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Collaborative Peer Tutoring as a Mechanism for the Integration of First-Year Student-Athletes

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COLLABORATIVE PEER TUTORING AS A MECHANISM FOR THE INTEGRATION OF
FIRST-YEAR STUDENT-ATHLETES

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Dedicated to my parents Glenn Walters, Sr. and Debby Schork-Walters, my sisters Courtney and Brieanna, and my loving and supportive family
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ABSTRACT

For high-profile Division-I student-athletes, the academic success journey is often overshadowed by athletic participation, providing both researchers and practitioners an incomplete picture of student-athlete academic success. There exists little literature on the phenomenon of student-athlete integration, a process suggested to enhance chances of academic success for this population (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Moreover, existing integration models largely do not consider the unique characteristics of student-athletes.

Student-athletes, particularly Division-I revenue athletes, face grueling athletic schedules and public expectations that make it difficult for them to achieve academic or social integration with the non-athletic parts of university life. In light of considerable public scrutiny of Division-I sports (Gayles & Hu, 2009b), a better understanding of student-athlete integration has the potential to (a) improve the college experience for this population, (b) increase integration, (c) promote academic success, and (d) enhance overall retention.

Over the course of the Spring 2012 semester, multiple observations and interviews were performed in Structured Study Time (SST), a collaborative peer-tutoring program housed in the Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services at Legacy University. Data was analyzed based on the procedures outlined in Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) grounded theory methodology. The Supporting Connections (SC) model uncovered in this study is a conceptual model describing the student-athlete integration process in a collaborative tutoring arrangement.

The model proposes that student-athlete integration is best achieved when student-athletes strengthen and stabilize connections with the institution’s people, places, and activities beyond the playing field. The notion of connections indicates the overarching theme that permeates all the other items in the model. This continuous process is the mechanism responsible for supporting student-athlete perceptions of connection to the whole college experience (e.g., by
building a strong connection with the tutor, the student-athlete feels a stronger connection to SST and, by extension, the multiple domains of the university’s life. Findings suggest that the student-athlete integration process is undergirded by strong institutional agents (e.g., tutorial staff) who are able to manipulate important academic and social forces in SST, thus creating the desired experiences (e.g., engagement, enjoyment, and escapism) that perpetuate student-athlete connections to university life.

The Supporting Connections (SC) model presented in this study provides a new tool for researchers and practitioners to assess the integrative potential of campus support programs, designed with characteristics of Division-I student-athletes in mind, that can (a) provide a better conceptual understanding of the integration process, (b) more effectively operationalize student-athlete integration, (c) increase perceptions of belonging to other campus organizations, and (d) increase the likelihood of academic success for this non-traditional student population.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Academic and social integration, or strong affiliations with campus academic and social environments, have been shown to have a positive effect on (a) academic success, (b) overall learning, (c) student development, (d) persistence, and (e) overall retention for traditional-aged college students (Astin, 1984; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Nora, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 1975, 1993). However, there exists little literature on the phenomenon of student-athlete integration, a process suggested to enhance chances of academic success for this population (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011), and existing models largely do not consider the unique characteristics of student-athletes.

For high-profile Division-I student-athletes, the academic success journey is often overshadowed by athletic participation. Student-athletes are a distinctive non-traditional population, subject to different challenges and needs than traditional students. When compared to their traditional student counterparts, student-athletes face additional challenges in navigating balanced academic and athletic identities, as well as excessive time demands resulting from sport participation (Despres, Brady, & McGowan, 2008; Gayles, 2009; Jolly, 2008; Watt & Moore, 2001; Wolverton, 2008). Although student-athletes are provided similar opportunities to engage campus academic and social systems as their traditional student counterparts, sport involvement likely limits their ability to maximize such involvement. In light of a general erosion of public confidence, low graduation rates, and publicized academic scandals in Division-I sports (Gayles & Hu, 2009b), a better understanding of student-athlete integration has the potential to (a) improve the college experience for this population, (b) increase integration, (c) promote academic success, and (d) enhance overall retention.
The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of a collaborative group-tutoring format in enhancing first-year student-athletes’ academic success. The forum for investigation in the current study is Structured Study Time (SST), a multi-dimensional collaborative tutoring arrangement run by graduate students at Legacy University. Further description of SST is presented in Chapter Three. For the purposes of this research, academic success is defined as the cumulative journey by which students make consistent progress towards a degree, a process precipitated by successful academic and social integration, as well as achievement of personal educational objectives (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). This study explores student-athlete academic success through the lens of integration, specifically academic and social integration. This grounded analysis addresses a specific research question: Does participation in collaborative peer tutoring facilitate academic and social integration for first-year student-athletes?

A Need to Expand Current Conceptual Models of Integration for Student-Athletes

Effective support programs and intentional interactions with faculty and peers can aid student-athletes in their participation in the athletic, social, and academic realms of college (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Astin (1984) claim that the level of intensity upon which a student engages in both academic and social aspects of the college environment affects their overall perception of the educational experience. Many studies have emphasized the importance of academic and social integration, or involvement, in influencing retention patterns of college students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Nora, Attinasi, & Matonak, 1996; Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1996), yet current scholarship has not examined what practices are most effective from an athlete-centered point of view in creating perceptions of integration. Astin (1993), Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005), and Tinto (1975, 1993) found that purposeful engagement with the academic and
social realms of college led to desirable outcomes, specifically enhanced retention for traditional students; however, these retention studies have largely failed to account for the unique student-athlete experience, and thus cannot be generalized to this population. As Comeaux and Harrison (2011) state, “Unlike other students, student-athletes as a nontraditional group are burdened with many demands resulting from the existing structure of intercollegiate athletics that pose challenges to their academic success and the overall quality of their college experience” (p. 236). Academic progress goals are often overshadowed by an emphasis to produce winning seasons and secure high-value corporate sponsorships (Eitzen, 2009).

While practitioners have figured out that creating meaningful engagement opportunities for students in the academic and social cultures of the university is important for overall academic success, the question as to what types of practices are effective for student-athletes remain unclear. Few attempts have been made to generate models of student-athlete integration that take into account the unique experiences of this population. To take advantage of the limited amount of time that high-profile student-athletes have to dedicate to such endeavors, it is important to determine whether programs such as collaborative tutoring effectively promote integration.

As a diverse non-traditional student group, very little is known as to why certain student-athletes outperform their peers academically. Existing studies (see Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Gayles & Hu, 2009b; Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terenzini, 1996) have begun to advance current understandings on variations in student-athlete academic performance. For example, Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, and Terenzini (1996) controlled for pre-college characteristics and found that intercollegiate sports competition led to gains in internal locus of attribution for success during the first year. Gaston-Gayles (2004) found that non-cognitive
factors, such as academic motivation, positively influenced academic performance among student-athletes. Gayles and Hu (2009b) found that student-athletes, regardless of race/ethnicity or profile level of competition, are equally likely to engage in purposeful activities, and increased involvement leads to increased learning for this population. As Comeaux and Harrison (2011) point out, although this research highlights potential forces responsible for either promoting or inhibiting student-athlete academic success, little is known as to how the overall integration process occurs. A better understanding of the cumulative integration process for student-athletes may allow practitioners to create timely interventions that foster academic and social engagement, consequently improving academic success.

Issues affecting the integration patterns and eventual path to academic success for high-profile student-athletes seem to be the most elusive and remain largely unknown to date (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Gayles and Hu (2009b) state that interactions with peers, outside of their respective sports, have led to positive cognitive and affective gains for both low- and high-profile collegiate athletes in distinct ways. However, their research also noted that participation in academic-related activities is more meaningful for low-profile athletes and indicated that a better understanding of the types of involvement that lead to enhanced learning for high-profile athletes is warranted. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) claim that a key domain of social integration for student-athletes involves engagement in extracurricular activities aside from their sports. While this research is valuable in providing examples of two important means of involvement that promote academic success (i.e., peer interactions outside of one’s sport and extracurricular activity other than sport), evidence is scant as to how such integration occurs.

Enhancing the overall academic success of student-athletes lies in expanding on existing frameworks that represent the unique qualities of the student-athlete experience. Comeaux and
Harrison (2011) developed a multi-level theoretical model to help explain the academic success of Division-I student-athletes, which is the only one of its kind specifically designed for this population. This research aims to expand on the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model, with an emphasis on the notions of academic and social integration as factors influencing academic success, and will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

The Most Challenging Experience: First-Year Student-Athletes at Division-I Institutions

The majority of student attrition among traditional populations occurs during the first year and before the beginning of the second year (Noel-Levitz, 2011; Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1993), student attrition is a direct result of lack of academic and social integration into the university community. Even more striking is the link between early academic and social experiences and future integration patterns of college students. Tinto claims that these experiences, even ones occurring as early as the first few weeks of college, can have long-term effects on future persistence towards degree completion. Although these findings may be applicable to traditional student populations, there is yet to be a systematic investigation of this phenomenon for student-athletes. Student-athletes at Division-I institutions are required to devote a great deal of time to their sport and are not typically able to devote as much time as their non-athlete counterparts to academic and social engagements.

The cumulative student-athlete experience can be affected by such factors as division level, effective academic support programs, year in school, or participation in a revenue or non-revenue sport. No two student-athletes will ever share an identical college experience. Nonetheless, the college student-athlete experience may be the most challenging for first-year student-athletes at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division-I institutions. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) state that, “Despite their relatively small representation on college campuses, Division-I student-athletes occupy a socially prominent space, whether as the subject
of controversy or of celebration” (p. 235). Sellers, Kuperminc, and Damas (1997) cite that student-athletes face the additional stress and pressures of achieving success in their sports. Balancing athletic and academic demands can be particularly difficult for first-year student-athletes (Gayles, 2009). Furthermore, Humphrey, Yow, and Bowden (2000) and Papanikolaou, Nikolaidis, Patsiaouras, and Alexopoulos (2003) cite that collegiate athletic status can result in additional stress being placed on these student-athletes due to loss of star status they may have experienced in high school, injuries, and conflicts with their coaches.

Particular attention should be paid to the academic and social integration patterns of first-year student-athletes at Division-I institutions, as these early experiences are likely to influence future academic success patterns in profound ways. Specifically, it is important for educators to identify mechanisms through which student-athletes can benefit from the academic and social integration opportunities commonly enjoyed by traditional non-athletes during the critical first year of college. Thus, new research is necessary to gain insight into the academic and social integration patterns of first-year student-athletes, not only to elicit recommendations for improving current support programs, but to enhance the overall college experience for this distinctive population.

Developing the Grounded Theory

Employing a grounded theory approach as defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008), this study examines one intervention that purports to enhance student-athlete academic and social integration—a collaborative tutoring program and involved in-depth interviews with several participants, multiple observations of tutoring sessions performed weekly, and document analysis of pertinent materials. A theoretical sampling strategy modeled after Corbin and Strauss (2008) was used to provide the researcher the flexibility to explore emerging theoretical constructs to saturate categories. Theoretical sampling is a technique that is concept-driven, cumulative, and is
specifically appropriate for studying areas that have received little attention in the current literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this study, sampling was guided by the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model, such that I attempted to collect interview data from student-athletes who reflected a diversity of backgrounds and initial commitments to academic success. I attempted to maximize variation by seeking interviewees that represented different sports teams, both genders, various racial/ethnic backgrounds, as well as in-season/out-of-season status. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), seeking variation in interview participants provides more generality and abstraction in the theory, such that it may be applicable to multiple contexts.

Grounded theory methods call for systematic analytical strategies, and do not offer specific recommendations for data collection techniques (Charmaz, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data collection is meant to be flexible and iterative, from multiple sources, and guided by gaps in data that emerge in the analysis stage. Data was thoroughly analyzed and coded using a three-step process per Corbin and Strauss (2008).

