression, and graduation of its student-athletes. Why not the same investment for Life Skills? From a policy perspective, this level of commitment from the NCAA would not only reassure consistency in staffing and program offerings, it would help level the playing field, providing a benchmark for the programmatic components all student-athletes should experience during their collegiate career.

Future Research

This study explored the essence of former student-athletes in Life Skills programming. The participants selected for the study all participated in Division-I programs from within an autonomy (i.e. Power Five) conference. Future studies should explore the experiences of student-athletes from within one conference. Since the current structure varies greatly among member institutions, an ideal study could compare the different models of Life Skills programs being utilized to identify best practices for similar athletic departments.

A similar study could take place at the other levels, Division-II and III, to see how differing division missions influence career development. Also, exploring the topic from a longitudinal perspective, delving into the student-athletes' experiences from matriculation to graduation in Life Skills. It would also be fruitful to specifically investigate the experiences of men's and women's basketball players and Life Skills programming. I was unable to find a former men's or women's basketball student-athlete for my study; this may suggest that the level of participation in Life Skills was lower for these two sports at these respective universities. There were two other areas that need more research: mental health and student-athletes with disabilities. These two populations have received more visibility in the field and there is a need to understand the experiences of student-athletes within these two subgroups in Life Skills programming and how best it could serve them is essential.

In 2019, the NCAA's Board of Governors, unanimously voted to reevaluate its position on its name, likeness and image policy for student-athletes (Osburn, 2019).

Though the legislation is still in progress, an empirical study would be beneficial, measuring the impact of name, likeness, and image on a student-athlete's participation in career-related Life Skills programming. This type of study could shape how programming can address the future challenges related to the career development of those student-athletes who will benefit most from the new name, likeness, and image legislation and how the new policy influences athletes' levels of athletic identity.

Lastly, a few scales have been designed to measure career decisions (Burns et al., 2013; Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010), life development (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993) and transferable skills (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Shiina, Brewer, Petitpas, & Cornelius, 2003) based on self-efficacy models; however, given the evolution of intercollegiate athletics and Life Skills, a study focusing on student-athletes' attainment of the NACE's career readiness competencies, using Bridges' Transition Model as a lens, could assist in shaping programmatic change as well.

Bridges (2019) encouraged those in the neutral phase to embrace it and not "speed up transition" (p. 146); therefore, an assessment measuring the length of time student-athletes spend in this phase could also assist practitioners in developing better interventions for new skill building and identity discovery.

Conclusion

The research opportunities regarding student-athlete experiences outside of the scope of athletic participation and academic measures are abundant. My study may have raised more questions than it answered regarding the experiences of student-athletes in said programming and career development, but it is certain that the current structure of

Life Skills programming supports the neoliberal approach to higher education, in which the purpose of higher education is to prepare students for jobs. The primary program offerings of Life Skills around career readiness and leadership support a system that promotes a skill set primed for the modern workforce. However, my collaborators recognized that they, along with some of their peers were not present at events or simply unaware of some of the possibilities that were readily available to them as some may have felt their attendance at such events may have suggested their failure to professionally pursue their sport. Therefore, there is a need for programming that incorporates autonomy, mastery, and connection, building intrinsic motivation while embracing their identity as student-athletes.

This realization leads back to my question of my own readiness to transition from college to a career. Using my analogy, I would consider myself a rookie as an undergraduate; one who simply did not know all the opportunities that truly existed. As a first-generation student, I navigated the college-to-career process primarily solo with a few tips from mentors. I also did not have athletic responsibilities consuming the majority of my daily activities. This aspect alone increased my chances of transitioning smoother than most of my athlete counterparts.

Now looking at my professional work experience with student-athletes, it is important to note that Life Skills cannot be viewed in isolation. It is a program offering within a much larger system of intercollegiate athletics and the university community that host a myriad of differing goals, measures, and expectations. My study reiterated the tension that exists between athletics and most other student-related engagement activities.

At the Division-I level, athletics performance and revenue generation remain the priority. Collaboration and open, continual student-athlete feedback are necessary to propel Life Skills forward and an integral part of the student-athlete experience.

Practitioners should not feel obligated simply to check a box but to ensure that the educational opportunities and activities capture the true needs of their particular population of student-athletes through meaningful assessment. The needs vary depending on the type of student-athletes entering the athletics department; however, a genuine investment from the NCAA would send a cohesive message that career development is important. Institutionally, presidents and athletic directors can a strong message in hiring coaches with resumes that support a commitment to student-athletes involvement and readiness to transition from college and enter the workforce.

Also, the athletic identity is a core quality and should be embraced in the creation and implementation process, creating a sense of connection for student-athletes. The memorable statement by one collaborator, “not the exception, but the rule”, illuminates the pivotal moment when some begin to realize the brevity of their athletic careers and fear, dissolution, and disorientation set in. Life Skills and student-athlete development activities must survive the seemingly differing objectives of Division-I intercollegiate athletics, truly creating an environment for student-athletes to feel autonomy, connection and ultimately mastery of the skills to thrive during and beyond their athletic careers.

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Letter



Office of Research Development, Integrity, and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: February 19, 2019

TO: Jan Arminio
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [1385568-1] In Their Words: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Former Student-Athletes' Experiences in Life Skills Programs in Relation to Career Development and Transition out of College

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: February 19, 2019
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form unless the IRB has waived the requirement for a signature on the consent form or has waived the requirement for a consent process. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This study does not have an expiration date but you will receive an annual reminder regarding future requirements.

