

**Applying the Student-Athlete Success Wheel: Examining the Academic and Social
Experiences of Intercollegiate Student-Athletes**

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Abstract

The present study investigated how different elements of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel play a role in helping intercollegiate athletes at a Midwestern Division I university to be successful in both their roles: student and athlete. Student-athlete participants (n=63) were asked to rate the influence of the 10 ‘spokes’ of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel on their daily lives. Additionally, respondents provided qualitative feedback about the most beneficial aspect of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel and made suggestions on how to improve the student-athlete experience. After analyzing the data, the results indicated that the three elements most valuable to student-athletes were motivation, relationship building, and mentors. Potential reasons justifying the three most valuable ‘spokes’ were provided, as well as recommendations for how to improve areas that were not rated as highly. Because this is the first academic study that applies the Student-Athlete Success Wheel, more research is needed to confirm the results of this study.

Keywords: student-athlete, student-athlete success, student success

Applying the Student-Athlete Success Wheel: Examining the Academic and Social Experiences of Intercollegiate Student-Athletes

As a society, we are constantly trying to discover what helps students to be successful in the classroom. This is particularly true in higher education, where many theoretical models have been developed to address the topic of student success. However, many of these models do not address a unique subset of the college student population: student-athletes. Like regular students, collegiate student-athletes must attend classes and complete the necessary coursework to pass their classes. However, unlike regular students, student-athletes must also serve as representatives of the athletic department on the field of intercollegiate competition. These extra athletic duties can be extremely time-consuming, which means that student-athletes cannot approach their lives in the same ways that non-athletes do. In this study, elements that impact student-athlete success will be closely examined and recommendations for improving student-athlete success will be provided.

Literature Review

NCAA and the Student-Athlete

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing body for college athletics in the United States. The NCAA, along with its member institutions, works to provide student-athletes with the best possible experience. Although winning and achieving success have a place within college athletics, the NCAA maintains that it should not be the primary factor driving institutions. As stated by NCAA President Mark Emmert, “the single most important function of a university besides safeguarding people is educating them.... We certainly need to make sure that we’re not talking about just graduating or just maintaining eligibility but educating young men and young women” (Wolken, 2014, para. 3). Besides obtaining a college

education, the NCAA (n.d.b.) provides examples of other benefits of being a college-student athlete: being successful in the classroom, access to additional financial aid and scholarships, receiving academic assistance and other support services, access to world-class training opportunities, exposure to a variety of different experiences, and additional preparation for life after sport.

One area that the NCAA mandates support in is academics. In 1991, Bylaw 16.3.1.1 was added to the NCAA Manual, which states that “member institutions shall make general academic counseling and tutoring services available to all student-athletes” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021, p. 238). Today, most Division I universities have a department specifically dedicated to providing academic support for athletes. Generally, this department is involved in five areas of assistance for student-athletes: aiding with any academic-related questions, inspiring academic performance, creating academic schedules that avoid conflicts with practices and other athletic obligations, assisting with the development of time management skills, and helping to provide tutors (Bell, 2009).

To measure the academic achievement of college athletic teams, the Academic Progress Rate (APR) was developed by the NCAA (Comeaux, 2013). Student-athletes can earn up to two points for their school: one for remaining at the institution and one for staying academically eligible. For teams to remain eligible for championship play, they must obtain a minimum four-year average. Penalties for falling below this level can include a reduction in the amount of athletic activities allowed each week and limits on the allowed number of competitions (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.a). The APR holds schools accountable for ensuring that their student-athletes are achieving success in the classroom (Comeaux, 2013; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Another important element of the student-athlete experience is getting prepared for life after sport. In 2000, Bylaw 16.3.1.2 went into effect; this regulation stated that “an institution shall be required to conduct a life skills program on its campus” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2021, p. 238). Life skills programs have traditionally consisted of a variety of topics, like drug/alcohol prevention, sexual assault training, time management, stress management, eating disorders, sleep, and financial literacy. However, according to Justin Sell (personal communication, August 29, 2022), Director of Athletics at South Dakota State University, the changing landscape of college athletics requires a continuous evolution of life skills programming. In addition to the traditional aspects of life skills programming, Sell identified six topics of importance that should be included in a collegiate athletics life skills program to meet the current needs of today’s student-athletes: diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); name, image, and likeness (NIL) resources; gender equity; nutrition; mental health; and career development.

Scholar-Athlete Ideal and School-Sport Balance

College athletes ideally strive to be not just student-athletes, but scholar-athletes. A scholar-athlete is best defined as being “an individual that participates in and fully explores his or her ability to achieve excellence in both academics and a sport” (Cross & Fouke, 2019, p. 4). Cross & Fouke’s definition represents the extreme dedication that one must have to excel at both roles. In other words, a scholar-athlete is committed to balancing their obligations in the classroom and out on the field of play. Recent research supports that embracing this dual role pays off for students. According to a study conducted by Nichols et al. (2019), student-athletes who excelled in the classroom were more involved academically than those who did not perform as well. This certainly makes sense, as more classroom experience should translate to higher

grades. Interestingly, the study uncovered that “high athletic performers actually recorded more academic, social, and everyday experiences compared to low academic performers” (Nichols et al., 2019, p. 330). These findings support the scholar-athlete ideal and that involvement in non-athletic activities will not detract from their athletic performance. Finally, as described by Cross and Fouke (2019), the successful scholar-athlete possesses several critical skills, including time management, cooperation when working on a team, ability to lead others, and emotional and physical well-being.

Many college athletes are aware that they need to be accountable for their academic progress and success in addition to their sport obligations (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013). Some examples of student-athlete activities include recruiting, athletic practices, strength and conditioning sessions, interviews with local and/or national media, academic courses, and mandatory study-hall time (Harrison & Bukstein, 2014). However, several studies have discovered that some athletes struggle with balancing the aspects of school and sport (Kamusoko & Pemberton, 2013; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2020). For example, a recent NCAA (2020) GOALS Study found that only about 60% of student-athletes stated that they can successfully balance their athletic and extracurricular activities with their academics. Time management and organization is an incredibly important skill for all college students, but especially for student-athletes. Ultimately, achieving success boils down to buying-in to academics, as “providing opportunities for academically at-risk student-athletes and appropriate academic support is only worthwhile if the student-athlete commits to being educated” (Osborne, 2014, p. 150).

Student-Athlete Identity

When discussing the student-athlete experience, it is important to touch on the importance of student-athlete identity. Not only are the student-athletes themselves cognizant of their identity, but also the people around them. One study discovered that over 90% of the athletes surveyed felt that they could be identified by the campus community as being an athlete (Parsons, 2013). To continue their growth into their identity as a student-athlete, it becomes extremely important for student-athletes to engage with members of the university student body (Navarro & Malvaso, 2015). Opportunities for this kind of engagement exist within several venues, such as academic classrooms, the student union, and residential halls. When student-athletes are embarking on this development process, they can sometimes experience role conflict (Harrison & Bukstein, 2014). According to Harrison & Bukstein (2014), this role conflict occurs when student-athletes struggle with balancing the duality of being a student and athlete, particularly when they view their role as a student as the only means to achieve the ends of being an athlete.