All data was initially broken apart and coded upon collection using open coding, and then axial and selective coding was utilized as incoming data was compared and eventually linked to initial data. This process resulted in the emergence of several codes, categories, and themes. Data analysis was continuous and was conducted in a fashion that allowed the researcher to constantly refine interview questions to capture newly discovered theoretical constructs. Furthermore, appropriate standards of validation, such as collection of rich data, member checks, and triangulation as described by Maxwell (2005), were built into the research design to establish validity of findings. Complete methodological details are presented in Chapter Three.
**Key Terms**

**Academic Success:** The cumulative journey by which students make consistent progress towards a degree, a process precipitated by successful academic and social integration, as well as achievement of personal educational objectives (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

**Collaborative Learning:** A broad variety of educational practices involving the joint intellectual efforts of students or between students and teachers (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Collaborative practices typically involve students working in groups to create mutual understandings of content material. Inherent to this learning approach is students’ active involvement with course material rather than traditional forms of passive involvement such as lecturing and note-taking.

**Integration:** A subjective sense of belonging and membership in the academic and social systems of a college, marked by perceptions of congruence between the student and the values, social rules, and academic quality of the college community (Deil-Amen, 2011; Tinto, 1993).

**National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division-I institution:** Considered the most competitive and elite class of amateur competition, a school is designated a Division-I school based on an extensive array of criteria such as (a) minimum number of male and female sports represented at the institution, (b) specified number of contests against other Division-I opponents, (c) requirements regarding average spectator attendance in the revenue sports (e.g., primarily football), and (d) ability to demonstrate capability to meet financial aid needs (e.g., scholarships) of incoming and present participants. NOTE: It is some Division-I schools that have high-value television contracts, play in widely viewed bowl games and tournaments, and are the most visible and scrutinized of collegiate athletics programs.

**Non-traditional student versus traditional student:** In the context of the current study, the term is used to describe student-athletes, a student group subject to intense time demands and pressures resulting from sport participation, which does not have a large degree of flexibility to
engage campus academic and social systems outside of sport. Student-athletes are but one of many populations of students who do not have personal characteristics or experiences typical of the traditional students in higher education: full-time student, age 18–25, residential, and immediately attends a postsecondary institution after high school. Other non-traditional student populations include commuters, first-generation, and returning adults.

**Revenue Sport:** Collegiate sports that generate the largest amount of revenue for collegiate athletics departments in the form of ticket sales and media rights (e.g., football and men’s basketball). Academic success challenges are likely the greatest for this group based on pressures to succeed in sport, especially the fact that this class of amateur competition is most associated with the professional ranks, compared to other classes of competition (Marx, Huffmon, & Doyle, 2008).

**Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

**Assumptions**

In order to conceptualize the integration process of first-year student-athletes in Structured Study Time (SST), certain assumptions were found in the interview participants, the semi-structured interview instrument, and the observational setting. It was assumed that a) interview participants will answer all interview questions freely and unbiased, without coercion or influence from the researcher or Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services staff, b) the semi-structured interview instrument will be constantly refined to reflect new insights gathered from previous interviews and observations, and c) student-athletes will go about their normal business in SST sessions, with no behavioral modifications in the presence of the researcher.
Limitations

The study was subject to several limitations. Foremost, because the student-athlete population participating in collaborative tutoring was small, the total population eligible for this study was fewer than 30 student-athletes. Furthermore, study groups were not homogenous, and it was impossible to match groups based on sport, gender, year in school, or ethnicity, as groups were chosen based on schedule availability. Additional threats to generalizability, typical of grounded theory, were magnified because of collection and analysis of data from only one Division-I athletic department, Legacy University. Several first-year student-athletes from one institution were not able to generate a general theory that encompasses the academic and social integration patterns of all student-athletes. However, findings from this study provide both future qualitative and quantitative researchers a glimpse into important constructs likely associated with the integration patterns of student-athletes, information that can assist in expanding this unchartered area of research and potentially lead to more general theory.

Delimitations

The selection of participants for this qualitative study was derived from only one collaborative group-tutoring format, SST. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000),

As we grounded theorists refine our categories and develop them as theoretical constructs, we likely find gaps in our data and holes in our theories. Then we go back to the field and collect delimited data to fill those conceptual gaps and holes—we conduct theoretical sampling. At this point, we choose to sample specific issues only; we look for precise information to shed light on the emerging theory. (p. 519)

This sampling technique was the largest delimitation present in the current study, as it allowed the researcher to have the power to refine ideas and provide the necessary strategy to identify
conceptual boundaries and to determine the precise fit and relevance of defined categories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Throughout the course of this study, there were additional delimitations. Based on the chosen conceptual framework and desire by the researcher to engage in a focused study, all of the students interviewed in SST were first-year student-athletes at Legacy University, a high-profile Division-I institution. An additional delimitation was that student-athletes are recommended or required to attend at least one of several available SST tutoring sessions weekly. All tutoring sessions for this course are designed in the collaborative peer-tutoring fashion, with traditional one-on-one tutoring available only under special circumstances. A full description of the SST collaborative peer-tutoring program format is provided in Chapter Three. Finally, this research explores academic and social integration as two interdependent factors, factors likely to lead to positive academic outcomes for student-athlete participants (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986).

**Significance of the Study**

While many in the academic community see intercollegiate athletics as important to institutions of higher education, there still remain concerns about the personal development of student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Often, concerns seem to hinge on academic success, particularly for Division-I student-athletes, when compared to non-athletes (Eitzen, 2009). Comeaux and Harrison (2011) claim that previous studies have failed to uncover the cumulative processes that influence different types of academic success for student-athletes. The interdependent processes of academic and social integration, shown to influence academic success among traditional student populations, have received almost no attention in the current literature as they relate to student-athletes. Increased levels of academic and social integration have led to favorable academic outcomes, specifically higher rates of persistence and overall
development for traditional student cohorts (Astin, 1993; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1993). It is likely that academic and social integration positively affect academic success for student-athletes, albeit in distinct ways from traditional populations. This research aims to uncover issues involved in the academic and social integration of student-athletes and insight as to how the cumulative process unfolds.

Despite numerous offerings of support programs for student-athletes, there is little evidence that these programs have yielded consistent increases in academic success (Comeaux, 2007; Hinkle, 1994). Student-athletes continue to face criticism for their inability to connect with the academic and social cultures of the university community (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Whereas some studies (Comeaux, 2005; Gayles & Hu, 2009b) have made claims that involvement in educationally purposeful activities can lead to academic improvements for student-athletes, questions remain about the overall integration process and current research has only begun to identify which programs may be effective. This study seeks to break ground in exploring one piece of the overall academic and social integration process for student-athletes: participation in collaborative peer tutoring.

A review of current literature reveals only one theoretical model devoted exclusively to conceptualizing the path to academic success for Division-I student-athletes (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). While academic and social integration are indicated in the original model as being partly responsible for academic success, the model presents an incomplete picture of how the process occurs. Furthermore, the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model accounts for only a limited number of elements in the academic and social systems thought to contribute to student-athlete academic success. This research seeks to expand on this portion of the model and uncover additional elements of the academic and social systems that foster integration and how this
process of integration contributes to academic success. Current scholarship has largely failed to hear the voices of individual student-athletes as to how they make sense of academic and social integration in a postsecondary environment or how the process unfolds in their unique context. To date, student-affairs practitioners cannot be sure what elements of support programs may be effective in enhancing the academic success of student-athletes. Therefore, this study can serve to both fill a current gap in the literature and to provide practical guidance to educators looking to improve the academic success of first-year student-athletes.

Summary of Chapter One

The purpose of this study is to present a grounded analysis that fills existing knowledge gaps in the current higher-education literature on the concept of integration for student-athletes at a high-profile Division-I institution. Specifically, this study uncovers how first-year student-athletes make meaning of their academic and social integration—two forms of integration important for academic success—in Structured Study Time (SST), a collaborative peer-tutoring program housed in the Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services at Legacy University.

Academic success describes the cumulative journey by which students make consistent progress towards a degree, a process precipitated by successful academic and social integration, as well as achievement of personal educational objectives (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Existing literature has identified the importance of academic and social integration in fostering student development and garnering persistence in traditional-aged college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980), yet little is known about this phenomenon for student-athletes.

Student-athlete members of a collaborative peer group tutoring format, housed within a Division-I athletics department, were interviewed and observed over a semester to aid in creating understandings of what factors contribute to effective academic and social integration for this population. Balancing athletic and academic demands can be particularly difficult for first-year
student-athletes (Gayles, 2009), so it is important that this population be specifically analyzed. A better understanding of factors that may contribute to academic and social integration will help student-affairs practitioners enhance the overall college experience for this population by aiding in the design and enhancement of programs that account for and recognize the intricacies of being a student-athlete.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Disharmony between Higher Education and Intercollegiate Athletics

The 19th century gave rise to competitive intercollegiate sports into American higher education as profitable business (Zimbalist, 1999). As early as the late 1880s, media coverage and sponsorship became avenues for revenue potential for colleges, largely spawned by the rise in popularity of football (Watt & Moore, 2001). Since the very beginning of the commercialization of college sports, there has been an apparent disconnect between higher education and collegiate athletics because of a general distrust by those inside the academy of the motives of outside sponsors. That divide may be ever increasing: As of the fiscal year ending in 2011, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (2011d) received $757 million in revenue, mainly from high-value television contracts and apparel sales. The heightened commercialization and pressure to produce winning programs appear to have overshadowed student-athletes’ academic goals (Eitzen, 2009). As Bowen and Levin (2003) and Meyer (2005) contend, this type of athletic subculture has impeded student-athletes’ ability to maximize their learning and personal development, a contention that has prompted calls for reform from both inside and outside of the academy.

These calls for reform have not gone completely unnoticed by the NCAA, and recent efforts may signal the first steps in improving academic and sporting divides caused by mass-commercialization. NCAA officials have recently implemented the academic progress rate (APR), a measure designed to track student-athlete academic progress towards graduation and retention (Gayles & Hu, 2009a). Student-athletes are awarded a single point for annual retention and can earn an additional point for maintaining academic eligibility. The APR is calculated by dividing the team’s total points by the amount of points possible, and then multiplying the final
total by one thousand. NCAA.org (2010) reports that the average four-year APR for all Division-I institutions was 970 in 2010, however individual team data reveal much lower scores for many teams at high-profile Division-I schools, similar to Legacy, especially in the revenue-generating sports of football and men’s basketball. Impediments to academic success, for any group of college students, are seen as worrisome for college administrators and the public at large.

Academic support programs are dealt with the task of improving the academic success of student-athletes, and consequently APR rates, yet to date very little is known as to what are the best steps to take. Due in part to mass commercialization, athletics administrators must seek new and creative ways to promote the academic missions of the university while allowing student-athletes the opportunity to benefit from the experiences that the dual roles of student and athlete provide (Watt & Moore, 2001). Gayles and Hu (2009b) state that there remains disharmony in the goals of higher education and athletics, and providing student-athletes a proper balance of positive academic growth/development and sports participation has remained largely elusive. Further investigation into academic support programs and an understanding of how they can best foster academic success can be seen as a crucial step in bridging the gap between the academy and athletics.

A Different College Experience for Student-Athletes

Intercollegiate athletes are some of the most recognized individuals on college campuses. Regardless of their sport, Division-I student-athletes in particular garner the attention of faculty, fellow students, and the public to higher extents than any other population on campuses nationwide. While the sporting accomplishments and failures of student-athletes receive great deals of attention, their journey to academic success does not. Few seem to be aware of the multiple obstacles that student-athletes face in achieving academic success. Aside from the
pressures inherent in sports participation, student-athletes face similar challenges of academic and social adjustments as non-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

It is known that successful integration and subsequent academic success is achieved by certain student-athletes at greater rates than others. The athletic subculture, for example, may play a role in limiting opportunities for academic success by way of diminishing chances at academic and social engagement. In addition, variations among student-athletes are known to affect patterns of integration, leading to different academic outcomes, yet current research has not been able to explain how such processes occur. The following sections attempt to explain how the athletic subculture and student-athlete variations might contribute to differing patterns of integration and ultimately impact academic success.