Generated on IRBNet

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Email

Communication to be emailed to prospective collaborators, identified via personal researcher contacts

Subject Heading: Request for Research Participation and Consent Form (IRBNet number: 1385568-1)

Dear _____:

You have been identified as a former NCAA Division-I student-athlete who participated in Life Skills or student-athlete development program while in college. I am writing to request your participation in a research study at George Mason University, to learn more about your experiences in Life Skills programming while a student-athlete at your respective institution. Furthermore, I am interested in hearing your perspective on such programming and its influence on your transition out of college into a career. Hence, my interests in speaking with you to better understand your experiences.

The process will begin with you receiving a writing prompt via email. Once you have completed and returned the prompt to me, I will follow up with sequential conversations, each approximately one hour in length, which can be scheduled at your convenience. Participation is voluntary and of course, you may discontinue the study at any time. All identifiable information, including the demographics form, will be removed and not utilized in the study. Of course, you are not obligated to participate, but your participation is greatly appreciated as it will assist in better understanding how students make meaning of the life-skills programs

Attached is a copy of the consent form that provides additional information about the study, along with the writing prompt to facilitate the initial conversation. If you decide to participate in this study, please sign and date the consent form and complete the writing prompts before our first conversation. Let me know if you have any questions.

I look forward to working with you and appreciate your time.

Ms. Morgan D. Fisher

Ph.D. Candidate, College of Education and Human Development

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

In Their Words: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Former Student-Athletes' Experiences in Life Skills Programs in Relation to Career Development and Transition out of College

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research project aims to look at the experiences of former student-athletes in Life Skills or student-athlete development programming as it relates to career development and the transition out of college. My hope is to learn more about former student-athletes experiences in the mandated programming, its influence on their career development, the transition from college to career, and how former student-athletes make meaning of the experience.

If you agree to participate, you will be emailed one written prompt in order to initiate the interview process. This prompt will ask two questions related to your experiences as a former student-athlete and should be completed prior to the first interview session. Upon completing the written prompt, you will be asked to participate in a series of 2-3 face-to-face interviews. For participants located outside the Washington D.C. region, interviews via phone or Skype will be conducted. With your consent, all interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the interview is captured accurately. Follow-up interviews will be conducted with each participant as well. You will be provided a copy of the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant, other than offering you the opportunity to offer your voice toward a better understanding of student-athletes' experiences. However, your participation and insight into this topic may directly, in the long-term, contribute to the relevant body of research that tackles such issues as student/athlete well-being, relationships, and development. This reflection may prompt you to come to a more complex understanding of your experience.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide during the one-on-one interview will be collected in such a way that your identity will remain confidential. While you are being asked to sign and provide your name on this consent document, please note that this document is in no way associated with your one-on-one interview responses. If you permit, the one-on-one interview will be audio-recorded, so I can properly analyze interview transcripts, but nothing you say will be attributed directly to you in any way because pseudonyms will be self-assigned at the beginning of the session taping. The pseudonym used during the interview session will be published and not your legal name. The tape transcript will not identify you by name. The tape transcript will be stored electronically in a secured drive and in hard-copy form in a locked cabinet, both of which will be accessed only by the researcher. The audio files will be deleted as soon as they have been transcribed. The transcripts will be retained for 5 years after the study closes. The electronic and hard copy versions will be destroyed once the research study findings have been finalized at the conclusion of this semester. The confidential responses will be used for research purposes only and will be viewable only by the academic professional (i.e., course instructor) who has an interest in the data and its conclusions solely for the purpose of instruction.

For those who agree to be interviewed over Skype, participants may review Skype's website for information about their privacy statement. <https://www.microsoft.com/privacystatement/en-us/skype/default.aspx>. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Morgan Fisher, College of Education and Human Development, a doctoral candidate at George Mason University. I can be reached at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. My dissertation advisor, Dr. Jan Arminio can be reached at [REDACTED]@gmu.edu

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board (IRB) office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. The IRBNet number is 1385568-1.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

___ I also consent to the audio recording of my interview. (please check for consent)

Printed Name:

Signature:

Date of Signature

Version date: 11-11-18

Appendix D: Writing Prompts

Date:

Dear _____,

Writing Prompts: Thank you for your participation in this study. As a collaborator in the study, your experiences as a former student-athlete are valuable. Below are three (3) writing prompts. Please complete and submit to me via email *prior* to our first conversation (e.g., interview). My email is [REDACTED]@gmu.edu. Your writings will be used to guide our conversations (e.g., interviews).

Length: Write no more than 2 pages TOTAL for all three (3) prompts.

3. In your own words, describe your most memorable experiences as a student-athlete.

2. How would you describe your athletics department's Life Skills program (e.g., its structure, offerings, staff)?

3. Write about a specific Life Skills program/activity/event that you remember in relation to transition or career development? Describe its purpose, what you did and why you feel this specific program/activity/event was memorable.

**Appendix E:
Demographics Survey**

1) What sport did you participate in while in college? (CIRCLE ONE, if two, choose primary sport)

Baseball	Men's Track & Field (I/O)	Men's Soccer
Men's Basketball	Women's Track & Field (I/O)	Women's Soccer
Women's Basketball	Men's Golf	Softball
Bowling	Women's Golf	Men's Swimming & Diving
Women's Cross Country	Men's Gymnastics	Women's Swimming & Diving
Men's Cross Country	Women's Gymnastics	Men's Tennis
Equestrian*	Men's Lacrosse	Women's Tennis
Fencing	Women's Lacrosse	Men's Volleyball
Field Hockey	Rifle	Women's Volleyball
Football	Rowing	Women's Beach Volleyball
Men's Ice Hockey	Skiing	Men's Water Polo
Women's Ice Hockey		Women's Water Polo
		Wrestling
		*discontinued by NCAA in 2017

2) What grade level did you COMPLETE before leaving the university? (CIRCLE ONE)

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Fifth Year Graduate Student

3) What is your race or ethnicity?