Some college athletes feel that being an athlete is not the sole component of their identity, so they typically develop plans for life after sport (Harry & Weight, 2021). In other words, they feel prepared for the next stage of life and embrace a sense of readiness for what lies beyond (Stokowski et al., 2019). However, other student-athletes “feel an identity loss when their athletic career is complete and can experience difficulty transitioning into a new social environment and into the workplace” (Smith & Hardin, 2018, p. 62). This sense of loss is commonly mentioned as a negative aspect of the transition out of college athletics. Other negative responses to this transition include not being prepared for the next chapter of life, having a sense that something is missing in their lives, encountering physical issues (Stokowski

et al., 2019), and enduring an identity crisis (Smith & Hardin, 2018). So, it has become increasingly important for student-athletes to develop a broader sense of personal identity beyond sports to help them adapt to the real world after graduation.

Student-Athlete Stress

Because of the increased pressure in recent years on achieving success and winning, college athletics has become an extremely high-stakes environment for student-athletes. For many members of the public, they romanticize and glamorize the student-athlete experience (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020), not realizing how difficult and stressful it is to compete in intercollegiate sports. Stressed-out athletes will likely not perform well in the classroom or out on the field of competition. However, performance is not the primary concern with the escalating amount of student-athlete stress. Rather, an uptick in the number of high-profile student-athlete suicides has led to an increased emphasis on addressing mental health (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020). To remedy this issue, it is important to examine the stress faced by student-athletes. In a survey conducted by Madrigal and Robbins (2020), the major sources of student-athlete stress included the potential to get injured, big-time moments/important games, fitness/conditioning, and playing time.

The top predictor of stress in student-athletes has been discovered to be anxiety about academics, but the climate of the team and dynamics of the coaching staff have been found to play a secondary role (Hwang & Choi, 2016). Mixed evidence exists regarding how coaches can help with student-athlete stress. Although research has indicated that some student-athletes feel that their coaches are concerned about ensuring that their mental well-being is in a good state (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2020), other sources cast doubt on whether student-athletes believe their coaches could help them with emotional turmoil they are facing (Cutler &

Dwyer, 2020). Regardless, student-athletes are more likely to engage with athletic department support personnel (like athletic academic advisors) than their coaching staff or team personnel about stress that they are dealing with (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020). Therefore, it is critical that these support personnel are trained in stress management techniques and are knowledgeable about how to refer student-athletes to mental health resources that exist in other departments on campus.

Student-Athlete Relationships

Throughout a student-athlete's career, they are exposed to the social community of a university through interacting with teammates, classmates, coaches, professors, and participating in on- and off-campus organizations (Cross & Fouke, 2019). In other words, like traditional students, student-athletes form many relationships throughout their college years. There are some relationships that have particular importance for student-athletes.

Cutler and Dwyer (2020) discussed the importance of a student-athlete's relationship with their coaches. Many realize how important coaches are when it comes to the student-athlete's athletic development, but they also play a major role in their academic development (Bell, 2009). When coaches emphasize the dual importance of athletics and academics, they are more likely to see their athletes flourish in their transition out of sport (Harry & Weight, 2021). On that note, Comeaux and Harrison (2011) provide an important warning: "With the heightened commercialization of intercollegiate athletics, colleges and universities must recognize that the level of academic investment among college coaches and other internal stakeholders who frequently interact with student-athletes can influence their success and life goals" (p. 237). In other words, based on the research, if coaches leverage their connections with their student-athletes to prioritize academics, it will help ensure that they are successful in life after sport.

University faculty are another group that play an influential role in the lives of student-athletes. In fact, in the most recent NCAA (2020) GOALS Study, nearly 60% of NCAA student-athletes stated that they developed a strong relationship with a professor. Additionally, Bell (2009) found a pattern of strong student-athlete connections with college faculty that likely stem from a desire to support the student side of a student-athlete. These strong relationships were defined as: 1) involved multiple meetings, 2) consisted of time together outside of the class setting, and 3) lasted multiple semesters (Bell, 2009). Academic success typically is a result of these relationships (Comeaux, 2005; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Specifically, one analysis discovered a positive correlation between faculty assistance and college GPA, which means that students who were given help from college professors performed better in the academic realm. This demonstrates the importance of academic support programs providing faculty mentors to student-athletes (Comeaux, 2005).

Other relationships can also play an important part in student-athlete success. When discussing their smooth transition out of sport, Harry and Weight (2021) found that over half of respondents brought up their social support systems. Besides coaches, other relationships mentioned in the study included their family, significant others, friends, and teammates. Creating relationships with non-athlete peers, as well as professors, appears to relate to academic success because it allows for additional support beyond what athletes receive from coaches and teammates (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Finally, according to Smith and Hardin (2018), current student-athletes should seek out role models in their lives, specifically through establishing relationships with former student-athletes who are successful in their life after sport.

Student-Athlete Career Development

For much of their college careers, college athletes are focused on developing their athletic abilities. As previously mentioned, this dedication to refining their craft can sometimes lead them to not be as prepared to transition out into the real world as their non-athlete peers (Smith & Hardin, 2018). Because of this, there are growing calls for athletic departments to provide more career education and preparation opportunities for student-athletes (Harry & Weight, 2021; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2020; Smith & Hardin, 2018). Stokowski et al. (2019) elaborates on this point, stating that athletic departments should provide college athletes with real-world career experiences because if they do, "... athletes will begin to find an identity and to see their self-worth outside of sport" (p. 420).

In the recent NCAA (2020) GOALS Study, about one out of every five junior and senior athletes stated that they could not do an internship because it conflicted with their athletic schedule. Accordingly, multiple sources have advocated for the expansion of student-athlete internship opportunities (Comeaux, 2021; Haslerig & Navarro, 2016). Research has found that this is one area where student-athletes feel they have a distinct weakness as compared to non-athletes (Haslerig & Navarro, 2016). In a recent case study conducted about Clemson University's student-athlete internship program, most participants reported that their internship experience was useful in assisting them to reach both academic and professional career goals. Some of the major outcomes of their experience included professional development, communication, collaboration, and work ethic (Coffin et al., 2021). Furthermore, internships are a way for athletes to increase the size of their professional network and to apply what they have learned in the classroom and through their respective sport in the real world (Haslerig &

Navarro, 2016). In other words, it provides them with a chance to make connections with employers and to develop their work capabilities.