The structure of intercollegiate sports competition has had the effect of creating a unique subculture on college campuses, which can lead to differing integration patterns among student-athletes and potentially have a negative effect on student-athlete academic success. Despres, Brady, and McGowan (2008) describe collegiate athletics as a distinct cultural phenomenon within the realm of higher education institutions, one in which the athlete is forced to balance the dual identities of athlete and student. Likewise, Gayles (2009) describes student-athletes as a unique population on college campuses subject to different challenges and needs than non-athletes. Intense time and scheduling demands are the factors that distinguish the student-athlete experience from those of non-athletes (Jolly, 2008). According to Watt and Moore (2001) and Wolverton (2008), student-athletes devote on average over 20 hours weekly to practice and play and face additional stressors such as injury and missed classes due to competition. Gayles (2009) cites additional pressures faced by student-athletes associated with maintaining academic standards in order to remain eligible for competition. Whereas non-athletes schedule their own
academic and social engagements, the lives of student-athletes are highly managed and under the strict oversight of others (Jolly, 2008). Little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of academic and social engagements recommended or required by practitioners, such as academic support programs, in fostering positive integration patterns for student-athletes.

Based on the time demands associated with sports participation, student-athletes are left with little time to devote to academic pursuits and other educationally meaningful activities of their own choosing (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Such demands may affect overall campus involvement patterns and limit participation in campus organizations or informal interactions with a faculty member, factors shown to positively impact academic success (Astin, 1984; Nora, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1993). The existing athletic subculture is also at least partly responsible for student-athletes spending the majority of their time together outside of sports competition, which can lead to academic and social isolation from non-athlete peers (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Gayles and Hu (2009b) found associations with peers other than teammates to have positive influences on learning and communication skills. It appears that such isolation patterns place limitations on student-athletes’ full realization of academic success, as well as their ability to participate in the overall college experience.

Based on numerous variations, such as division level of competition, revenue or non-revenue sports, gender, and race/ethnicity, classification of student-athletes into specific categories is impossible. These differences account for divergent college experiences among student-athletes. Furthermore, these variations can affect levels and patterns of academic and social integration, and consequently academic success.

Whereas student-athletes face a different college experience based on sporting demands in general, level of competition magnifies these differences. Division level seems to affect the
role of athletics in the overall college experience and how student-athletes conceptualize sports participation. Athletes participating in divisions marked by lower levels of competition (i.e., Divisions II and III) have different competitive experiences. Urban (2000) states that sport competition at Division-II and III programs is an integrative part of the cumulative college experience, while sport competition at Division-I institutions has morphed into a forum for mass entertainment, overtaking all other aspects of college life for student-athletes. Watt and Moore (2001) claim that lower-level competition is additionally associated with love of the sport, negating an emphasis on the external rewards that are more abundant in Division-I competition. Whereas the overall student-athlete experience is ripe with a host of internal and external pressures different from those of a non-athlete, athletes at Division-I institutions undoubtedly face a tougher challenge with external pressures from the media and coaches (Watt & Moore, 2001).

Athletes involved at higher levels of competition, i.e., Division I, are subject to even greater time demands than athletes at less competitive levels. Athletes involved in high-profile Division-I programs, such as football, can spend upwards of 40 hours weekly on sporting-related activities (Wolverton, 2008). These accentuated time demands are problematic, as it lessens an athlete’s ability to engage in academic and other educationally meaningful activities that occur outside the classroom (Gayles & Hu, 2009b). High stakes placed on win–loss records and media contracts at Division-I schools further limit student-athletes’ ability to partake in the college experience compared to other athletes and non-athlete peers (Watt & Moore, 2001). The NCAA has attempted to enhance the college experience for student-athletes by limiting the number of hours student-athletes can spend on athletic-related activities, placing restrictions on the number of athletes who cohabitate together on campus, and requiring academic support services for these
athletes (Gayles & Hu, 2009a). While experts may be taking measures to increase opportunities for meaningful engagement with the campus community for student-athletes, they are at a loss for explaining how the cumulative processes of academic and social integration unfold and their relationship to academic success.

The demands of being a high-profile Division-I student-athlete and pressures to succeed in one’s sport likely obscure the importance of academic responsibilities. There is strong evidence to suggest that Division-I student-athletes consider their first priority to be athletics and their second academics, thus raising the question of whether they view themselves as athlete-students (Adler & Adler, 1991; Wolverton, 2008). “There is a received wisdom that the student experiences of [Division-I] student-athletes are deficient and that student-athletes are, and are treated as, athletes first and students second” (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007, p. 947). In sum, Division-I student-athletes appear to be the most at risk for misunderstanding traditional roles associated with college attendance.

According to Sturm, Feltz, and Gilson (2011), research on Division-I student-athletes reveals that athlete identity is more prominent than one’s student identity. Sellers (1992) reports that male athletes in the revenue-generating sports are generally expected to be less successful academically in college, based on poor secondary educational opportunities. Although some of these findings may be partly attributed to the mass-commercialization of college sports and associated pressures to succeed in competition, campus academic and social systems may play a role in reinforcing athlete-centric identities. A better understanding of how the cumulative integration process develops could allow practitioners the ability to provide timely interventions that bolster student-athletes’ academic identity, likely resulting in higher rates of academic success.
While the Division-I student-athlete experience is different from other classes of competition, further distinctions result from revenue or non-revenue sport participation. Competing in revenue-generating sports (i.e., men’s basketball and football) at a Division-I institution may present the most challenging situation for student-athlete academic success. Revenue sports are labeled as such because they generate the largest amount of revenue for collegiate athletics departments in the form of ticket sales and media rights. Successful revenue-generating programs have the ability to contribute tens of millions of dollars to department revenues, which are used to enhance facilities, recruit top-notch athletes, and fund coaches’ salaries.

There is a prevailing sentiment that athletes participating in revenue-generating sports at Division-I institutions are professionals, masquerading as amateur competitors (Marx, Huffman, & Doyle, 2008). According to Dudley, Johnson, and Johnson (1997), individuals involved at these high levels of competition are more likely to report physical and mental abuse and higher rates of isolation compared to those participating at lower levels due to pressures to win. Undoubtedly, such pressures are likely to affect integration patterns, which in turn may negatively impact academic success for these athletes. However, current research has not identified in what ways. In an era of mass commercialization, it would appear as if success in sport and resulting lucrative corporate sponsorships are more important than the academic goals and personal development of high-profile revenue athletes.

Public confidence levels appear to be waning in high-profile revenue sports competition in light of low graduation rates in both the past and present (Gayles & Hu, 2009b). Recently, public concerns about the academic success of participants in revenue sports have been substantiated by the NCAA (2011a) report on four-year APR averages. The report indicated that
men’s basketball and football were significantly further behind the national average of 970—945 and 946, respectively—between 2006–07 and 2009–10. In a study comparing the intercollegiate athletics experience of various groups, Eitzen (1988) stated that male student-athletes in football and basketball demonstrated lower grades and graduation rates when compared to other athletes. Aside from describing such differences, current research has not been able to explain what processes occur that make the path to academic success particularly difficult for Division-I revenue athletes.

Gender is another variation that leads to different college experiences among student-athletes. In general, there is little literature on female student-athletes, but that literature suggests that the academic and social integration process for female student-athletes is different than that of their male counterparts. Female student-athletes tend to exhibit higher levels of academic success than their male counterparts, and differential patterns of academic and social integration are likely to be at least partially responsible for such trends. However, research has done little to investigate how or where these differences occur.

Background and demographic variations lead to different college experiences and academic outcomes for traditional students, and the same is relevant among student-athletes. However, distinctions between the cumulative integration processes that contribute to academic success for various racial/ethnic groups have yet to be identified in the current literature. Sellers (1992) states that the road to academic success may be especially tough for black student-athletes and suggests that quality-of-life issues while in college may be even more important for this group compared to other groups. Social integration issues, such as experiences of isolation and discrimination, may be particularly important in the quality of life for Black student-athletes on college campuses. In a study of non-athlete Black students, Allen (1988) found that campus race
relations and faculty interactions influenced academic performance. Sellers (1992) contends that the combination of being Black and a student-athlete brings with it lowered expectations on college campuses. While it is known that academic and social integration positively affect academic success, knowledge of integration differences between groups can provide practitioners the ability to offer more customized strategies to perpetuate academic success.

The Path to Academic Success for Student-Athletes

The path to academic success for student-athletes is often represented tragically to the general public, which has an effect on how intercollegiate competition is viewed. The public often expresses skepticism about the value of participation in collegiate athletics amid reports of low graduation rates, academic scandals, and the relative academic underpreparedness of student-athletes, particularly at Division-I institutions (Gayles & Hu, 2009b). However, at the same time, public emphasis on winning may be partly responsible for perpetuating an athletic subculture that detracts from the ability of student-athletes to realize full academic success.

While current investigation has provided some indication of potential barriers that may impede student-athlete academic success, these issues are not well known (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Furthermore, student-affairs practitioners do not have enough knowledge about mechanisms in the academic and social systems that promote or inhibit academic success for student-athletes. Professionals are left applying traditional student models of academic success to student-athletes, which oftentimes do not recognize the full range of experiences of this population. Research has posited that precollege characteristics, levels of commitment, and elements of the academic and social systems are all responsible for contributing to student-athlete integration, and ultimately academic success (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). In short, however, very little is known about the issues themselves and the cumulative path to academic success for this population.
Precollege and Individual Characteristics

Studies on traditional student populations have revealed that precollege characteristics such as educational experiences and preparation as well as individual attributes have both direct and indirect effects on college academic success. Comeaux (2005) states that these findings may be applicable to models designed to predict Division-I student-athlete academic success. In one study, Astin (1993) found that high school GPA has a strong influence on academic achievement in college. Furthermore, learning opportunities available to students while in high school have effects on their GPA and college expectations. Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) found that access to a rigorous curriculum (e.g., advanced-placement courses) is highly disproportionate for members of low-income communities, and can impact postsecondary educational outcomes.

It appears that the path to academic success for many Division-I student-athletes begins at a deficit, as many arrive at college academically underprepared. It is incumbent upon institutions to monitor students, who arrive at risk academically in all cases, however student-athletes at Division-I institutions may require the most attention to ensure academic success, based on the unique circumstances surrounding high-profile competition. Evidence suggests that not only do certain student-athletes arrive academically underprepared based on precollege preparation patterns, but colleges are willing to compromise academic admissions for the sake of generating profit from sports.

The first-year experience is already complicated by difficult academic and social adjustments, and arriving academically underprepared only compounds these transitions. Many incoming student-athletes feel that they are not properly prepared for academic life, or perceive they will be treated differently as a result of their athlete status (Papanikolaou, Nikolaidis, Patsiaouras, & Alexopoulos, 2003). Humphrey, Yow, and Bowden (2000) cite that 95% of male
athletes and 86% of female athletes were stressed as a result of tests and examinations and missed classes due to travel.

The most striking indicator of academic underpreparedness may be the overwhelming trend of athletes receiving preferential admissions treatment, consistent across all types of institutions (Phillips, 2009). Lower admission standards in place for student-athletes at many institutions may present a false sense of academic ability, distort academic roles, and accentuate initial underpreparedness. The NCAA (2011c) reports that as of August 1, 2008, a sliding scale for test-score and grade-point averages in the 16 core courses is used to establish initial eligibility. The sliding scale was accepted by the NCAA largely based upon claims that standardized tests were racially biased and therefore minimum requirements unfairly affected the admissions of underrepresented populations (Phillips, 2009). Despite minimum requirements that all prospective student-athletes are responsible for under the NCAA, there remain different eligibility standards among the conferences, which rise when a student arrives on campus (Phillips, 2009). Individual schools are also provided opportunities to apply for admissions waivers for certain student-athletes based on extenuating circumstances.