4) What is your gender?

5) What was your major/minor?

6) What was your initial career plan *before* leaving the university?

7) What career field did you pursue *after* leaving the university? Why?

8) Are you a first-generation college student?

For Researcher Only—DO NOT FILL OUT

INTERVIEWEE PSEUDONYM: _____

Location: _____

Start Time: _____

Date: _____

Finish Time: _____

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Date:

Dear _____,

Thank you for your participation in this study. As stated on the consent form, this research project aims to look at the experiences of former student-athletes in Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) programming as it relates to career development and the transition out of college. My hope is to learn more about former student-athletes experiences in the mandated programming, its influence on their career development, the transition from college to career, and how former student-athletes make meaning of the experience.

Remember, for confidentiality purposes, your legal name will be replaced by a pseudonym, and you may discontinue your participation at any time with no penalty.

Thank you for completing and returning the writing prompt. This series of questions will deal with your written responses:

Interview 1 (focused specifically on past experience as student-athlete)

1. Tell me about your experiences as a student-athlete at X university.
2. What sport did you play? How many years?
3. What was memorable about playing X sport at X university?
4. As a student-athlete, what did a good day look like for you?
5. Tell me about your experiences with the athletics department's student-athlete development programming (i.e., Life Skills)?
6. Can you recall any Life Skills specific programs?
 - If so, what were they and describe the event/activity?

- What was your experience with that/those event(s)/activity(ies)
7. When and in what ways was the Life Skills (i.e., student-athlete development) program presented to you?
 - Were the events/activities mandated?
 - If so, which activities were mandated?
 - Were there volunteer events?
 8. Tell me about your experiences at a Life Skills or student-athlete development event. Were there voluntary activities?
 - If so, which were voluntary, and did you attend?
 - If you did not attend, do you recall your reason for not attending?
 9. What was your experience like as you approached the end of your collegiate career?
 10. What was your experience with professional staff assisting you with your transition out of college and athletics
 11. When did you begin thinking about a career?
 - Can you describe some of the career development activities/events offered in athletics at X university?
 12. Are there any areas that you feel I missed regarding your past experiences as a student-athlete and participation in Life Skills that you would like to share?

Interview 2 (focused specifically on the transition out of college, current life, and career status)

1. Since leaving X university, what have you been doing personally and professionally?
2. How are your current experiences different from or consistent with your expectations when you graduated?
3. In what ways do you feel Life Skills influenced and prepared you for your transition from college into a career?
 - Can you recall a specific experience that attributed to this process?
4. In your own words, describe the transition process out of college and the adjustment after graduating (or leaving) X university?

5. What interactive experiences did you have with Life Skills programming pertaining to the transition out of college?
6. Career development is defined as . . . In your opinion, was this approach to career development offered through the Life Skills program?
 - If so, in what ways?
 - If not, what would you say attributed to your current career status?
7. In what ways do you feel Life Skills influenced and prepared you or failed to prepare you for your career choice?
 - Can you recall specific event(s)/activity(ies)/person(nel) that attributed to this process?
8. Do you find yourself remembering and using any of the skills/tools you learned from a Life Skills event/activity?
 - If so, what was the event/activity and the skills/tools?
9. Are there any areas that you feel I missed regarding your transition process out of college and current career status that you would like to share?

Interview 3 (focused specifically on meaning-making: the convergence of past experiences as a former student-athlete who participated in Life Skills programming as it relates to the transition out of college and career development)

1. Reflecting on your experiences as a former student-athlete, what do those experiences mean to you now?
2. In what ways do you feel your experiences in Life Skills activities prepared you for the transition out of college?
 - If not life skills, what experience or who prepared you for this transition?
3. In what ways do you feel your experiences in Life Skills activities fostered your career development?
4. If you could return to X university's athletics department, what would you recommend to add or delete from their Life Skills program? Why?
5. If you could return to X university as a student-athlete, what would you do the same? Different? As it pertains to your transition out of college and career development?

6. Now that you are X number of years removed from your student-athlete experience, what does the term Life Skills (or student-athlete development) mean to you?
7. Today, what advice would you give yourself as a new student at X university?
8. Are there any areas that you feel I missed or you like to review?