Professional development programs exist in many different forms in athletic departments around the country. As an example, at the University of Central Florida, the Knightship Program provides student-athletes with the chance to learn about different sectors of businesses for five hours a week for half a semester. On the opposite coast, Oregon State University's Everyday Champions Program involves workshops, informational speaker sessions, and other development initiatives designed to help prepare student-athletes for entering the workplace after graduation (Bukstein, 2016). To help combat the growing commercialization of college athletics and to prepare students for their future career, Harrison and Bukstein (2014) proposed a Meaningful Education and Career Preparation as Compensation Model that includes some of the following elements: an emphasis on experiential learning (e.g. internships and professional conferences), uniform decals for students who are successful in the classroom, online discussion forums geared towards sharing professional advice, and entrepreneurship competitions designed to provide financial resources to business ideas created by student-athletes.

Regardless of what approach is taken, Harry & Weight (2021) claim that athletic departments must do a better job at emphasizing career exploration, career planning, and career support for their student-athletes to help them prepare for life after being a student-athlete.

Student-Athlete Skill Development

As a college athlete, not only is it important to learn and refine their athletic abilities, but it is also a time in which they need to grow into a role as a productive member of society. Actively participating in the social and academic experiences that surround college student-athletes has been demonstrated to play a part in their personal development (Cox et al., 2004).

James J. Duderstadt, former president at the University of Michigan, aptly describes the positive influence of intercollegiate athletics on student-athlete development, stating that “college sports provided an important opportunity for teaching people about character, motivation, endurance, loyalty, and the attainment of one’s personal best—all qualities of great value in citizens” (2003, p. 70). Today, current student-athletes are cognizant of how sport is impacting their development into a contributing member of society. The most recent NCAA (2020) GOALS Study discovered that the vast majority of responding student-athletes felt that their involvement in college athletics positively impacted the growth of these skills: personal responsibility, work ethic, teamwork, goal setting, attention to detail, leadership, dealing with change, time management, and understanding different races/backgrounds.

However, not only are student-athletes aware of this skill development, but employers are taking notice as well. A survey of 50 different employers attributed the following traits to former student-athletes: competitive nature, orientation towards achieving goals, ability to work under pressure, tireless work ethic, strong conviction, and willingness to be teachable (Chalfin et al., 2015). To connect with the previous section of this literature review, this means that employers are recognizing how prepared some student-athletes are for their future career. One employer who participated in the survey conducted by Chalfin et al. (2015) sums it up best when they responded with the following statement: “These same life lessons you learned in sports directly translate to success in business. Teamwork, individual accountability, a strong work ethic and adaptability are some of the key attributes of successful employees” (p. 16). In other words, these transferrable skills that student-athletes refine over their college athletic careers are not only useful to society, but they are also applicable to their future job.

Introduction of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel

Although many theoretical models discussing student success exist within the literature, few specifically cover the unique population of student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). One of these models, the Model for College Student-Athlete Academic Success, examines pre-college factors, commitments made early on in an athlete's college career, and the athlete's system of social support to determine a student-athlete's success in the classroom (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Burton et al. (2021) used this model, as well as their personal perspectives and the experiences of the student-athletes they interviewed, to develop the Student-Athlete Success Wheel, which is shown in Appendix A. The 10 spokes of this wheel will be briefly described throughout the remainder of this section.

1) Priorities

Student athletes must realize that their most valuable resource is their personal time. It is important for student-athletes to discover what the most important thing in their life is and then carve out specific time in their routine to accommodate this priority (Burton et al., 2021).

2) Relationship building

This involves connecting with teammates, coaches, classmates, professors, and other relevant stakeholders in the student-athlete's athletic, academic, and personal life. Student-athletes should strive to create relationships that foster trust and a sense of commitment, which will hopefully lead to solid connections that last beyond a student-athlete's college years (Burton et al., 2021).

3) Using resources

Applicable resources can include a variety of on-campus academic and health resources, like tutoring services, the student health and counseling clinic, the university library, athletic training, and their academic advising team (Burton et al., 2021).

4) Mentors

As described by Burton et al. (2021), it is critical for student-athletes to “connect to a key person who will help guide you through your decisions and life steps” (p. 43). Mentors can provide mentees with solid advice on how to avoid certain missteps and how to achieve their academic or professional goals.

5) Time management

Time management is defined as “the efficiency with which you use your time” (Burton et al., 2021, p. 43). With the rigorous combination of academics and athletics, it is especially important for student-athletes to utilize this skill in their everyday routine.

6) Organization

Burton et al. (2021) believes that “organization helps you prioritize your activities and stay on top of what you need to achieve” (p. 44). Whether this involves using a daily planner or a mobile calendar of events, it is key for student-athletes to use some sort of organizational system.

7) Motivation

For many student-athletes, their primary desire is to attain success, both in the classroom and out on the field of competition. However, it is paramount that this desire is internally motivated to achieve long-term success (Burton et al., 2021).

8) School/sport balance

As discussed earlier in this literature review, student-athletes should strive to be a student first and an athlete second. Student-athletes should view their participation in athletics as being complimentary to their academics and their overall student experience (Burton et al., 2021).

9) Networking

With networking, it is all about who you know, not what you know. So, student-athletes should actively seek out ways in which they can leverage their status as an athlete to grow their professional network to set themselves up for success after their college years are finished (Burton et al., 2021).

10) Career focus, macro and micro

Student-athletes should be using every opportunity within their five years of eligibility to prepare themselves for their future career. Embracing a macro career focus means to determine one's desired field of study, while a micro approach asks students to narrow their career choice down to a specific segment of their chosen industry (Burton et al., 2021).

This particular tool was designed to help student-athletes track their progress over the course of their college experience. The central concept of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel "...is that each aspect builds on the others to cumulatively drive your success" (Burton et al., 2021, p. 41). No research has yet been conducted through the lens of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel, so the remainder of this paper will be dedicated to diving into its practical applications to actual student-athletes.

Methods

For this study, an original survey instrument was created. This instrument consisted of 20 statements on a four-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree) and two

open-ended questions that sought specific feedback about aspects of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel. For the 20 Likert-type scale statements, each ‘spoke’ of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel received two statements based on their definitions and explanations in the work of Burton et al. (2021). To test this instrument’s validity, a ‘convenience sampling’ approach was utilized, in which feedback was gathered on the survey’s design from those easy to recruit (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). In the first round, the instrument was examined by a professional sport consultant, a sport management professor, a college dean, a college athletic director, a senior woman administrator, and three athletic academic advisors. I was fortunate enough to have two of the authors of the Burton et al. (2021) book, *20 Secrets to Success for NCAA Student-Athletes*, provide feedback about my survey during this round of testing. In the second round, the survey was presented to college student-athletes at a meeting of a Division I Midwestern university’s Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC). These pilot run participants were informed that this was not the real study. As a result, over 40 SAAC members provided written and oral feedback on the structure and clarity of the survey. This feedback was incorporated into updating the survey before proceeding into the next stage of the research process. See Appendix A for a copy of the Student-Athlete Success Survey.