At least publicly, the NCAA has made attempts to demonstrate its concern for student-athletes’ academic success and to level the playing field for all incoming athletes. According to the NCAA (2011b), its stated DI academic philosophy reads, “The NCAA membership is committed to the education of student-athletes and has implemented a series of policies to strengthen the preparedness of Division-I student-athletes for college work and ensure they make steady progress toward a degree.” The issue of academically underprepared student-athletes will continue to be an important issue for the NCAA to address, as national media outlets have also drawn attention to the issue. Knobler (2008) published a report in the Atlanta Journal
Constitution on key test scores and GPA admission qualifications of student-athletes at 54 universities, representative of all six Bowl Championship Series (BCS) conferences, one in which Legacy belongs. Results indicated that, overall, SAT and GPA gaps existed between athletes and non-athletes at these high-profile institutions, with the most striking differences existing in football and men’s basketball. High-profile institutions are undoubtedly caught in a balancing act between maintaining lower academic standards to field profitable sports teams, especially at highly selective schools, versus public outcry of unfair standards for student-athletes.

Individual attributes such as race/ethnicity have also been linked to varying paths to academic success among student-athletes. Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1982) and Walter, Smith, Hoey, and Wilhelm (1987) report that African American student-athletes are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and enter college with greater academic deficiencies compared to their White counterparts. Sellers (1992) supported these findings in an analysis of racial differences as predictors of GPA for student-athletes in revenue-generating sports.

The first line of defense to combat initial academic underpreparedness issues among student-athletes are academic support programs. These programs have no control over precollege preparation patterns or individual attributes, yet are expected to promote academic success for all participants. While some programs have demonstrated great progress in student-athlete academic success, little research exists that identifies what practices make the greatest contribution, especially for individual groups. It is imperative that research be conducted that explores whether and how student-athlete academic support programs address the reality of academic roles in college and how athletes initially process such roles.
Levels of Commitment

Precollege characteristics appear to affect the formation of initial commitments that student-athletes make to both academic and sporting pursuits. For example, Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston (1992) report that initial degree expectations influence matriculation, such that student-athletes aspiring to obtain a bachelor’s degree are less likely to graduate than ones aspiring to obtain higher degrees. These initial commitments are likely to change, however, as integrative processes with college academic and social systems occur (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Upon entering high-profile Division-I programs, challenges in finding a path to academic success for student-athletes may be particularly difficult. High-profile competition may have the most profound effects on initial and latter development of commitment to sport (Coakley, 2001). In their seminal work on student-athlete identity, Adler and Adler (1991) conducted a series of longitudinal studies on basketball players at a high-profile institution. Their findings yielded evidence of a steady decline in the importance placed on academics after the first year, as evidenced by enrollment in easy classes and majors, with academic behaviors trending towards sustaining eligibility. To gain a better understanding of the Division-I student-athlete experience, Potuto and O’Hanlon (2006) conducted a study involving upperclassmen ($n = 930$, who had completed at least 85 credit hours) at 18 universities and found that the large majority of respondents felt they experienced a well-rounded education (91.7%), that their education had well prepared them for post-college pursuits (81%), and that they would have attended a four-year university even if they didn’t participate on a varsity sport team (74.9%). Such disparities in findings, amply represented by class level, signal a need to focus on the integration patterns of first-year student-athletes at Division-I institutions that may shape perceptions of academic roles.
Involvement in the Academic and Social Systems: The Path to Integration

Along with precollege characteristics and commitments, integration into the academic and social systems of the college environment is known to contribute to academic success for traditional populations, and the same is likely true for student-athletes. Research has indicated that individual attributes of student-athletes lead to differing patterns of academic and social integration, resulting in varying levels of academic success. However, little evidence is provided in existing literature to explain how academic and social integration processes occur or how they contribute to academic success for student-athletes.

There is a great deal of literature addressing the academic and social integration of traditional college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1986). It is known that higher levels of academic and social integration are accompanied by rises in persistence for traditional populations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1997). Student persistence tends to be the primary focus of any studies related to retention, and is defined by Mangold, Bean, and Adams (2003) as “the degree to which an individual is repetitively and/or continuously enrolled at an educational organization in order to achieve his or her goal of eventual graduation” (p. 541). In sum, the student who is able to successfully achieve higher levels of integration, both academically and socially, into the college community will be more likely to stay in college and accomplish personal educational objectives than those who do not. Although integration patterns are likely much different for student-athletes than non-athletes based on sporting involvement, nonetheless integration patterns are important to understand as they are expected to contribute to academic success.

While student persistence is not the focus of this study, it is an important component of the academic success definition presented in the previous chapter. Academic success requires
persistence, and persistence levels increase with higher levels of academic and social integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1997). Theoretical models that account for academic and social integration in persistence decisions do exist for traditional non-athlete students. In their current forms, however, they are not specifically designed with the unique experiences of student-athletes in mind. However, they do present a general overview of processes of student interaction with academic and social systems, which influence persistence and can ultimately affect overall academic success. Two of the most widely known are Tinto’s Student Integration Model (SIM) (1975, 1986) and Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement.

Tinto’s Student Integration Model (SIM) (1975, 1986) relies on notions of academic and social integration and is one of the most recognized and influential models used to view the process of student departure from post-secondary institutions. In its original inception, Tinto’s interactionist model was based on Durkheim’s theory of suicide. Durkheim posits in his model that individuals commit suicide based on insufficient amounts of societal integration; Tinto posits that departure from college can be understood using a similar rationale, or insufficient integration into different aspects of university life. The two most dominant forces at work in a college environment are academic and social, and the decision to withdraw could be a factor of perceived lack of integration in one or both of these realms. Tinto’s model first assumes that pre-college characteristics (e.g., gender, high school achievement, and level of parental encouragement) have an effect on institutional commitment and intent to attain a college degree. Second, the interaction between students’ individual traits and commitment to higher education tend to influence their academic and social integration into certain types of institutions (e.g., community college, four-year universities). Finally, levels of academic and social integration
achieved by the student predict persistence decisions. Tinto’s Model of Student Retention is presented below in Figure 1 (Draper, 2008).


Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement puts forth that students learn more when they share in both the academic and social aspects of college life. It provides the general mechanisms by which students academically and socially integrate into the college community, which influence drop-out decisions and whether or not academic success will be achieved. It is well known that involvement in cocurricular activities enhances student development and is an important factor in retention (Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Astin (1996) indicates that some of the most important types of involvement center upon academic endeavors and interaction with peer groups. Chickering and Gamson (1987) propose seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education that are consistent with many tenets of Astin’s (1999) Theory of
Involvement and among the most cited in the higher education literature. Among these, cooperative learning, active learning, and respect for diverse ways of learning (see Chickering & Gamson, 1987) are factors that influence multiple aspects of student development and ultimately academic success.

Consistent with the student-centered philosophy inherent in these types of integration mechanisms, the student herself is responsible for determining the level of engagement. Astin (1984) recognizes the importance of student time in his theory, as it is directly related to how often students can take advantage of developmental opportunities in and out of the classroom. Successful programs and related practices can be judged by the level of involvement they foster in students (Astin, 1984). There is even evidence to suggest that increased involvement in meaningful educational activities is essential for the development of a sense of campus community (Kinzie & Schuh, 2008). Tinto (1975, 1993) recognizes that perceptions of campus community can influence students’ departure choices from college, which in due course affects academic success.

Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement asserts that in order for quality student growth to occur, high-quality university programs must be in place that are representative of the university’s commitment to student learning. Involvement with outside activities can certainly erode opportunities for student development. Astin’s (1985b) Theory of Involvement can be summarized using the following five items (p. 306):

1. Involvement requires investment of psychological and physical energy in objects (e.g., tasks, people, and activities).
2. Involvement is a continuous concept—different students will invest varying amounts of energy in different objects.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features.
4. The amount of learning or development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement.
5. Educational effectiveness of any policy or practice is related to its capacity to induce student involvement.

A diagram summarizing the five elements of involvement, essential in influencing integration patterns and eventual academic success is shown in Figure 2 (Threeton & Pellock, 2010).

![Diagram of Astin's Theory of Involvement](http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JCTE/v25n2/threeton.html)


For traditional college students, academic and social integration appear to affect each other in an interdependent manner in their influence on academic success (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986), but there remains disagreement among scholars as to their relative contributions. Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, and Pascarella (1996) found evidence that suggests that in-class experiences primarily influence student persistence and subsequent academic success, while Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) suggest essentially focusing solely on social integrative factors and dismissing academic integrative factors altogether. Moreover, several studies (see Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Stage, 1989; Tinto, 1975) describe the relationship between academic and social integration on academic success to be more of a compensatory
relationship, whereby higher levels of one form of integration compensate for weaker forms of the other form of integration. Regardless, Stage (1989) suggests that students are more likely to persist when both academic and social integration occur.

Tinto (1997) found that increases in academic involvement were accompanied by rises in social involvement in residential students. However, apparently academic integration had the strongest effects on persistence when social integration was relatively low, and inversely, as social integration increased, the positive effects of academic integration were attenuated. Current scholarship suffers from a lack of application of academic and social integrative factors on academic success for students who can be characterized as non-traditional, such as student-athletes. In fact, the major and best-known models of student persistence (see Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure, 1975, 1987, 1993; Astin’s Theory of Involvement, 1984) were designed for traditional students in residential settings.

Knowledge of the degree of interdependence of academic and social integration and its subsequent effect on academic success for student-athletes is not available in current literature. Tinto (1997) suggests that levels of on-campus involvement may affect academic and social integration patterns, as students who attend two-year institutions typically spend less time socially with peers outside of class. Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995) and Pascarella and Chapman (1983) report that social involvement has a lesser impact on overall persistence compared to academic involvement for students at two-year institutions. In fact, Tinto (1997) found that involvement in the classroom promotes academic integration as well as furthers integration opportunities outside the classroom for community college students. Similarly, the same may hold true for non-traditional student groups like student-athletes, who also are limited by time constraints to engage in out-of-class social activities with peers.
A better understanding of the potential interdependence of academic and social integration for student-athletes may allow practitioners to customize intervention strategies that emphasize specific interactions with elements of the academic and social systems, respectively, based on their positive influence on academic success. Current literature has provided few clues as to the academic and social integration experiences of student-athletes, with no attention given to the actual meaning-making processes involved. It is known that student-athletes oftentimes face social isolation, both from other students on campus and student-athletes of other sports. Harris, Altekruse, and Engels (2003) state that student-athletes tend to segregate themselves by their respective sports, thus distancing themselves from social opportunities with other student-athletes and non-athlete peers. Given the complexity of the student-athlete experience, much remains to be learned about differences in academic and social integration and its effects on academic success.

Research has only recently begun that attempts to understand the varying processes of integration that affect academic success among different groups of athletes. Existing studies have demonstrated that female student-athletes tend to experience high levels of academic success (Burnett, Peak, & Dilley-Knoles, 2010; Foltz, 1992). Eitzen (1988) reports that female student-athletes compare similarly to their non-athlete counterparts in academic preparation and performance, but significantly more highly in both domains when compared to male athletes. Marx, Huffmon, and Doyle (2008) suggest that dissimilar integration patterns may explain some of the differences in student-athlete academic performance between males and females. They report that female student-athletes tend to maintain stronger ideals of student-athlete status compared to their male counterparts. Their finding holds true both upon entry into college and into the later years. Marx, Huffmon, and Doyle (2008) state that reinforcement of a balanced
academic and athletic identity is perpetuated by same-sex teammates and friends at greater levels for female athletes compared to their male counterparts. Reinforcement by peer groups is influential in the decision-making processes for all college students, and this added emphasis placed on the student-athlete role by close peers may lead to greater efforts being applied to academic pursuits. Nonetheless, relatively little else is known about the social integration patterns of female student-athletes or how it might foster higher levels of academic success.