Appendix G:
Table 2—Essential Themes Example

Hurdles - Detour Ahead (Transitions Abound)	injury...again	Mollie experienced two potentially season ending injuries. "I was just hitting my stride as a hitter, building momentum and then it happened. It was demoralizing" Tim's injury occurred his freshman year! "I didn't think anything of it just because it didn't feel good when you fall. I got up and walked; it hurt and I thought it would go away. When I got into the ring a second time, I tried to throw...there was so much pain" (Tim, interview 1)
	time to transfer	"I graduated as a red shirt sophomore and had two years of eligibility left after I finished my degree. I applied and got into the institution on my own without any help from the athletic department. I got in and decided to transfer [to another institution] because I knew, again, [from the] walk on experience how brief collegiate athletics was and how quickly it can be take away. I was able to finish two degrees, and start a third degree within my student athlete experience and had them all paid for." (interview 1, p. 3 and 4) Justin, personal communication)
	leaving college (graduating)	Jillian - interview 2 - fear of the unknown Grateful for his fifth year, ready to transition
	losing scholarship	"I was not the exception, I was the rule...College sports is a business" (interview 1, p. 17) Tim, personal communication)
	leaving sport	"I had one year of eligibility left. I had a decision to either stop playing, start working, stay in school...and ultimately continue focusing on school. But [I] was put in a position where admission into the grad school depended on me not playing football...I was faced with foregoing all that good stuff you look forward to at the end of your career. I decided to go down that route, which I found very difficult afterwards" (interview 2, p. 3) Jason, personal communication)
		interview 2, first page...listen to recording "life revolving around softball"
	Professional sports	...As soon as our season was up, I spent the first six months post graduation pursuing the NFL. Long story short, I didn't make it to the NFL, I was cut after rookie league camp." (interview 2, p. 1) Justin, personal communication)
	extra curricular activities/programs (filler while injured OR the realization that athletics is coming to an end)	Tim talked about free food...Jillian talked about social life
		"understanding that the NFL probably wasn't going to happen and it wasn't really something that I wanted, I knew that I needed to use [the] platform that I had to my advantage...because I knew I wouldn't be able to have a part-time job or join many clubs, so here's a pre-established network that I wanted to be a part of to grow my resume. (interview 1, p. 3) Jason, personal communication).
	I'm different	"I actually went through the general student process. I applied like a general student, went through the general student orientation, arrived on campus at the end of August with the general student population, worked out in the student gym for my first week of school and the was thrown into this division one football environment, in the same recruiting class as those who are my same age, but they had been there the whole summer. This then emerged as a walk on: you're expected to perform, at a high level, yet not given the same tools or resources to do so" (interview 1 - p. 1) (Justin, personal communication)

References

- Ackerman, C. A. (2013). *Exploration of factors related to the development of vocational identity in collegiate student-athletes* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas: Lawrence, Kansas).
- Adler, P., & Adler, P. A. (1985). From idealism to pragmatic detachment: The academic performance of college athletes. *Sociology of Education*, 58(4), 241-250.
- Adler, P., & Adler, P. A. (1987). Role conflict and identity salience: College athletics and the academic role. *The Social Science Journal*, 24(4), 443-455.
- Adler, P., & Adler, P. A. (1991). *Backboards and blackboards*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- American Council on Education. (1937). *The student personnel point of view*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.myacpa.org/sites/default/files/student-personnel-point-of-view-1937.pdf>
- American Association of State Colleges and Universities. (2005). *Connecting higher education, public opinion, and public policy*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.aascu.org/uploadedfiles/aascu/content/root/policyandadvocacy/policypublications/connecting%20higher%20education%20public%20opinion.pdf>
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2002). *Greater expectations: A new vision for learning as a nation goes to college*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/publications/GreaterExpectations.pdf>
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(2), 297-308.
- Barratt, M. J. (2012). The efficacy of interviewing young drug users through online chat. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 31(4), 566-572.
- Beamon, K. (2008). Used goods: Former African American college student-athletes' perception of exploitation by Division-I universities. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 77(4), 352-364.

- Bembenutty, H. (2009). Academic delay of gratification, self-efficacy, and time-management among academically unprepared college students. *Psychological Reports*, 55, 613-623.
- Benner, P. (1984). *From novice to expert: Excellence and power in clinical nursing practice*. London, UK: Addison Wesley.
- Bowden, C., & Galindo-Gonzalez, S. (2015). Interviewing when you're not face-to-face: The use of email interviews in a phenomenological study. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 10, 79-92
- Branch, T. (2011, October). The shame of college sports. *The Atlantic*, 308(3), 80-110.
- Bresciani, M. J., Gardner, M. M., & Hickmott, J. (2009). *Demonstrating student success: A practical guide to outcomes-based assessment of learning and development in student affairs*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). Athletic identity: Hercules' muscle or Achilles heel? *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24, 237-254.
- Bridges, W. (2019). *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes* (3rd ed). New York, NY: Lifelong Books.
- Buckner, C. M. (2017). Exploring the academic success of black male former student-athletes and their experiences with academic support upon re-entry to college. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15799coll40/id/436938/rec/1>
- Burns, G. N., Jasinski, D., Dunn, S., & Fletcher, D. (2013). Academic support services and career decision-making self-efficacy in student-athletes. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 61, 161-167.
- Byers, W. (2010). *Unsportsmanlike conduct*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.14486.19>
- Charmaz, K. (2004). Premises, principles, and practices in qualitative research: Revisiting the foundations. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(7), 976-993. doi:10.1177/1049732304266795
- Chen, S., Snyder, S., & Magner, M. (2010). The effects of sport participation on student-athletes' and non-athlete students' social life and identity. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 3, 176-193.
- Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Comeaux, E. (2010). Racial differences in faculty perceptions of collegiate student-athletes' academic and post-undergraduate achievements. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 27, 390-412.
- Comeaux, E., & Harrison, C. K. (2007). Faculty and male student-athletes in American higher education: Racial differences in the environmental predictors of academic achievement. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 10(2), 199-214.
- Comeaux, E., & Harrison, C. K. (2011). A conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes. *Educational Researcher*, 40(5), 235-245.
doi:10.3102/0013189X11415260
- Community [Def. 2]. (n.d.). *Dictionary Online*. In Dictionary. Retrieved July 30, 2018, from:
<https://www.google.com/search?q=community+definition&oq=community+definition&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.4430j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>
- Coomes, M. D., & Gerda, J. J. (2016). A long and honorable history. In G. McClellan, J. Stringer & Associates (Eds.), *Handbook of student affairs administration*, (pp. 3-23). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cooper, J. N. (2012). Personal troubles and public issues: A sociological imagination of black athletes' experiences at predominantly white institutions in the United States. *Sociology Mind*, 2(03), 261-271. doi:10.4236/sm.2012.23035
- Covell, D., & Walker, S. (2016). *Managing intercollegiate athletics*. Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway.
- Cox, R. H., Sadberry, S., McGuire, R. T., & McBride, A. (2009). Predicting student athlete career situation awareness from college experiences. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 3(2), 156-181.
- Crawford, T. K. (2007). *Intercollegiate athletic participation and undergraduate student Engagement*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304806988/>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Creswell, J., & Poth, N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