The population of the study consisted of three athletic teams at a Midwestern Division I institution. All three head coaches of these teams gave their consent for their team to take part in this research project. These teams were asked to participate in this study because all three were out of season, are known on campus for their team culture, and have head coaches with tenure. As recommended by administrators within the athletic department, the survey was distributed to students in paper form during October 2022. After participants completed the survey, the data were compiled in an Excel spreadsheet and a Word document so that it could be properly

analyzed. When converting into a digital format, the qualitative data was double-checked and the quantitative data was triple-checked for accuracy.

Results

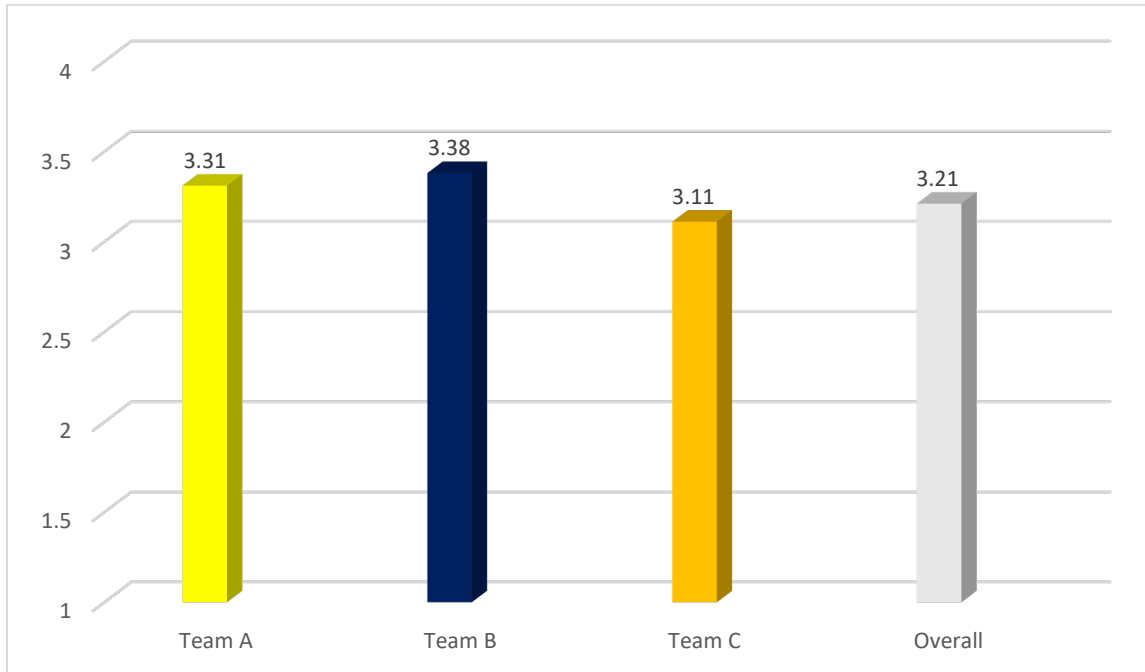
Overall, 63 student-athletes participated in this study: 13 females and 50 males. In this section, the quantitative results will be reported for each ‘spoke’ of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel.

Priorities

Respondents were asked if they had a list of priorities most important to them and if they carved out time for things that were most important for their personal success. The average scores for the teams were as follows: 3.12 for Team A, 3.04 for Team B, and 2.92 for Team C. Overall, the average combined score was 2.98.

Relationship Building

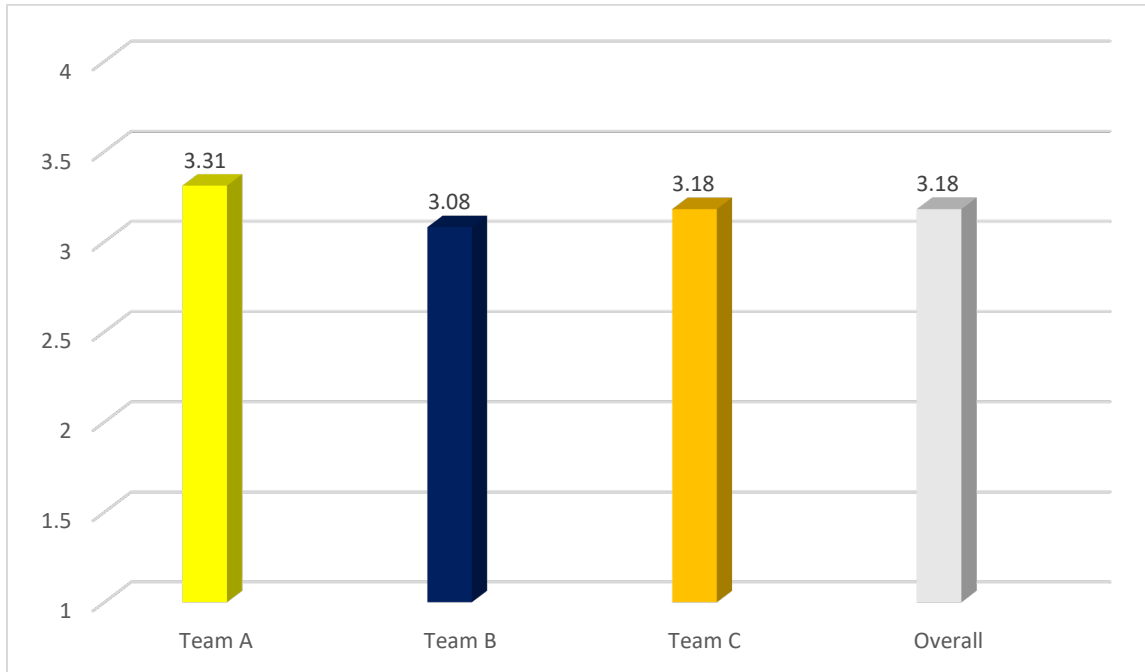
Survey participants were asked about the development of relationships with their coaches/teammates (athletic connections) and peers/professors (academic connections). The scores for this spoke can be found in Figure 1. Relationship building tied for the highest average score for Team B, which was a 3.38. It also received the second highest average score (3.21) for the combined results of all three teams.

Figure 1*Relationship Building Results***Using Resources**

Respondents were asked about their utilization of academic and health resources through the athletic department or on-campus. The highest average team score was Team A (3.27), followed by Team B (2.92) and Team C (2.81). Overall, the combined average score for this category was 2.93.