Other studies have revealed that academic and social integration patterns among student-athletes vary along racial lines and competition statuses, which may help to explain differences in academic success. Comeaux and Harrison (2006) reveal that while White student-athletes achieve gains in academic success through various forms of faculty contact, the same is not true for Black student-athletes. Levels of academic integration, in particular, may also be affected by whether the student-athlete is in-season or not, especially for revenue sports. Scott, Paskus, Miranda, Petre, and McArdle (2008) report that student-athletes tend to exhibit higher levels of academic performance during the off-season of their respective sports. Knowledge of the numerous factors that affect academic and social integration patterns among varying groups of student-athletes can assist student-affairs professionals in customizing support formats that promote academic success for all student-athletes.

**Academic Support Programs as a Mechanism for Fostering Integration**

The idea of academic support programs as a mechanism to assist student-athletes in their academic development is not a new concept. Two decades ago, Sellers (1992) stated, “An underutilized approach for improving the academic performance of student-athletes is the development of effective support programs once they are enrolled in college” (p. 56). This recommendation spawned as a result of his findings regarding the apparent academic underpreparedness of Black student-athletes. Shriberg and Brodzinski (1984), characterize the
first support programs of the 1970s as solely concerned with the domains of academic tutoring, time management, and course scheduling. However, these programs failed to recognize the large scope of potential issues that student-athletes encounter in their efforts to integrate into the academic and social systems of colleges, and thus were not well-balanced based on current understandings of the unique aspects of a student-athlete’s existence. Only recently have attempts been made to differentiate academic support programs serving student-athletes.

Today, the emphasis on support programs for student-athletes is a major concern. Well publicized cases of academic scandal and gross misconduct have led to public outcries questioning the value of intercollegiate athletics competition and resulted in the NCAA requiring, not merely encouraging, academic support services for Division-I athletes (Gayles & Hu, 2009a). Critics continue to question the level of involvement of student-athletes in the overall college experience and what processes are responsible for varying degrees of academic success, especially at the Division-I level (Gayles, 2009). Based on the rigorous schedules of student-athletes, little time is left for student-athletes to explore academic and other co-curricular opportunities, which likely affects their abilities to fully realize academic success. Unfortunately, there is minimal exposure in the current literature regarding the effectiveness of support programs in facilitating academic and social integration and consequent academic success for student-athletes as a group and subsets of this population.

Limited knowledge in regards to mechanisms that foster academic and social integration, impacting future academic success, place student-athlete academic support programs at an operational deficit. There are examples of numerous academic support programs nationwide that assist Division-I student-athletes in managing academic and athletic tasks, yet they lack a complete understanding of how academic success occurs for this group cumulatively and among
different variations of student-athletes. Research has just recently begun to develop models that account for differences in the student-athlete experience compared to non-athletes (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Despite little attention in the literature, there exist a few programs that have adopted notions of academic and social integration as part of collaborative learning formats. The following section will present an overview of collaborative learning, an intervention strategy that has led to varying levels of academic and social integration for traditional students and certain student-athletes, and known studies which have examined this phenomenon.

**Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning refers to a broad variety of educational practices involving the joint intellectual efforts of students or between students and teachers (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Collaborative practices typically involve students working in groups to create mutual understandings of content material. Inherent to this learning approach is students’ active involvement with course material rather than traditional forms of passive involvement such as lecturing and note-taking.

There are certain assumptions present with collaborative learning. According to Smith and MacGregor (1992), collaborative learning formats capitalize on the diverse backgrounds and learning styles of participants. The multitude of differing experiences and perspectives brought together by a diverse group allows students to gain a more complex understanding of content material. Furthermore, at its core, collaborative learning is a social process. According to Golub (1988), this style of learning promotes communication among peers, and through this communication, shared meaning-making and mutual engagement occurs. Fostering peer social connections, an essential element of collaborative learning, is known to enhance overall student development and retention (Astin, 1985a; Kuh, 1990) and has been highlighted in two of the
most widely referenced and validated models in the higher education literature, Tinto’s (1993) Theory of Student Departure and Astin’s (1984) Theory of Student Involvement, introduced in previous sections.

Collaborative learning entails much more than simple rote memorization of content material and can lead to the realization of larger educational goals (Smith & MacGregor, 1992). Collaborative learning formats contain both academic and social integration components, two multidimensional concepts known to have an effect on overall student persistence levels (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1997). Two known studies have been conducted on collaborative learning arrangements, which examine notions of academic and social integration as factors of academic success: the Cooperative Evening Study Group (CESGP) and the Home Group.

**Cooperative Evening Study Group (CESGP).** In the only known study looking at the academic and social integration of student-athletes, Dudley, Johnson, and Johnson (1997) examined the Cooperative Evening Study Group (CESGP), established by a Midwestern university’s Department of Academic Counseling for Intercollegiate Athletics. The program was designed for the provision of academic and social support for first-year athletes. The conceptual framework of the program is grounded in the practice of using collaborative learning to establish an interdependent learning environment (e.g., Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991). According to Johnson et al. (1993) and Johnson et al. (1991), collaborative learning involves the use of academic teams that provide athletes the mutual benefit to maximize their own learning and the learning of their counterparts. Furthermore, collaborative teamwork has been found (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1989) to result in greater effort
put forth towards goal achievement, better interpersonal relationships, and greater degrees of psychological health when compared to competitive endeavors.

The evening study group met five nights a week for three hours each night, and athletes were required to attend two evening sessions during the week (Dudley et al., 1997). Academic support staff included a coordinator, two academic specialists, and between three and five specialist tutors. Following the base group meetings, students were given a choice to work within different areas, such as math, computer lab, or common course, where collaborative learning was the expectation. Students were encouraged to work in pairs for assignment completion, studying, and for the overall assistance of one another. Furthermore, program staff and tutors not only helped individuals with academic issues, but teamwork issues as well (Dudley et al., 1997). Another aspect of the program, the goal of facilitating social integration, was accomplished through a break given to student-athletes during the session where they were encouraged to socialize with other student-athletes.

Results from their investigation indicated that student-athletes viewed the evening study groups as an effective cooperative endeavor, promoting the maximization of everyone’s success, but did not see themselves as dependent on the resources or shared goals of others (Dudley et al., 1997). Other findings indicated that athletes felt high degrees of academic support and personal support from staff members (Dudley et al., 1997). Although this study broke ground in the examination of first-year student-athlete academic and social integration, it was subject to certain limitations. Eligibility for participation in the study consisted of competing in an intercollegiate sport and having first-year status. Furthermore, criteria for participation were not established, and the authors only indicate that athletes were required to attend and all participants had varying
academic abilities. Finally, male athletes from the revenue-generating sports were excluded from participation in this study.

Although this quantitative study sought to measure whether the collaborative group tutoring format provided opportunities for academic and social integration, it was not able to explore the actual meaning-making process by student-athletes. This hidden process, partially discovered in this grounded analysis, uncovered a wider array of constructs interconnected with perceptions of academic and social integration and highlighted differences between student-athletes and non-athletes. The discovery of such constructs will inform professional practice by expanding current knowledge on the entire integration process for first-year student-athletes in a collaborative tutoring arrangement and offering recommendations to enhance the overall college experience for this population.

The Home Group. In another study, social integration patterns of non-athletes were examined in a collaborative learning context. The home group concept utilized for Perspectives on American Education was analyzed at Kutztown University in eastern Pennsylvania (Stahler, 1997). This particular course is considered a foundations course, which is an entry-level course for all students enrolled in the College of Education. According to Stahler (1997), on the first day of the semester, students are assigned to a five- or six-member home group. Group assignment was not random, and students were assigned based on major, gender, age, and race. The instructor does not meet the students prior to group assignment; however, attempts are made to diversify the groups as much as possible.

From the outset, students participating in the home group are encouraged to share all contact information and to begin working on a collaborative assignment. Although the home group is predicated on individual accountability, in the sense that students are responsible for
course material, they are told that they have a shared responsibility to help one another develop as future educators. Whether a brief review meeting or an activity that lasts an entire class period, the home group is set up so that students are required to meet and engage in a collaborative group activity on a weekly basis. The conceptual framework of the home group puts forth the idea that learning is its primary purpose. According to Stahler (1997), during the 14-week course, the home group engages in a plethora of both formal and informal activities. Activities are developed from a combination of both planned objectives, and others have evolved from student needs that have been identified.

In her many observations of the home groups at Kutztown, Stahler (1997) stated that she saw feelings of compassion and empathy develop between group members. Furthermore, she states that the home-group concept provides a forum for students to associate with one another, who may never have had the opportunity outside of class. Stahler (1997) also states that students have approached her to speak about concerns they have had about former home group members a year after the class ended. The home group experience seems to suggest that collaborative learning environments positively affect the social integration of members, although Stahler (1997) is not specific as to the impacts of the group on academic integration. This finding provides evidence that collaborative learning arrangements have the ability to affect one important component involved in academic success, social integration patterns.

**Conceptual Framework**

**Model for College Student-Athlete Academic Success**

As stated, numerous researchers (see Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Gayles & Hu, 2009b; Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, & Terenzini, 1996) have attempted to explain academic achievement variations among student-athletes. Such studies have been useful in identifying factors that may promote or inhibit academic success for student-athletes, but little is known
About the issues themselves (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Furthermore, these studies have provided little insight about the cumulative processes involved in the achievement of academic success for student-athletes as a group and among different subsets of this population (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

A conceptual model to help understand characteristics and processes that likely affect academic success for student-athletes is the Model for College Student-Athlete Academic Success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The model combines unique characteristics of student-athletes and academic success, validated in current literature, to help researchers conceptualize the process of academic success for Division-I student-athletes, both as a whole and in stages (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Individual and college environmental characteristics are linked to academic success in the model. Taking into account precollege characteristics, the degrees and types of involvement that student-athletes have with their college environment are purported to influence levels of academic and social integration (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). It is conceived that higher levels of academic and social integration will lead to greater degrees of academic success.

Intellectual development, peer-group interactions, faculty interactions, and engagement with relevant curriculum in the academic and social environments are all potentially responsible for increasing the likelihood of academic and social integration (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Different combinations and levels of these factors will affect academic and social integration, which will ultimately affect academic success. Although there is no exact formulation for the amounts or types of involvement, the link between purposeful involvement in the academic and social systems of a college and academic success is clearly indicated in the model.
In their model, the authors highlight several examples of items in the academic and social systems, validated by previous literature, that likely effect academic success. The authors did not intend for the list to be exhaustive, but rather provide researchers a view of student-athletes’ potential paths to academic success. One such example in both the academic and social systems is “relevant curriculum,” represented via an academic support program known as Scholar-Baller (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Harrison’s (1995, 2002) Scholar-Baller (SB) curriculum is a program designed for academic support services that takes into account the unique experiences and cultural orientations of student-athletes. The program uses popular culture examples as a means of connecting students to relevant issues, while simultaneously working to assist student-athletes build strong self and social identities. The full Model for College Student-Athlete Academic Success is presented in Figure 3 (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Application of Model to Student-Athletes in Structured Study Time (SST)

Tinto’s (1975, 1993) Student Integration Model (SIM) and Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement are both influential in Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) Model for College Student-Athlete Academic Success. Both of these previous models take into account notions of academic and social integration, which are crucial factors for persistence and consequent academic success in college (Tinto, 1975, 1993; Astin, 1984). Tinto’s interactionist model forms the underlying foundation of the current model, describing the two broad constructs: academic and social integration, which drive retention decisions. The previous framework is extended more broadly.
in the current model to apply specifically to academic success, rather than retention, yet the
general premises of the importance placed on academic and social integration remain unchanged.

While Tinto’s work identifies that academic and social integration are important for
persistence and eventual academic success, Astin’s Theory of Involvement (1984) describes the
general mechanisms by which integration is achieved. Astin’s (1984) model puts forth the idea
that academic and social integration are a product of both quantitative and qualitative elements of
involvement. Structured Study Time (SST) recognizes the importance of academic and social
integration (see Tinto, 1975, 1993) as crucial factors for academic success reflected in its
program philosophy. Furthermore, it provides the mechanisms for involvement by which
academic and social integration can occur (see Astin, 1984) through the use of a structured
environment, quality resources, and promotion of faculty-to-student and peer-to-peer
interactions. A detailed description of SST is available in Chapter Three.

Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) model attempts to further refine these frameworks by
adapting them to a unique population, student-athletes, for whom the “traditional” definitions of
or relationships between involvement and integration may not be appropriate. As previously
mentioned, the model was developed specifically for Division-I student-athletes, using
characteristics validated in previous literature of student-athletes and overall academic success.
Based on these characteristics, portions of this model are appropriate for application to student-
athletes involved in SST to explore their patterns of integration at Legacy University. As
previously stated, Comeaux and Harrison (2011) contend that the model (see Figure 3) could be
used to view the cumulative process of academic success or could also be used to view the
process in stages. The simplified model of college student-athlete integration, representing the
stage of the full model investigated in the current study, is illustrated in Figure 4. Based on the
scope of the present study, the simplified model was appropriate in exploring the integration potential of SST for student-athletes.

In their model, the authors apply the Scholar-Baller (SB) paradigm to demonstrate one potential element of the academic and social system that is posited to lead to academic and social integration and ultimately academic success. As Comeaux and Harrison (2011) acknowledge, academic support programs such as SB are only one factor of many that exist in the academic and social systems that likely promote academic success. Conceivably, SST is an important element of the academic and social system that contributes to integration and eventual academic success. Using the same logic undergirding the application of SB to the original model, SST is not viewed as the primary contributor to student-athlete academic success, but rather provides the researcher a unique lens to view the cumulative process of integration for participants (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

**Summary of Chapter Two**

The road to academic success for a student-athlete is quite often challenging (Jolly, 2008). Despres, Brady, and McGowan (2008) describe collegiate athletics as a cultural phenomenon within the realm of higher education institutions, one in which the athlete is forced to choose between the dual identities of athlete and student. According to Jolly (2008), intense time and scheduling demands are the most apparent factors that distinguish the student-athlete experience from those of non-athletes. The rigorous demands placed upon student-athletes make it difficult to share in the full spectrum of educationally purposeful opportunities as non-athletes.

Despite the vast amount of evidence that suggests an overall positive benefit of collegiate athletic participation, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding the connection made by athletes between their sport and academics at large Division-I institutions. Another prominent issue faced by student-athletes is social isolation, both from other students on campus and student-athletes of
other sports. Given the complexity of the student-athlete experience, much is still to be learned about the environmental interactions that lead to academic success.

In the last three decades, attempts have been made to create better academic support services for this unique population (Harris et al., 2003). However, developments have been anything but linear, and researchers have yet to determine the proper balance of academic and social integration that promotes student-athlete academic success. Models of academic and social integration exist for traditional student populations, yet only one theoretical model devoted exclusively to Division-I student-athletes exists in the extant literature (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). There exists a need for further investigation into the integration experiences of student-athletes, as more complete understandings can lead to improvements in support programs and potentially enhance the overall college experience for this population.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This chapter will present the data collection and analytical methods used in this study. This chapter is broken down into three sections. The first section presents the rationale for using a grounded analysis. The second section describes the data collection procedures and activities used in the current study. Finally, the third section presents the analytical methods and processes used to generate the grounded theory in the present study.

Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

This study utilized a qualitative approach based in grounded analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the academic and social integration processes of first-year student-athletes in Structured Study Time at Legacy University. According to Patton (1990), qualitative analysis is both an art and a science. The art aspect involves the researcher carefully selecting procedures to solve analytic problems and having the ability to create a coherent story from the data that “feels right” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 47). The science aspect of a grounded analysis is generation of a theory that reflects all collected data, which can be used to inform professional practice.

According to Stern (1995), “The strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in investigations of relatively unchartered water, or to gain a fresh perspective in a familiar situation” (p. 30). Numerous questions about the academic success and participation in the overall college experience for Division-I student-athletes remain unanswered. Academic and social integration patterns have been ultimately linked to learning, persistence, and overall academic success for traditional students (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1993). However, very little is known about how the path towards academic success develops for student-athletes, particularly processes of integration. It is important that a grounded
theory methodology (GTM) was used to identify new constructs and expand current conceptual frameworks on the integration patterns of student-athletes so that student-affairs practitioners may be able to modify current formats of academic assistance and create a more fulfilling college experience for this group.

**Data Collection**

**Research Setting**

Based on the researcher’s previous employment as a tutorial assistant within the Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services, access to Structured Study Time collaborative peer-tutoring sessions was secured. By spending several hours weekly in collaborative peer-tutoring sessions, student-athletes are exposed to a plethora of academic and social stimuli, and the research setting was appropriate to explore how student-athletes create meaning of such experiences and how integration patterns unfold. The collaborative tutoring sessions promote completion of coursework, time management, enhancement of study skills, as well as interactions with graduate mentors and fellow students. Finally, SST peer-tutoring sessions are composed of mainly first-year student-athletes. While the researcher made an appearance in SST sessions biweekly over the course of the Spring 2012 semester to gather observational data, on certain occasions (e.g., major sporting events or overall low attendance) data collection was compromised, resulting in the use of eight substantive observational opportunities and one comparison observation of subject-area tutoring to assist in generation of the grounded theory. Complete observational details are presented below in Table 1.
Observations Performed in Structured Study Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Total Duration (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/17/2012</td>
<td>SST Laboratory *(prior to relocation)</td>
<td>5:45p–7:30p</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/19/2012</td>
<td>SST Laboratory*</td>
<td>6:00p–7:30p</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/24/2012</td>
<td>Subject-area tutoring zone (Comparison group)</td>
<td>6:00p–7:30p</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/26/2012</td>
<td>SST</td>
<td>7:00p–8:30p</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/31/2012</td>
<td>SST</td>
<td>7:20p–8:20p</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2/2012</td>
<td>SST</td>
<td>7:30p–8:30p</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/7/2012</td>
<td>SST</td>
<td>7:30p–8:30p</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/13/2012</td>
<td>SST</td>
<td>8:15p–8:50p</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/20/2012</td>
<td>SST</td>
<td>7:15p–8:00p</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Context/Environment

Structured Study Time is a multi-dimensional collaborative tutoring arrangement run by graduate students (new policy as of Spring 2012) at Legacy University. Legacy University is a large public research-oriented institution whose student-athletes participate at the NCAA’s
Division-I level of competition. In the past several decades, numerous athletic programs have won national championships, catapulting Legacy into the national spotlight, and Legacy continues to be a dominant force in numerous high-value corporate sponsorships and media contracts. In the same time period, however, concurrent with its success in athletics competition, came various reports by the media highlighting academic integrity issues among its student-athletes. SST sessions at Legacy University served as an adequate setting to explore how high-profile Division-I student-athletes navigate integration issues in light of its placement in a nationally recognized athletics program.

SST is provided to student-athletes through the Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services. Consistent with Smith and MacGregor’s (1992) definition of collaborative peer learning, SST utilizes a broad variety of educational practices that involve the joint intellectual efforts of students and SST tutors. Such practices may include, but are not limited to, structured peer-group work to complete class assignments or to master new material, individualized sessions with SST tutors designed to enhance organization, time management, basic skills building, and individualized goal-setting and reflection sessions.

At its core, the philosophy of SST is to provide a forum for the holistic development of the student-athlete, with particular emphasis in the academic and social domains. The holistic approach to development has received attention in the counseling literature. Danish and Hale (1981) and Ferrante, Etzel, and Lantz (1996) have suggested the use of counseling services that focus on the holistic development of student-athletes. One such approach that stresses holistic development is the wellness approach. According to Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000), such programs conceptually define wellness as “a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which the body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully”
Campus-wide issues such as student retention and academic persistence are addressed by programs that take on the conceptual framework of developing the student as a whole person (e.g., Hermon, 2005). SST places an emphasis on issues such as retention and persistence, while addressing the interconnected domains of a “whole” student-athlete, consistent with the tenets of a holistic program.

First-year student-athletes are recommended or required by their advisors to attend SST sessions as a means of facilitating the transition into college academic life. The program is designed in such a way that it provides first-year student-athletes intensive and intentional interactions with advisors, support staff, and peers in order to promote both initial and future academic success at Legacy. Primarily an academic support program, SST is structured so that social interaction is necessary as well, both athlete-to-tutor and athlete-to-athlete. The design of group sessions allows for students to assist one another in creating shared meaning of content material and recognizes the importance of peer social interactions. Golub (1988) highlights that collaborative learning formats intentionally promote communication among peer members, a key tenet in realizing academic success.

Upon arrival at Legacy, the student-athlete’s academic advisor fills out a questionnaire specifying his or her reason for the student’s placement in SST and offers specific areas of focus (e.g., time management, raising GPA, or study skills) that should be addressed by the SST tutor. Furthermore, the advisor also provides specific milestones to be reached on the road to goal achievements (see SST Advisor Questionnaire in Appendix A). During their first session, the student-athlete is also asked to answer a brief questionnaire relating to perceptions of academic success in college, identification of past roadblocks to academic success, and attitudes about SST tutorial support (see SST Student Questionnaire in Appendix B).
During the student-athlete’s first SST session, he is introduced to his tutor and other student-athletes. The first order of business involves organization and is a joint effort by the SST tutor and student-athlete to identify important due dates of academic assignments and any potential disturbances as a result of sports-related travel (see Calendar in Appendix D; see Assignment Tracker in Appendix E). Concurrent with this process of organization, the tutor and student-athlete work collaboratively to create specific semester goals and weekly actions designed to accomplish these objectives (see SST Academic Success Plan in Appendix C).

As the semester progresses, the student-athlete is monitored by support staff to ensure adequate academic progress, goal accomplishment, and overall satisfaction with the SST program. Department administration, the lead tutorial coordinator, SST tutors, and advisors all maintain a very open and transparent relationship in discussing student-athletes’ academic progress and collaborate to develop essential interventions when necessary to refocus an ailing student. SST aims to instill academic self-sufficiency in its participants with the ultimate goal of weaning student-athletes off of structured tutoring all together. The majority of student-athletes in SST are first-year, but some are second- or even third-year students.

The SST forum provides the researcher the ability to witness the integration, both academic and social, of first-year student-athletes involved in collaborative peer tutoring. Furthermore, it allows for a structured environment in which to obtain interviews. SST, however, is much more than simply a designated forum for collaborative group tutoring. Through its network of graduate student tutors, administrators, and advisors, it also serves as a gateway in which student-athletes can be directed to other campus resources (e.g., learning specialists and other venues of assistance) to perpetuate academic success. While not a primary focus of this study, a question was included in the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendices G–I) to
examine other possible non-SST influences on integration, which yield additional insights on integration patterns occurring outside of SST for this population. The aim of this question was twofold. First off, the question intends to uncover additional resources that student-athletes use to enhance their academic success, which athletic administrators may not be aware of. Such knowledge may allow administrators to branch out and improve partnerships with certain offices, thus making such services more widely available to more student-athletes. Secondly, it intends to help athletic administrators understand the comparative contribution of SST to overall integration compared to other campus resources and whether more time should be given to student-athletes to possibly explore other integration mechanisms.

Participants

This section will describe the basic demographics of the research participants. For the purposes of this study, multiple first-year student-athletes in the SST collaborative study sessions were observed and interviewed over the course of the Spring 2012 semester. In addition, athletic administrators, advisors, and tutors were observed and interviewed relating to their role in facilitating the collaborative tutoring sessions.