- Danish, S. J., Forneris, T., Hodge, K., & Heke, I. (2004). Enhancing youth development through sport. *World Leisure*, 3, 38-49.
- Danish, S., Petitpas, A., & Hale, B. (1993). Life development intervention for athletes: Life skills through sport. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 21, 352-385.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.
- Dee, T. S. (2009). Stereotype threat and the student-athlete. *Economic Inquiry*, 52(1), 173-182. doi:10.3386/w14705
- Di Fabio, A., & Bernaud, J. (2008). The help-seeking in career counseling. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72, 60-66. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2007.10.006
- Dudley, B. S., Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1997). Using cooperative learning to enhance the academic and social experiences of freshman student-athletes. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 137(4), 449-459.
- Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 23(3), 197-203.
- Egan, J., Chenoweth, L., & McAuliffe, D. (2006). Email-facilitated qualitative interviews with traumatic brain injury survivors: A new and accessible method. *Brain Injury*, 20(12), 1283-1894.
- Fallows, S., & Steven, C. (2000). Building employability skills into the higher education curriculum: A university-wide initiative. *Education & Training*, 42(2), 75-83. doi:10.1108/00400910010331620.
- Falls, D., & Wilson, B. (2013). 'Reflexive modernity' and the transition experiences of university athletes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(5), 572-593.
- Feltz, D. L., Hwang, S., Schneider, R., & Skogsberg, N. J. (2013). Predictors of collegiate student-athletes' susceptibility to stereotype threat. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(2), 184-201.
- Ferris, E., Finster, M., & McDonald, D. (2004). Academic fit of student-athletes: An analysis of NCAA Division 1-A graduation rates. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(6), 555-575.
- Fox, K. F. (2011). *"Figuring it out": A grounded theory of college to post-college transition*. (Doctoral dissertation). The University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

- Friedman, L. (2008). Crossing the great divide: Bridging the gap between campus academic advisors and athletic academic-support personnel. *NACADA*, 18, 49-57.
- Fuller, R. D. (2014). Transition experiences out of intercollegiate athletics: A meta-synthesis. *Qualitative Report*, 19(46), 1-15.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1960/1989). *Truth and method*. Weinsheimer J., Marshall D., translator; 2nd revised edition. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Gaston-Gayles, J., & Hu, S. (2009). The influence of student engagement and sport participation on college outcomes among Division-I student-athletes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(3), 315-333.
- Georgia Institute of Technology. (2009a). *The total person program*. Retrieved from <http://ramblinwreck.cstv.com/school-bio/geot-rice-total.html>
- Georgia Institute of Technology. (2009b). *2008-2009 Georgia Tech annual report*. Retrieved from <http://issuu.com/ramblinwreck/docs/0809-report>
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K., & Anderson, M. L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (3rd ed). New York, NY: Springer.
- Gould, D., & Carson, S. (2008). Life skills development through sport: Current status and future directions. *Sport & Exercise Psychology Reviews*, 1, 58-78.
- Grogan, A. (2014). Hamish goes to school – transitioning through change. *Change Factory*. Retrieved from <https://www.changefactory.com.au/our-thinking/articles/hamish-goes-to-school-transitioning-through-change/>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1999). Naturalistic and rationalistic enquiry. In J. P. Keeves & G. L. Lafomski (Eds.), *Issues in educational research* (pp. 141-149). New York, NY: Pergamon.
- Gurney, G. S. (2011). Stop lowering the bar for college athletes. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Stop-Lowering-the-Bar-for/127058>
- Harper, S. R. (2016). *Black male student-athletes and racial inequities in NCAA Division I college sports: 2016 edition*. Philadelphia, PA: The University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education. Retrieved from www.gse.upenn.edu/equity/sports2016
- Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2014). Making engagement equitable for students in U.S. higher education. In S. J. Quaye & S. R. Harper (Eds.), *Student engagement in*

higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations, (pp. 11-14), Routledge.

- Harrison, C. K., & Lawrence, S. M. (2004) African American student-athletes' perceptions of career transition in sport: A visual and qualitative investigation. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 6, 373-394.
- Harrison, L., Sailes, G., Rotich, W. K., & Bimper, A. Y. (2011). Living the dream or awakening from the nightmare: Race and athletic identity. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 14(1), 91-103. doi:10.1080/13613324.2011.531982
- Hart Research Associates. (2013). It takes more than a major: Employer priorities for college learning and student success. *Liberal Education*, 99(2), 22-29.
- Haslerig, S. (2017). Who or what are graduate(d) student athletes? Redefining a misunderstood subpopulation. *Journal of Higher Education Athletics and Innovation*, 1(2), 110-122. doi: 10.15763/issn.2376-5267.2017.1.2.110-122
- Heckman, J. J., & Kautz, T. D. (2012). Hard evidence on soft skills. *Labour Economics*, 19(4), 451-464.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. New York, NY: Harper & Row. (Original work published 1926.)
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The question concerning technology* (pp. 3-35). New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Hodge, K., Danish, S., & Martin, J. (2012). Developing a conceptual framework for life skills intervention. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 4(8), 1125-1152.
- Hopkins, R. M., Regehr, G., & Pratt, D. D. (2017). A framework for negotiating positionality in phenomenological research. *Medical Teacher*, 39 (1), 20-25. doi:10.1080/0142159X.2017.1245854
- Hora, M. T., Benbow, R. J., & Oleson, A. K. (2016). *Beyond the skills gap: Preparing college students for life and work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Horowitz, H. (1987). *Campus life: Undergraduate cultures from the end of the eighteenth century to the present*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hosick, M. B. (2019a, May 8). Division I college athletes match record-high academic performance: Overall Academic Progress Rate remains at 983. *NCAA.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/division-i-college-athletes-match-record-high-academic-performance>