Mentors

Survey participants were asked if they had someone in their life they are not related to that was invested in their success and they used to help them make important life decisions. The scores for this category are located in Figure 2. The combined average score for the Mentors category was 3.18, which was the third highest overall score.

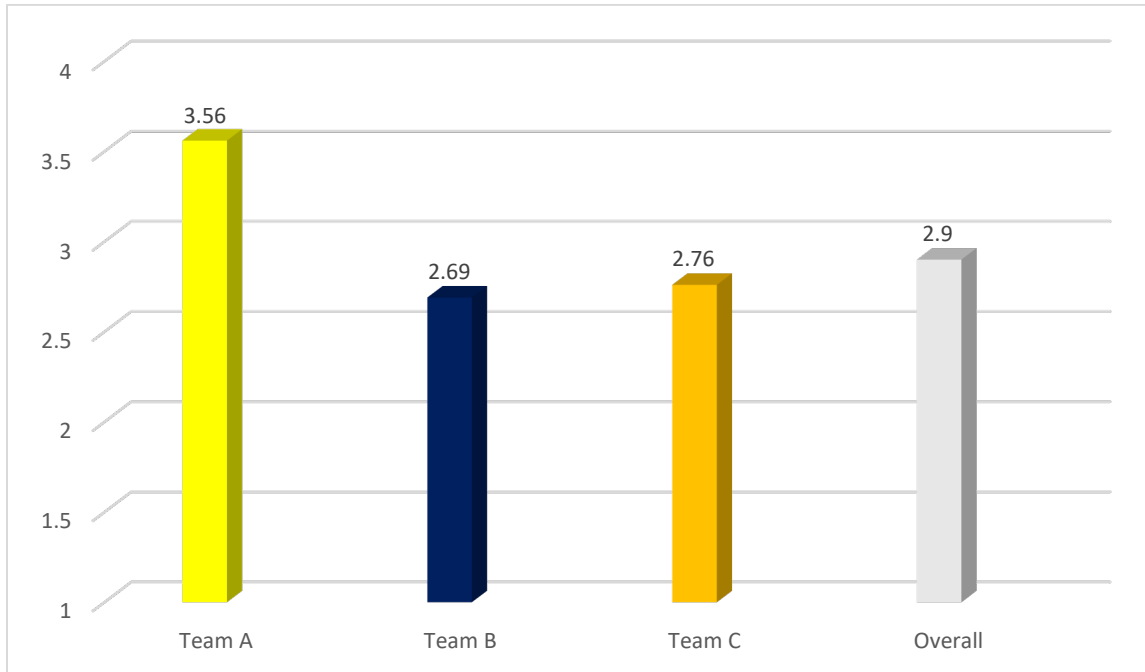
Figure 2*Mentors Results***Time Management**

Respondents were asked about how well they used and managed their time each day. The average scores for the teams were as follows: 2.81 for Team A, 2.85 for Team B, and 2.64 for Team C. The average combined score for this spoke of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel was 2.71, which was tied with another spoke for the second lowest score.

Organization

Survey participants were asked if they used organizational tools and other skills to help them be successful in their daily lives. The average results can be found in Figure 3.

Organization received the highest average score for Team A, which was a 3.56. It also had the most amount of variance between teams, with a range of 0.87.

Figure 3*Organization Results***Motivation**

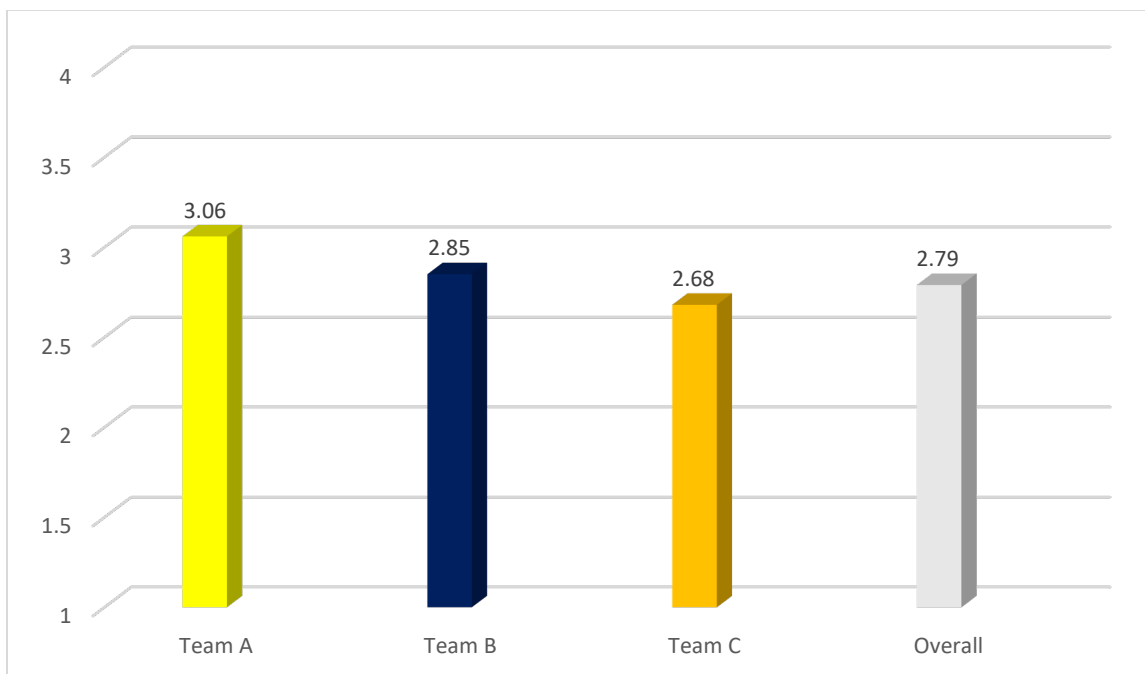
Respondents were asked whether their drive to be successful in academics and athletics came from internal motivations. Two teams (Team A and Team B) had equally high scores of 3.38, while Team C's average score was 3.32. Overall, the combined average score for all three teams was 3.35. Motivation tied for the highest average score for Team B. It also received the highest average score for Team C. Notably, the Motivation score was the highest combined results of all three teams and had the least amount of variation between teams, with a range of only 0.06.

School/Sport Balance

Survey participants were asked about how they balance their academic and athletic roles and if they viewed themselves as a student-athlete (rather than as an athlete-student). The average scores for this spoke can be located in Figure 4.