SST participants represent a wide array of student-athlete variations, including but not limited to male/female, multiple races/ethnicities, in-season/out-of-season, and revenue and non-revenue participants. Participants were not selected based on a specific set of criteria, but rather the researcher intentionally compared data gathered from a multitude of interviews and related sources and systematically selected what sources would help him gain further insight into emerging theoretical constructs. This sampling technique, known as theoretical sampling, will be explained further in the following section. All of the interviewees that participated in the present study are listed below in Table 2.
Table 2

*Interview Participants From Legacy University*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>Year in school/ Position held</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Revenue or non-revenue sport</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Site of Interview</th>
<th>Format of Interview</th>
<th>Total Duration of Intv. (min)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>2/9/2012</td>
<td>Interview Room</td>
<td>Face</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwayne</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>2/16/2012</td>
<td>Interview Room</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
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<td>First-year</td>
<td>W (Inter.)</td>
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<td>Face</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>Tutor</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>Face</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3/23/2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>W</td>
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<td>W</td>
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<td>Face</td>
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<td>First-year</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-revenue</td>
<td>4/16/2012</td>
<td>Advisor Office</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>Non-revenue</td>
<td>4/16/2012</td>
<td>Advisor Office</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwight</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>4/16/2012</td>
<td>Advisor Office</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>First-year</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>4/19/2012</td>
<td>Interview Room</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collection of Data**

Grounded theory methods do not specify a specific method for data collection, and the collection process is “not time discrete” (Egan, 2002, p. 283). Rather, incoming data from the
naturalistic environment and interviews are constantly compared to existing data, codes, and categories that have been developed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The basic rule underlying the “constant comparative method” is, “While coding an incident for a category, compare it with previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 106). Each step of the analytic process is moved forward by the need for additional data collection, which assists in the clarification and explanation of emerging concepts.

The data collection process gains focus over time (Egan, 2002). As the researcher began initial observations and interviews, data was collected using broad-based approaches, such as utilization of the entire semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix G). Initial interviews serve the researcher to accomplish two main goals. Firstly, they allow the researcher to gain insight on emerging themes, which allow him to recognize leads in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Respondents were asked to speak freely and unrestrained within the applicable interview time constraints, such that they were able to amply discuss how they understood and described their integration experiences in SST. This was important, as existing literature did not provide much in terms of student-athlete integration, and it was imperative that the researcher build a firm conceptual base to guide further inquiry.

As leads were established, data was constantly compared and served the researcher in making adjustments to the observational setting and interview questions in order to capture emerging concepts and refocus the data-collection process. The constant comparative method is discussed in further detail in the following section. The sampling strategy employed in this study is described as theoretical sampling, a method characterized by an aim to “refine ideas . . . . help[ing] to identify conceptual boundaries and pinpoint the relevance of categories” (Charmaz,
The researcher concurrently used constant comparison of data with theoretical sampling, allowing him to delimit his data collection, such that only the most appropriate sources needed to develop the emerging concepts were chosen (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Towards the end of the study, interviews and other data collection techniques became brief and directed towards particular subject matter (Egan, 2002).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) place a great deal of importance on the collection of data from multiple sources as a means of exposing variation. Attempts to gain understandings of the phenomenon under investigation involved the researcher utilizing several participants and multiple data-collection techniques. In order to study how first-year student-athletes interacted in the collaborative peer-tutoring environment and created meaning of their integration experiences, the researcher collected interview data and made multiple visits to the field. Based on the intense time demands of the student-athletes involved in this study, the researcher chose to rely heavily on naturalistic observation as a means of data collection. This primary method of data collection was minimally invasive to both the department and student-athletes.

Over the course of the Spring 2012 semester, the researcher utilized eight substantive evening SST collaborative peer-tutoring observations and one subject-area tutoring observation, for a duration not exceeding two hours, to assist in generation of the grounded theory. The researcher took extensive field-notes during the program, which were transcribed and coded immediately following the session. Several interviews with program participants were also conducted during the Spring 2012 semester. The researcher attempted to conduct interviews with an SST participant or administrator as often as schedules and time constraints permitted. Furthermore, as a safeguard in respecting the time demands of student-athlete participants, no athlete was interviewed more than twice. All interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and
coded. The researcher attempted as much as possible to interview as many diverse student-athletes as possible “to develop as many diverse properties of the categories as possible” and to ensure that the grounded theory reflected multiple perspectives (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 62).

During observational sessions, the researcher located himself in a central location in the SST area, whereby he was able to oversee several concurrent sessions. Based on the large area available for SST tutoring, the floor was split between a front and rear area where desks and computer cubicles were located, and the researcher would sometimes relocate between areas during a single session, based on nightly volume. He chose to place himself as a passive observer, to honor the wishes of departmental administration, as not to create any undue distractions during tutoring sessions. At the same time, such a passive observational role served to the researcher’s advantage, as he was able to expand his data collection to encompass numerous tutoring sessions during one sitting, thus increasing variability. However, on more than one occasion, especially during times of low attendance due to major outside sporting events, the researcher was permitted by administrators and tutors to sit within a live session, however was permitted only minimal engagement with session participants.

The lack of interaction during the observational sessions was made up for during interview sessions—where the researcher was able to engage student-athletes, administrators, and tutors—to assist him clarify, expand, and contest concepts he felt to be significant to the emerging theory. It was during interview sessions that the researcher was truly able to make sense of items observed during tutoring sessions. Passive observational opportunities, both outside and within tutoring groups, also served to modify the semi-structured interview protocol, such that certain questions were eventually eliminated, and latter interviews were tailored
towards capturing emerging concepts. The progression of modifications made to the semi-structured interview protocol can be tracked in Appendices G–I.

Finally, the researcher never felt that his presence in sessions caused the student-athletes to modify normal SST behaviors, or compromised the integrity of any collected data, as he purposefully dressed and played the part of a student-athlete during sessions. This allowed him to blend in well with Legacy’s student-athlete population. Furthermore, his identity as a researcher was revealed to fewer than fifteen student-athletes throughout the course of the study.

To supplement the observations and interviews, additional qualitative data-collection techniques were employed, such as document analysis. Pertinent documents were perused, such as supplemental study materials provided during sessions and summative evaluations of tutor performance. Finally, the researcher spoke to as many department members as possible in the administrative ranks, both informally and formally, to gather further insight on student-athlete integration in SST. The same procedures for coding, outlined later in the chapter, were followed with extraneous data sources. A list of important documents that added depth to the grounded theory appears below in Table 3, and the actual evaluations are presented in Appendix K.

Table 3

*Document Analysis Materials*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Type</th>
<th>Date of Analysis</th>
<th>Length of Analysis (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-Athlete Evaluation of Strategic Tutor Performance</td>
<td>4/26/2012</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Athlete Evaluation of Strategic Tutor Performance</td>
<td>4/26/2012</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Athlete Evaluation of Strategic Tutor Performance</td>
<td>4/26/2012</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is of primary importance for the researcher to balance the needs of quality scholarship with professional integrity. “‘Proportionate reason,’ a utilitarian ethic [that] attempts to balance the benefits, costs, and consequences of actions in the field, asking if the means to an end are justified by the importance and values of goals attained” were always at the forefront of the researcher’s mind (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 634). When appropriate and timely, the researcher engaged in “collaborative inquiry” during SST sessions, an attempt to make student-athletes feel like “stakeholders” in this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 634). Such an approach involved a short inquiry into an interaction or the researcher seeking clarification of a recent event. However, at all times, the researcher realized the need to maintain the utmost in professional integrity and used proper discretion as not to create any substantial disruptions during a session.

**Data Analysis**

The interview, observational, and document data collected for this study was analyzed following the techniques, procedures, and guidelines of grounded analysis outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). In this section, the general framework of the analysis, the process of analysis, and standards of validation will be covered.

Grounded analysis is an iterative process that involves intense questioning and precise examination of the observation and interview data (Creswell, 1998). All data was analyzed using the constant comparative method, such that all incoming data was compared to previously collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Glaser (1965) contends that the constant comparative method, involving joint coding and analysis, allows for systematic development of theory. The three-step coding process used to analyze data, introduced in the following section, formed the basis of constant comparison. Data coding guided theoretical sampling, the practice of making sampling decisions towards specific areas that shed light on
emerging concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The constant comparative method and theoretical sampling used in this study are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Grounded theory methods involve an approach characterized by systematic inductive guidelines for the analysis of data and seek to build middle-range theoretical frameworks to interpret the collected data (Charmaz, 2000). The use of inductive guidelines is such that discovered theories are based on concepts derived from collected data about the phenomenon under investigation, rather than ones provided from existing literature (Egan, 2002). However, the technical literature was of some use in the analysis stage. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the literature can be a tool used to enhance sensitivity and encourage deeper thinking, stimulate initial observations and interviews, and to confirm or refute existing explanations of a phenomenon.

**Process of Analysis**

Data collection and analysis stages are interwoven in a grounded analysis. This approach was chosen to guide data analysis for this study for its systematic and rigorous methods to generate theory from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data-analysis procedures are based on Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) latest version of grounded theory methodology in which emerging concepts are discovered through the use of (a) early coding/brainstorming, (b) open and axial coding, and (c) selective coding. Each section will be explained further, in sequential order, as it applies to analysis in the current study.

**Early coding/brainstorming.** The first stage in the analysis process is characterized by early coding. Coding is defined as the analytic process through which “data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 3). The researcher thoroughly read through all initial observation and interview data in order to “enter vicariously
into the life of participants, feel what they are experiencing, and listen to what they are telling us” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 163). In addition to gaining a basic understanding of what was going on, initial data analysis served to guide future data collection and analysis. Intimate connections made to the material were vital, as “close encounters” with data in the early stages set the foundations and crucial links that promote well-developed theory (p. 163). Memos were an essential part of this process and all subsequent coding. Following initial coding, the researcher produced handwritten memos that reflected his conceptualizations of what the data were indicating. Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that the process involves brainstorming about questions related to the data, initial comparisons between data, and reflective thought. The process culminated in the identification of potentially important themes, which shaped future data collection. An excerpt of early coding/brainstorming from the present study is presented below in Figure 5. The reader is able to transcend through the researcher’s inductive thought processes and initial sense-making of observational material by reviewing the attached memo.

**Memo 7**

**January 18, 2012**

**SST is multi-dimensional**

*Some student-athletes come and go, some seemingly check-in with group leader, others do not; some come in and print only, while others sit-down and begin working on an academic assignment.*

Different reporting structure for certain student-athletes [if at all], different clothing styles, etc.

**Methodological Note:**

SST is multi-dimensional in a plethora of ways. First off, this last observation sort of sums up that SST is a means by which student-athletes can engage: academically, socially, and athletically. In addition, SST is multi-dimensional in that it serves student-athletes who need academic assistance, need to print a document, or for those who simply want to engage in a short catch-up conversation with a peer [purely social]. Separation [now observed to be almost entirely by sport] has persisted from start to finish. It is also apparent, that based on apparent schedules, student-athletes enter SST from a variety of points in their day [casual clothes versus athletic attire].

*Figure 5. Early coding/brainstorming. This figure illustrates an example of early coding in the present study.*
Open and axial coding. Open coding entails initially breaking the data apart and developing concepts that represent blocks of raw data in terms of their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Concepts can be seen as the building blocks of theory and represent simple indicators of a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The goal of open coding is to break down data into separate units of meaning and initially categorize phenomena (Goulding, 1999). Goede and Villiers (2003) define properties as characteristics that are common to all the concepts in a category. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define dimensions as “Variation of a property along a range” (p. 45). An understanding of the properties and dimensions of concepts allow the researcher to create abstract categories, which are groups of similar concepts that represent the “cornerstones” of building theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7). Incoming data from observational and interview transcripts were read line by line, and labels or codes were developed that identified discrete concepts found in the text. These concepts were then placed into their own respective categories, which allowed the researcher to separate concepts based on similar responses to a particular process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This stage was important in later stages of analysis, as this initial coding allowed the researcher to identify similarities and differences in codes.