- Hosick, M. B. (2019b, October 16). DI student-athletes graduate at record high rates: Nearly nine out of every 10 DI college athletes earn degrees. *NCAA.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/di-student-athletes-graduate-record-high-rates>
- Husserl, E. (1964). *The phenomenology of internal time-consciousness*. Bloomington, IN: University Press.
- Janeiro, I. N., & Marques, J. F. (2010). Career coping styles: Differences in career attitudes among secondary school students. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 10(1), 35-48.
- Johnson, J. (2013). Assessing academic risk of student-athletes: Applicability of the NCAA graduation risk overview model to GPA. *NACADA Journal*, 33(2), 76-89. doi:10.12930/NACADA-13-041
- Johnson, N. (2010). Tinker takes the field: Do student-athletes shed their constitutional rights at the locker room gate. *Marquette Sports Law Review*, 21, 293.
- Jones, S. R. (1995). Voices of identity and difference: A qualitative exploration of the multiple dimensions of identity development in women college students. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Maryland, College Park.
- Jones, S. R., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. L. (2014). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues*, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jowett, A., Peel, E., & Shaw, R. (2011). Online interviewing in psychology: Reflections on the process. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 8(4), 354-369.
- Kafle, N. (2011). Hermeneutic phenomenological research method simplified. *Bohdi: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5, 181-200.
- Kammeyer-Mueller, J. D., & Wanberg, C. R. (2003). Unwrapping the organizational entry process: Disentangling multiple antecedents and their pathways to adjustment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 779-794.
- Kamusoko, S. D., & Pemberton, C. L. A. (2013). Student-athlete wellbeing and persistence: An in-depth look at student-athlete perceptions. *Journal for the Study of Sports & Athletes in Education*, 7(1), 41-61.
- Kinley, N., & Ben-Hur, S. (2015). *Changing employee behavior: A practical guide for managers*. London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Komives, S. R. (2000). Inhabit the gap. *About Campus: Enriching the Student Learning Experience*, 5(5), 31-32.
- Koro-Ljungberg, M., Yendol-Hoppey, D., Smith, J. J., & Hayes, S. B. (2009). (E)pistemological awareness, instantiation of methods, and uninformed methodological ambiguity in qualitative research projects. *Educational Researcher*, 38(9), 687-699.
- Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J., & Whitt, E. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kyllonen, P. C. (2013). Soft skills for the workplace. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 45(6), 16-23.
- LaForge, L., & Hodge, J. (2011). NCAA academic performance metrics: Implications for institutional policy and practice. *Journal of Higher Education*, 82(2), 217-235.
- Lally, P. S., & Kerr, G. A. (2005). The career planning, athletic identity, and student role identity of intercollegiate student-athletes. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 76(3), 275-285.
- Laverty, S. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical, methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(3). Retrieved from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_3final/pdf/laverty.pdf
- Le Crom, C. L., Warren, B. J., Clark, H. T., Marolla, J., & Gerber, P. (2009). Factors contributing to student-athlete retention. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 2(1), 14-24.
- Leach, K. (2015, October). NCAA, N4 to partner on life skills professional development. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/ncaa-n4a-partner-life-skills-professional-development>
- Levy, M. (2005). Career transitions. In J. Taylor & G. S. Wilson (Ed.), *Applying sport psychology: Four perspectives* (pp. 249-265). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Loughead, T., Hardy, J., & Eys, M. (2006). The nature of athlete leadership. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 29(2), 142-158.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Mayhew, M. J., Rockenbach, A. N., Bowman, N. A., Seifert, T. A., Wolniak, G. C., Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2016). *How college affects students: 21st-*

century evidence that higher education works (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

McGlade, B. (1997). The development and implementation of the Total Person Program at the Georgia Tech Athletic Association (thesis). Retrieved from <https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb3065006> OCLC-37738541.

Melendez, M. C. (2007). The influence of athletic participation on the college adjustment of freshmen and sophomore student-athletes. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8, 39-55.

Mishkind, A. (2014). Overview: State definitions of college and career readiness. *College and Career Readiness and Success Center*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED555670.pdf>

Morse, J. M. (2007). Sampling in grounded theory. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 229-244). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Morse, J. M., & Richards, L. (2002). *README FIRST for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Mount, C. (1989, July 25). Kevin Ross sues Creighton, claims breach of contract. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-07-25/sports/8902200842_1_creighton-university-basketball-suit-charges

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Naemi, B., Burrus, J., Kyllonen, P. C., & Roberts, R. D. (2012). Building a case to develop noncognitive assessment products and services targeting workforce readiness at ETS. Retrieved from https://origin-www.ets.org/s/workforce_readiness/pdf/rm_12_23.pdf

National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2012). Position statement: The critical importance of institutional first-destination/post-graduation surveys. NACE Center. Retrieved from <http://www.nacweb.org/about-us/advocacy/position-statements/position-statement-first-destination-surveys/>

National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2020). Career readiness defined. NACE Center. Retrieved from <https://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>

National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA). (2017, July). N4A Constitution. Retrieved from

http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/nacda/sports/nfoura/auto_pdf/2017-18/misc_non_event/N4AConstitutionBylaws070717.pdf

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2008). *2008-2009 NCAA C.H.A.M.P.S./Life Skills Program* [Brochure]. Retrieved June 8, 2018 from: <https://www.ncaapublications.com/p-3883-2008-2009-ncaa-champs-life-skills-program-brochure-25pkg.aspx>

National Collegiate Athletic Association (2017, June 28). GOALS and SCORES studies. *NCAA.org*. Retrieved from https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/2017GOALS_Full_Report_20170628.pdf

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019a, April 3). Estimated probability of competing in professional athletics. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/estimated-probability-competing-professional-athletics>

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019b, August). *NCAA Division I Manual*, Article 12. Indianapolis, IN: NCAA.