Figure 4

School/Sport Balance Results



Networking

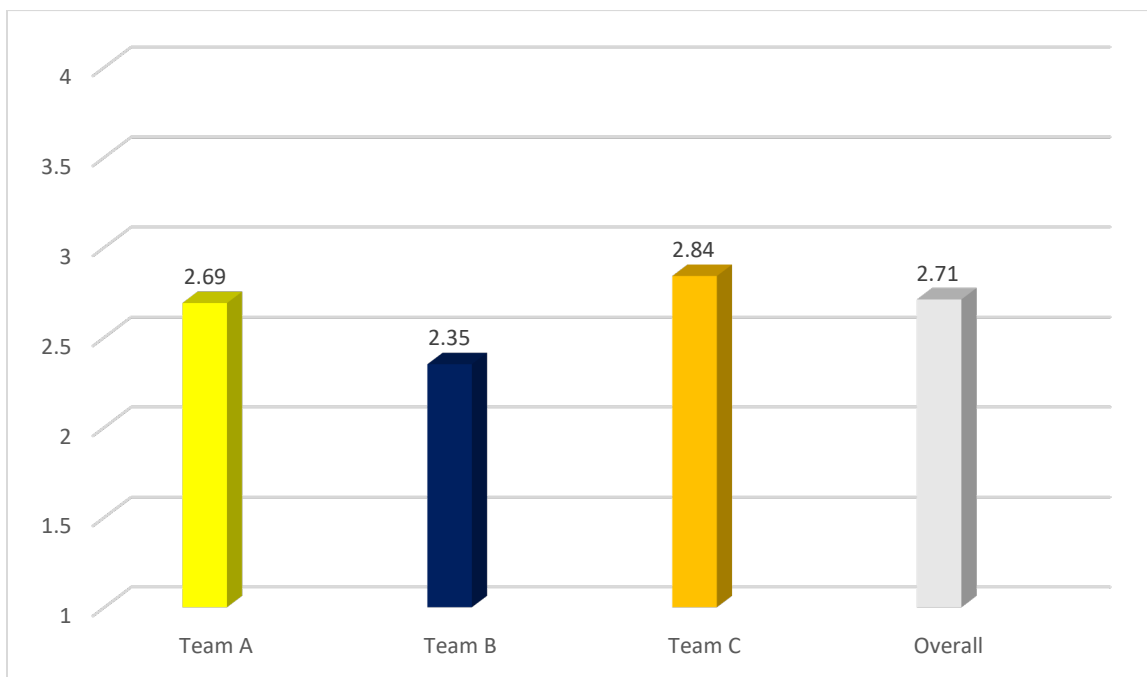
Respondents were asked if they had used their status as a college athlete to grow their professional network. The average team scores were as follows: 2.28 for Team A, 2.47 for Team B, and 2.39 for Team C. The overall average team score for this category was 2.38. Networking received the lowest average score for Team A and Team C, while it also was the lowest average score for the results of the combined three teams.

Career Focus: Macro and Micro

Survey participants were asked to acknowledge whether they have narrowed down what career field they would like to pursue after graduation and whether they have found a specific position that interests them. The results for this spoke of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel can be found in Figure 5. Career focus was the lowest average score (2.35) for Team B and tied with the Time Management category for the second lowest overall score.

Figure 5

Career Focus Results



The complete results for each of the three teams, along with the range and average score for each of the 10 spokes of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel, are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1*Quantitative Results of the Student-Athlete Success Survey*

Spoke	Team A	Team B	Team C	Range between Teams	Average
Priorities	3.12	3.04	2.92	0.20	2.98
Relationship Building	3.31	3.38	3.11	0.27	3.21
Using Resources	3.27	2.92	2.81	0.46	2.93
Mentors	3.31	3.08	3.18	0.23	3.18
Time Management	2.81	2.85	2.64	0.21	2.71
Organization	3.56	2.69	2.76	0.87	2.90
Motivation	3.38	3.38	3.32	0.06	3.35
School/Sport Balance	3.06	2.85	2.68	0.38	2.79
Networking	2.28	2.47	2.39	0.19	2.38
Career Focus: Macro and Micro	2.69	2.35	2.84	0.49	2.71

The last two questions of the Student-Athlete Success Survey encouraged student-athletes to provide open-ended responses. Student-athletes were provided a visual of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel to assist in answering the open-ended questions. The first open-ended question asked students to consider what element of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel was most beneficial to their student-athlete experience. The second open-ended question prompted students to identify an improvement that could be made to enhance the overall student-athlete experience. To share the student-athlete responses, several themes have been identified.

The first short-answer question asked respondents to identify what aspect of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel has been most beneficial to their personal successes as a student-athlete. Three primary themes emerged: relationship building, motivation, and time management. Twenty-one student comments were part of the Relationship Building theme, 20 student

comments related to the importance of Motivation, and 12 student comments fell under the Time Management theme. Several quotes for each of the three primary themes are included below.

Each respondent was coded with a number and the letter indicated their team affiliation.

Relationship Building

Respondent 3A: “Without the relationships that I have built, I don’t think I would be as motivated or in a good head space to fulfill the rest of the elements. The relationships I have built are why I love being a student athlete.”

Respondent 9A: “I think the relationships I’ve formed with my teammates, coaches, athletic staff, academic faculty, etc. have been most impactful on me. They have supported me & opened many other doors for me.”

Respondent 10C: “Some of my past and current teammates are some of the people I’m closest with in my life. As someone who struggles with mental health having that support group around me really makes a difference”

Motivation

Respondent 12A: “I believe motivation has been the most beneficial because, the way I view it, without the will/desire/motivation there is no driving force pushing you to continue being a student-athlete. You have to want to be a student-athlete. Once the motivation is gone, that’s when people quit.”

Respondent 36C: “I understand what I am capable of in the classroom & on the field, and my passion for [sport] gives me enough motivation to work-hard, show up everyday & give it

my all to be successful. However, being able to translate the same degree of motivation for success in the classroom is difficult, but when achieved it makes life easier & more enjoyable”

Respondent 13B: “If I decide I want to do something, I do everything in my power to get it done”

Time Management

Respondent 22C: “As a student-athlete, you are forced to be good at managing your time or else you will start to lack in the classroom or on the field. It would be impossible to get everything done in a day without good time management”

Respondent 7A: “Having busy schedules makes it crucial to know what I need to get done and roughly how long it takes. By making sure I get things done allows me time for personal & social time.”

For the second open-ended question, respondents were asked to consider the 10 elements of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel and suggest ways to improve their experience as student-athletes. Four themes emerged: using resources, time management, networking, and priorities. Sixteen student comments related to the Using Resources theme, 10 student comments mentioned improvements that could be made to Time Management, and eight student comments each fell under the themes of Networking and Priorities. Quotes for each of the four themes are included below.

Using Resources

Respondent 6A: “I think it would be useful to have better access to mental health support or just having check-ins with a mentor because being a student-athlete can be overwhelming.”

Respondent 6C: “I think some of us athletes do not use all the resources available to us because we think it is not needed or feel embarrassed to go ask for help on something school related or even athletically related.”

Respondent 6B: “We tend to rely on ourselves to make decisions and overcome many obstacles, but there are many people and programs that are willing to help us.”

Time Management

Respondent 13C: “Time management is something I struggle with. Discussing some strategies for that would have greatly benefited me to start my athletic career”

Respondent 36C: “I understand that as student-athletes we need to spend a ton of time on both athletics & school, but the time away from the general population on campus sometimes gets tough. We spend so much time around the same people because of the time commitment, it can be difficult.”

Respondent 21C: “Time management is something that is very tricky as a student athlete because you’re doing a lot of things in a week and need to be able to manage it all. I definitely would say if I was better at this it would help my overall experience.”

Networking

Respondent 13A: “I think networking could improve because I don’t always know how or who to reach out to that would be helpful for my future career.”

Respondent 20C: “Having more alumni come back to tell us about some of the things that made them successful when they were here”

Priorities

Respondent 4A: “I think people do not realize how hard it can be to be away from family and the ones you love. I think having [sport] & school at the top of the priority list is important, but I also think my family are the most important people in my life and I wish I could spend more time with them”

Respondent 27C: “Working on what’s most important and making sure I get it done would relieve a lot of stress in my life.”

Discussion

With the research conducted, I hoped to discover elements that have the greatest influence on student-athlete success. I specifically examined the ‘spokes’ of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel, which include priorities, relationship building, using resources, mentors, time management, organization, motivation, school/sport balance, networking, and career focus. Since this model has never been applied to actual student-athletes, the main priority of this study was to reduce the research gap that exists in this area of student success.

The results of this study found that the three ‘spokes’ of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel that received the most support across all three teams involved in this study were motivation, relationship building, and mentors. Three areas that have the most room for improvement among these three teams are networking, career focus, and time management. For Team A, organization received the highest average rating, while networking had the lowest average score. On Team B, relationship building and motivation got equally high scores, while career focus received the lowest overall score. For Team C, motivation garnered the top average score, while networking got the lowest average rating. The category of organization received the

most variation among average team scores, while the area of motivation had the least amount of variation among the three teams.

The area of motivation constantly ranked highly in the results of this study, regardless of the team. Additionally, there was a very small margin (0.06) between the average results of each team. The consistency in this category demonstrates the drive and passion required of student-athletes to be successful on the field and in the classroom, regardless of the sport played. As stated in part by Respondent 12A, "...the way I view it, without the will/desire/motivation there is no driving force pushing you to continue being a student-athlete. You have to want to be a student-athlete." Student-athletes must have some force within them pushing them to do their best and to achieve more. Without this internal fire, they run the risk of losing their competitive edge that they had spent years honing and developing. Furthermore, as alluded to by Respondent 12A, they may eventually quit competing in their sport altogether. Through this study, it is apparent that student-athletes are fully cognizant of how important possessing motivation is to their personal success and show an awareness for how to utilize their motivating factors to their advantage.

The average overall scores for the 'spokes' of relationship building and mentors were the second-highest and third-highest, respectively. Because of the interconnected nature of these two categories and the tiny variation (0.03) between the overall scores of these 'spokes', I feel that it is relevant to discuss these areas together. For student-athletes to be successful, they must develop relationships with many different individuals who play a role in their lives as intercollegiate athletes. Some of these individuals include, but are not limited to: teammates, coaches, professors, athletic department non-coaching staff, peers (non-student-athletes), and fellow athletes. Relationship building is a characteristic that is inherent in sport. Especially in

team sports, athletes cannot perform to the best of their ability when they do not trust or do not have a relationship with their fellow teammates. Therefore, many coaches emphasize team-building within the context of their program, particularly during preseason practices so that athletes can build rapport with one another before the season begins. So, because many student-athletes have been exposed to and learned about this important skill, they transfer it to other areas of their life (academic and social). Also, because of how busy college athletes are, most cannot do everything that a normal student does on their own. As such, relationships with academic advisors and professors are key for helping student-athletes achieve success in the classroom. As mentioned by Comeaux (2005), one way to foster these relationships is for academic support programs (typically led by an athletic academic advisor or someone involved with academic support for an athletic department) to connect student-athletes with a faculty mentor. Furthermore, when discussing the role of mentors, this is another area that inherently is found in sport. When athletes are new to a team or an organization, they typically look to team captains or upperclassmen for advice on how to navigate the team culture and life as a student-athlete. Once again, because they get this experience within the context of sport, it makes it easier for them to apply these skills to areas outside of sport. First-year student-athletes are no longer surrounded by family, so they look to others in their environment to provide them guidance and assistance. The high ranking of mentors in this study is supported by previous research, particularly the suggestion of Smith and Hardin (2018) for student-athletes to have role models involved in their lives.

On average, the category of networking received by far the lowest score when combining the results of all three teams. Student-athletes dedicate so much of their time to academics and athletics that supplemental activities, like networking, may fall to the bottom of the list of

priorities. Additionally, concerns about access to networking opportunities could be relevant, as career fairs, professional conferences, and other networking events are typically hosted during the day, which is a prime time for student-athletes to have class or practice conflicts. For example, in the mind of a student-athlete, time spent traveling to and presenting at an academic conference is time that cannot be spent on refining their athletic crafts. One potential way that coaches could address this issue is to build networking into the culture of the athletic program. For instance, coaches could encourage current players to connect with alumni within their sport. This could be accomplished by pairing student-athletes with a former athlete who is in their field of interest and having them frequently communicate with or job shadow their mentor. As mentioned by Respondent 20C, it could also be beneficial to invite alumni to speak to current players to give them advice about how they succeeded during their college years and how they successfully transitioned to the workforce after graduation.

Another potential area of improvement that showed up in the results of this study involves the ‘spoke’ of career focus. For many college student-athletes, they view their participation in athletics as their job. However, by not thinking about life after sport while still in college, student-athletes are not setting themselves up for future success. Many members of the general student body spend much of their four years in college exploring different careers through working in their field of interest as an intern or in a part-time position. As such, previous research has proven that this is one area where student-athletes feel disadvantaged as compared to regular students (Haslerig & Navarro, 2016). It is vital that student-athletes obtain work experiences in concurrence with their athletic experiences so that they can successfully transition to the workforce immediately following graduation. One way to potentially remedy this issue is for universities to develop internship programs specifically for student-athletes. This would

allow student-athletes to participate in internship experiences that would be designed to accommodate their busy academic and athletic schedules (e.g. 5 hours a week throughout the entire academic year, only intern during offseason, etc.) and still receive similar career experiences as the rest of the student body. Clemson University's student-athlete internship program has received positive comments regarding how it helped participants to achieve their career goals and develop as competent professionals in their field (Coffin et al., 2015). Accordingly, there is no reason why this model cannot be duplicated in schools across the country to provide more career exploration opportunities for student-athletes.