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019c, August). *NCAA Division I Manual*, Article 14. Indianapolis, IN: NCAA.

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019d, August). *NCAA Division I Manual*, Article 17. Indianapolis, IN: NCAA.

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019e, August). *NCAA Division I Manual*, Division I Philosophy. Indianapolis, IN: NCAA.

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019f). NCAA Life Skills Program. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/leadership-development/life-skills>

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019g). Student-Athlete Advisory Committees (SAAC). Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/ncaa-student-athlete-advisory-committees-saacs>

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2019h). What is the NCAA? Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/what-ncaa>

Navarro, D. (2012). Supporting the students of the future. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 44(1), 43-51.

Navarro, K. M. (2014). A conceptual model of division I student-athletes' career construction processes. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 32(1), 219-235.

- Navarro, K. M. (2015). An examination of the alignment of student-athletes' undergraduate major choices and career field aspirations in life after sports. *Journal of College Student Development*, 56(4), 364-379.
- Navarro, K., & Malvaso, S. (2015). Toward an understanding of best practices in student-athlete leadership development programs: Student-athlete perceptions and gender differences. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 7(3), 23-43.
- Nyad, D. (1989, May 28). Views of sport: How illiteracy makes athletes run. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/28/sports/views-of-sport-how-illiteracy-makes-athletes-run.html>
- Nystrom, S. (2009). The dynamics of professional identity formation: Graduates' transition from HE to working life. *Vocation and Learning*, 2, 1-18.
- Opdenakker, R. (2006, September). Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7 (4). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fgs-7.4.175>.
- Osborne, J. (1994). Some similarities and differences among phenomenological and other methods of psychological qualitative research. *Canadian Psychology*, 35(2), 167-189.
- Osburn, S. (2019, October 29). Board of governors starts process to enhance name, image, and likeness opportunities. *NCAA.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/board-governors-starts-process-enhance-name-image-and-likeness-opportunities>
- Pascale, C. (2011). *Cartographies of knowledge*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido, F. M., & Quaye, D. J. (2016). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Peck, A., & Preston, M. (2018, August). Connecting bridges: Introducing the cocurricular career connections leadership model. NACEweb.org. Retrieved from <https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/connecting-bridges-introducing-the-cocurricular-career-connections-leadership-model/>
- Perrone, L., & Vickers, M. H. (2003). Life after graduation as a “very uncomfortable world”: An Australian case study. *Education and Training*, 45, 69-78.

- Petitpas, A., & O'Brien, K. (2008). A focus on career considerations. In A. Leslie-Toogood & E. Gill (Eds.), *Advising student-athletes: A collaborative approach to success* (pp. 133-138). Lawrence, KS: Allen Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1983). *Methodology for the human sciences: Systems of inquiry*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp. 41-60). New York, NY: Plenum.
- Renford, R. (2017). The lack of political activism among today's Black student-athlete. *Journal of Higher Education Athletics and Innovation*, 1(2), 123-131.
- Robinson, M. (2015). *Athletic identity: Invincible and invisible, the personal development of the athlete*. Sarasota, FL: First Edition Design Publishing.
- Rothschild-Checroune, E., Gravelle, F., Dawson, D., & Karlis, G. (2012). Balancing academic and athletic time management: A qualitative exploration of first-year student-athletes' university football experiences. *Society and Leisure*, 35(2), 243-261.
- Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Savitz-Romer, M., Ott, M., Swan, A. K., & Liu, P. P. (2017). Finding conceptual coherence: Trends and alignment in the scholarship on noncognitive skills and their role in college success and career readiness. In M B. Paulsen, (Ed.). *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp.141-180). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Sack, A. (2008). *Counterfeit amateurs: An athlete's journey through the sixties to the age of academic capitalism*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *Thinking qualitatively: Methods of mind*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Salvadge, A. (2019, February 7). The impact of internships and study abroad on the career readiness of first-generation students. NACEweb.org. Retrieved from <https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/internships/the-impact-of-internships-and-study-abroad-on-the-career-readiness-of-first-generation-students/>
- Sampson, J. P., Jr., McClain, M. C., Musch, E., & Reardon, R. C. (2013). Variables affecting readiness to benefit from career interventions. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 61, 98-109. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2013.00040.x
- Savage, H. J., Bentley, H. W., McGovern, J. T., & Smiley, D. F. (1929). *American college athletics* (No. 23). Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of

Teaching. Retrieved from <http://www.thecoia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Carnegie-Commission-1929-excerpts-1.pdf>

- Savitz-Romer, M., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Fancsali, C. (2015). Social, emotional, and affective skills for college and career success. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 47, 18-27. doi:10.1080/00091383.2015.1077667
- Sears, S. (1982). A definition of career guidance terms: A national vocational guidance association perspective. *Vocational Guidance Quarterly*, 31(2), 137-143. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2164-585X.1982.tb01305.x>
- Seidman, I. (1989). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and social sciences* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Shechtman, N., DeBarger, A. H., Dornsife, C., Rosier, S., & Yarnall, L. (2013). Promoting grit, tenacity, and perseverance: Critical factors for success in the 21st century. Retrieved from <http://www.tech.ed.gov/files/2013/10/OET-Draft-Grit-Report-2-17-13.pdf>
- Shiina, S., Brewer, B. W., Petitpas, A. J., & Cornelius, A. E. (2003). Effects of transferable skills workshops on the career self-efficacy of college student-athletes. *Academic Athletic Journal*, 17(1), 54-64.
- Shulman, J. L., & Bowen, W. G. (2011). *The game of life: College sports and educational values*, (62). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Shurts, W. M., & Shoffner, M. F. (2004). Providing career counseling for collegiate student-athletes: A learning theory approach. *Journal of Career Development*, 31(2), 95-109. doi:10.1007/s10871-004-0567-4
- Simons, H. D., Bosworth, C., Fujita, S., & Jensen, M. (2007). The athlete stigma in higher education. *College Student Journal*, 41(2), 251-273.
- Simons, H. D., & Van Rheenen, D. (2000). Noncognitive predictors of student-athletes' academic performance. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 30(2), 167-181. doi:10.1080/10790195.2000.10850094
- Simons, H. D., Van Rheenen, D., & Covington, M. V. (1999). Academic motivation and the student-athlete. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(2), 151-162.
- Sleap, M., & Reed, H. (2006). Views of sport science graduates regarding work skills developed at university. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11, 47-61.
- Sloan, A., & Bowe, B. (2014). Phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology: The philosophy, the methodologies, and using hermeneutic phenomenology to

- investigate lecturers' experiences of curriculum design. *Quality and Quantity*, 48(3), 1291-1303
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Smith, R. A. (1988). *Sports and freedom*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, R. A. (2011). *Pay for play: A history of big-time college athletic reform*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Sorensen, E. A., Sincoff, M. Z., & Siebeneck, E. A. (2009). The need for an effective student-athlete pregnancy and parenting policy. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 1, 25-45.
- Southall, R. M., Nagel, M. S., & Sexton, M. (2016, April 6). *2016 adjusted graduation gap report: NCAA division-I basketball*. Retrieved from http://csri-sc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/2016-Basketball-AGG-Report_Final.pdf
- Staurowsky, E. J., & Sack, A. L. (2005). Reconsidering the use of the term student-athlete in academic research. *Journal of Sport Management*, 19(2), 103-116.
- Stecher, B. M., & Hamilton, L. S. (2014). *Measuring hard-to-measure student competencies: A research and development plan*. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR863.html
- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797-811.
- Stearns, P. (2003). Expanding the agenda of cultural research. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49(34), B7-B9. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/214696211/>
- Stringer, K. J., & Kerpelman, J. L. (2010). Career identity development in college students: Decision making, parental support, and work experience. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 10, 181-200.
- Suggs, W. (2006). Historical overview: At play at America's colleges. In R. Lapchick (Ed.), *New game plan for college sport* (pp. 1-28). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Sullivan, S. E., & Baruch, Y. (2009). Advances in career theory and research: A critical review and agenda for future exploration. *Journal of Management*, 35 (6), 1542-1571. doi:10.1177/0149206309350082. ISSN 0149-2063

- Super, D. E. (1957). *The psychology of careers; an introduction to vocational development*. New York, NY: Harper & Bros.
- Super, D. E. (1963) Toward making self concept theory operational. In D. E. Super, R. Starishevsky, N. Matlin & J. P. Jordaan (Eds.) *Career Development: Self-concept theory* (pp. 17-32) New York, NY: College Entrance Examination Board.
- Super, D. E. (1980). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 16, 282-298
- Super, D. E. (1990). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In D. Brown, L. Brooks, & Associates (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (pp. 197-261). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Swan, A., & Arminio, J. (2017). Developing career-ready skills: A review of the literature. In A. Peck (Ed.), *Engagement & Employability* (pp. 19-38). Washington, DC: NASPA.
- Terrell, T. (2012). *Division I student-athlete degree choice* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Digital Scholarship@UNLV. (1782)
- Thelin, J. R. (2019). *A history of American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tovar, E. (2013). A conceptual model on the impact of mattering, sense of belonging, engagement/involvement, and socio-academic integrative experiences on community college students' intent to persist. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd/81
- Trahan, K. (2014, July 9). Athletes are getting degrees, but does that actually mean anything? *SB Nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.sbnation.com/college-football/2014/7/9/5885433/ncaa-trial-student-athletes-education>
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. (2003). UNICEF definition of terms. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7308.html
- van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315421056>
- Walters, A. J. (1995). The phenomenological movement: Implications for nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 22(4), 791-799. 10.1046/j.1365-2648.1995.22040791.x

- Weiss, S. M., & Robinson, T. L. (2013). An investigation of factors relating to retention of student-athletes participating in NCAA Division-II athletics. *Interchange*, 44(1-2), 83-104. doi:10.1007/s10780-013-9198-7
- Wendlant, N., & Roehen, A. B. (2008). Addressing the college-to-work transition: Implications for University Career Counselors. *Journal of Career Development*, 35, 151-165. doi:10.1177 /0894845308325646
- White, L. (2014). *Lesbian and gay career development and Super's life-span, life-space theory* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/68440/1/White_Lisa_201411_PhD_thesis.pdf
- Wolverton, B. (2014, October 27). NCAA's graduation rates don't necessarily prove success. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/NCAAs-Graduation-Rates-Dont/149627/>
- World Health Organization. (1999). *Partners in life skills education: Conclusions from a United Nations inter-agency meeting*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/30.pdf

Biography

Morgan D. Fisher graduated from Wichita Heights High School, Wichita, Kansas, in 2000. She received her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Kansas State University in 2004. She later earned her Master of Education from Bowling Green State University in 2007.