The category of time management seemed to receive the most mixed results of any of the 'spokes' of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel. Although it received one of the lowest scores in the quantitative section of the research and was mentioned by 10 student-athletes as an area of improvement, it was also brought up by 12 students as the most beneficial part of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel. Previous research discovered just 60% of college student-athletes successfully managed their time between their athletic, academic, and social pursuits. Interestingly enough, in this same study, the vast majority of student-athletes reported that their experience as a college athlete positively affected their development of time management skills (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2020). In other words, existing research supports the conflicting results surrounding the topic of time management that were obtained in this study. One way that athletic departments could attempt to fix this large disparity is through programming efforts geared towards time management skills. As an example, time management could be a featured topic in a freshman student-athlete mentoring program or the focus of a monthly SAAC meeting. Effective time management is essential not only to success in college,

but life in general, so it is critical that athletic departments and coaches do everything in their power to help their student-athletes develop these skills.

One last discussion topic about the results centers around the ‘spoke’ of organization. In particular, the range of this category between the lowest and highest team scores (0.87) was almost double the range of any other category. With this extreme variation, it should come as no surprise that it was the top average score for Team A, while it was one of the lower scores for both Team B and Team C. One reason for this disparity could be related to the team culture. For instance, the coach of Team A may emphasize the importance of organization, while the coaches of Team B and Team C may choose to focus on other aspects of success. Another potential explanation for the huge difference could be the age of the team. Teams composed mostly of upperclassmen may be more oriented towards organizational skills because they have discovered the importance of planners and other organizational tools to help them stay on top of their daily schedules, while younger teams made up of first-year students may not have figured out how critical these resources are to achieving success. I feel that the disparity in the topic could be something explored in future research projects.

The biggest limitation of this study is that because the Student-Athlete Success Wheel has never been applied in research, the survey instrument used in this project was created completely from scratch, using the work of Burton et al. (2021) to guide its development. Although it was reviewed by professionals in the college sport industry and current student-athletes before it was distributed to the selected population, it was not subject to extensive scholarly testing and review. Another limitation of this study is that the responses of first-year student-athletes were included. Because this survey was administered around the midpoint of the fall semester, first-year student-athletes had only been on campus for a few months. Therefore,

they may have not had an adequate amount of time to develop opinions on statements discussed in the survey instrument.

Future research should continue to dive deeper into the ‘spokes’ of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel. In fact, I feel that a whole study could be devoted to just one specific element of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel (e.g. motivation, networking, organization, etc.). The survey developed in this study could be administered to students from different geographic regions and different levels of athletic competition (Division I, Division II, Division III) to see if a wider pool of participants would change the findings. Also, future research could examine the differences between male and female student-athletes. This would allow researchers to see if there is a variation in how success on the field and in the classroom is achieved based on the gender of the student-athlete. Finally, future studies could look at how the results differ between student-athletes involved in team sports and those involved in individual sports.

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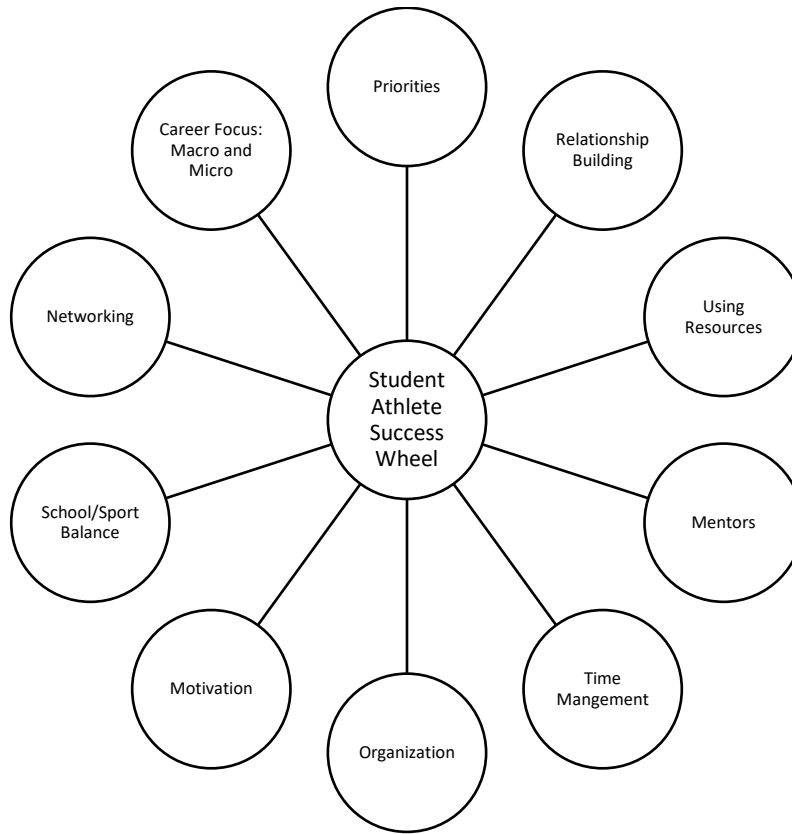
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Appendix A

Student-Athlete Success Survey

To answer the questions below, consider your experience as a student athlete. Read each statement and mark the box that best describes your experience. On the back side of this survey, there are 2 open-ended questions related to your experience as a student-athlete.

	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I have a written list or other visual reminders of the priorities in my life that are most important to me.				
2	I always make time for things that are most important for my personal success.				
3	I have developed strong relationships with my coaches and teammates.				
4	I have developed close relationships with my peers and professors on campus.				
5	I use athletic and/or on-campus academic resources, such as tutoring, SI, the library, mentoring programs, etc.				
6	I use athletic and/or on-campus health resources, such as the wellness center, the student health clinic, nutritionist, athletic trainer, etc.				
7	I have someone in my life who is not related to me that I rely on to help me make important decisions.				
8	I have someone in my life who is not related to me that is invested in me and my long-term success.				
9	I make the most effective use of my time every day.				
10	I find that it is easy to manage my time every day.				
11	I use a planner, calendar, or another tool to stay organized.				
12	My organizational skills help me to accomplish my daily tasks and assignments.				
13	My desire to be successful in the classroom comes from within.				
14	My desire to be successful in my athletic activities comes from within.				
15	I feel good about how I balance my academic and athletic priorities.				
16	I view myself as a student first and an athlete second.				
17	I have used my status as an athlete to connect with professionals in my field of interest.				
18	I have connected with alumni from my sport to grow my professional network.				
19	I know what general career field I would like to work in after graduation.				
20	I have a specific job within my chosen career field that I want to apply for after graduation.				



Of the 10 elements of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel (pictured above), which has been the most beneficial to your student-athlete experience? Please explain.

Considering the 10 elements of the Student-Athlete Success Wheel, what improvements could be made in the future to enhance the student-athlete experience? Please explain.