Next, the researcher employed axial coding, the process of interrelating categories and subcategories. Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that “open coding and axial coding go hand in hand” (p. 198). Once a phenomenon of interest was identified in the open-coding stage, attempts were made to relate it to its various properties, including causal conditions and action strategies. As the open-coding stage breaks down the data in order to categorize it, the axial-coding stage allows the researcher to put the data back together and discover connections between categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As concepts between categories were hypothetically
linked, the researcher reanalyzed existing transcripts and engaged in theoretical sampling (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to verify or invalidate such connections. These linkages formed the backbone of the grounded theory generated in this study. The following example of open/axial coding, presented below in Figure 6, details an observation that was initially open-coded, but led the researcher to begin axial coding, as constant comparison of data led him to realize an emerging theme of “commitment/compassion” that resonated across several observations.

Following, Figure 7 is presented, which depicts an organizational frame used by the researcher to organize causal relationships between the student-athlete/tutor relationship and integration along its various properties.

**Memo 4**

**February 1, 2012**

**Commitment/Compassion**

*On behalf of tutor to student-athlete/student-athlete to tutor*

**Mutual engagement: interest in each other’s lives outside of SST**

**Methodological Note:**

While some tutors are seemingly more concerned with fostering academic engagement (some seem to permit too much non-academic talk, etc.) not a single graduate tutor has demonstrated anything short of complete commitment/compassion to their student-athletes, both individually and as a group. First off, these two gentlemen, student-athlete and tutor, have a really nice bond, and while the tutor asks the student-athlete about his sport, the student-athlete also listens as the tutor talks about his academic endeavors. There is lots of head nodding, listening, and questions being asked to ensure understanding and demonstrate mutual respect. Also, two things about the tutor: a). He demonstrates a willingness no matter what to ensure the student-athlete somehow gets ahold of the notes he needs to review [similar to the saving dilemma from last session]; b). He is really (and I mean really) good at fostering a collaborative learning session/dialogue with the student-athlete about subject matter he seems to know very well [similar to the accounting tutor from previous observation and tutor who was talking about ‘stereotypes’ from last Thursday]. Tutors are certainly responsible for some piece of student-athletes’ academic/social integration, in SST, further investigation needs to be performed as to how the student-athletes make sense/perceive the tutorial staff support.

*Figure 6.* Open and axial coding. This figure represents an example of open and axial coding in the present study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phenomenon</strong></td>
<td>Relationships between tutors and student-athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual conditions</td>
<td>Mutual academic engagement and shared interest in each other’s lives outside of SST; tutor allows student freedom to freely socialize with peers and take breaks when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Need by student-athletes to utilize tutors to help create understandings of academic material; otherwise, to be left alone to conduct session according to their preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervening conditions</td>
<td>Ability of tutors to maintain academic flow and keep student-athletes engaged when needed; the balance factor between academic and social engagements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action strategies</td>
<td>Demonstrate commitment and compassion to student-athletes’ academic progress and social needs and show that they are cared for as “people”; developed through building trust and displaying empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td><strong>Integration</strong> (e.g., academic, social, and athletic) through Connections with people, places, and activities of Legacy University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7.* Organizational frame adapted from Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedure and Techniques, by A. Strauss and J. Corbin, 1990, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

**Selective coding.** The third progression in the coding process is known as selective coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define selective coding as, “the process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (p.116). Theoretical saturation often occurs in this stage, when a researcher “determines that a category offers considerable depth and breadth of understanding about a phenomenon, and relationships to other categories have been made clear” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 149). Selective coding allows the researcher to highlight the categories that played the most pivotal role in the formulation of the grounded theory. As Borgatti (n.d.) contends, “The essential idea [of selective
coding] is to develop a single storyline around which all everything else is draped . . . . Selective
coding is about finding the driver that impels the story forward” (para. 20–22). Thinking through
how the various categories were related, especially along casual lines, initiated the story that
guided construction of the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Figure 8 represents an
example of how the researcher began to identify the selective code of “connection,” which was
uncovered and eventually confirmed in the latter stages of data analysis. By utilizing constant
comparative techniques of all the collected data and with the additional support of the following
interview from an advisor/learning specialist nearing the end of data collection, the researcher
determined that “connection” was the central category that all other categories related to.

2). Many of the student-athletes state that the role of their administrators/advisors/tutors is
essential to their academic success. Would you agree that the role of the aforementioned group is
essential for the integration of student-athletes? What is it that this group does that lead to the
integration of student-athletes?

I would agree that the relationships and connections for students with the support team is
imperative to their success. I always tell students, especially when they first arrive, that I don’t
care who it is but they need to find one person who they feel connected to within the department.
It can be me or another advisor or another student services type administrator, but they need one
person they feel they can count on in their lives. These support people aid in the transition of the
student and assist in setting them up for success. We may just discuss possible barriers to success
or we might discuss who to cope in a difficult situation. This role becomes the person who the
student can go to when they are unsure of how to move forward in a certain situation. The
students are just like any other student on campus who might be having trouble with a roommate
or a girlfriend/boyfriend, but they don’t have the time available to reflect or seek out answers.
They also don’t have many connections who aren’t on the team or coaching staff. The people in
academic or student services are more free to have conversations about these situations in
private. We also are connected to campus in a way that many other athletic department
employees are not connected. We can point students in the right direction on campus and help
them find the path to assistance

Figure 8. Selective coding. This figure illustrates an example of selective coding in the
present study.
**Grounded theory model.** The final product generated from the data-analysis process is a grounded theory model, presented in a visual format, which illustrates how links emerged between different categories and between categories and their concepts (see Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Furthermore, the model is a summation of the inductive thought processes that led to the identification of one core category, and how other subcategories relate to it. This model illustrates the constructs that emerged from this study, and their casual relationships, and provides the reader a conceptual base upon which to understand the process of student-athlete integration in a collaborative tutoring arrangement (Palazesi, 2004). The grounded theory model is presented in Chapter Four.

**Standards of Validation**

The researcher built in certain safeguards into his methodological framework to ensure that he maintained appropriate standards of validation to justify findings. Validation is a process by which the researcher utilizes a series of strategies that speak to the “accuracy” of a study (Creswell, 2006, p. 207). Maxwell (2005) describes validity in a qualitative context to refer to “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). Validity, as built into a research design, describes strategies used by the researcher to minimize inaccurate interpretations or explanations gathered from the data (Maxwell, 2005). While numerous validation strategies have been proposed by qualitative researchers, Creswell (2006) states that at least two should be built into any given research design to enhance validity. Three specific validation strategies were used in this study: rich description, respondent validation (member checks), and triangulation (Maxwell, 2005). The following section will define each strategy and offer an explanation for how it was used to enhance credibility of findings in the current study.
Rich Description

Foremost, the researcher utilized rich description in his transcripts and related memos to establish validity of findings in the current study. Rich description entails the use of sufficient detail in reported findings, such that readers feel like they were involved in the research process and could make their own judgments (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that utilizing rich and thick description allows for the reader to determine transferability, or whether stated conclusions may be applicable to other settings. Becker (1970) suggests that long-term involvement in the research setting and intensive interviews are the impetus for gathering rich data.

The researcher’s effort at providing rich description was aided through his steady immersion in the research setting for several hours weekly over the course of an entire academic semester. In the course of this study, the researcher composed verbatim transcripts of the interviews to perpetuate rich descriptions (Maxwell, 2005). Furthermore, all observational data was gathered through descriptive note-taking in addition to being double-checked and transcribed a second time after each session to ensure completeness and accuracy (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). It is also incumbent upon the researcher to provide sufficient evidence of how data was collected and analyzed, thus to indicate how the researcher arrived at his findings. This was accomplished through the use of post-interview comment sheets, also known as “memo writing” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Memos take the reader through the inductive thought processes that led the researcher to propose relationships between concepts.

Respondent Validation

Respondent validation, or “member checks” (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985), is “systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying”
(Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). Maxwell (2005) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) cite this validity strategy to be the single most important method to ensure you have properly interpreted data collected from participants as well as an important check against potential researcher bias. According to Creswell (2006), the process involves taking data, analyses, and interpretations to participants such that they can determine the accuracy of the researcher’s account.

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured permission from administrative staff in Legacy’s Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services to conduct member-checks with student-athletes and staff. During the last week of the Spring 2012 semester, the researcher engaged student-athletes and staff in informal focus groups regarding their perceptions of accuracy of the completed data analysis. A model similar to the current Supporting Connections (SC) model presented in Chapter Four was demonstrated, utilizing the same six constructs and served to frame the discussions. Initial support for the model was favorable, and the cumulative group opinion suggested that the model accurately captured the student-athlete integration process in SST. Further analysis of the data, insights drawn from the focus groups, and collaborative sessions with the researcher’s major professor and SST administrative staff led the researcher to apply minor changes to the sequence of constructs presented in the original model. A final round of verification was conducted in which the researcher sought insights on the reconstructed model from SST staff and the professorate on his doctoral committee. George, an administrator in SST, had the following to say in an e-mail correspondence to the researcher after reviewing the current model and narrative:

This is absolutely phenomenal work…. I just finished reviewing your materials and to say the least I am very impressed. Your model is very detailed and provides a good analysis of exactly what you will be measuring. Great job!!!! (excerpt from personal e-mail)
Triangulation

Triangulation is a process of corroborating multiple sources of data to clarify a particular finding (Creswell, 2006). According to Fetterman (1998), triangulation involves testing one source of information against another to ensure that data has been interpreted properly. Maxwell (2005) states that this strategy “reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops” (p. 112). Mathison (1988) states the obvious in utilizing triangulation, using more than one individual for data collection, but Denzin (1978) expands this strategy to encompass a time and space element in which a social phenomenon is observed under a variety of conditions. Mathison (1988) argues that the goal of triangulation is not to force all data to fit one single proposition, but for the researcher to be open to various possibilities—convergence, inconsistency, and contradiction of data—to build a good explanation of a social phenomenon that reflects as many realities as possible.

The researcher constantly compared multiple sources of data (e.g., interview transcripts, observational data, and documents) to create the best possible explanation of collected data. In addition to multiple, diverse participants being interviewed to shed light on the emerging social phenomenon, the researcher also observed Structured Study Time sessions during multiple time slots, which presented different groups of student-athletes and peer tutors. Exploring SST under multiple conditions enhanced the generality of developed explanations. The researcher also took into account inconsistencies and contradictions in collected data, not automatically discarding such findings. Such a process provided avenues for further exploration and ensured that the generated theory was representative of the full spectrum of student-athletes and occurrences in the field (Mathison, 1988).
Researcher Bias

The researcher did not enter the research context completely free of personal biases. It is important that the researcher indicate his personal biases that may have influenced data collection and analysis and methods to enhance confidence in findings. Murphy, Dingwall, Greatbatch, Parker, and Watson (1998) cite that it is important for the researcher to provide evidence of how previous experiences may influence data collection and analysis. Furthermore, Elliott and Lazenbatt (2005) cite that extensive memoing is crucial in controlling distortion by alerting the researcher to his personal biases. Glaser (1978) defines memoing as “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationship as they strike the analyst while coding” (p. 83). Simply put, the researcher writes down any ideas or questions that emerge during the data analysis. This served not only as a tracking device for how the researcher made meaning of conceptual ideas, but also served as a record of how he related codes and properties to each other from the collected data.

The personal biases of the researcher entering the research context derived from his previous employment within the Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services. While this study was designed to present a grounded theory that helps practitioners understand how student-athletes integrate into Legacy University via Structured Study Time, the researcher had been previously employed by this department, departing in good standing, which represents a personal affinity on his behalf to assist student-athletes. The researcher’s commitment to the academic success of student-athletes remained strong during the timeframe of the current study, and he hopes to one day gain employment as an athletic administrator. Such a personal commitment to the department and student-athletes may have led him to potentially ignore negative occurrences or ineffective procedures in the department that were detrimental to the academic success of student-athletes.
Extensive memoing was performed in the current study, after each data collection session, to assist in enhancing confidence in findings. The researcher was able to check if the memos fit the collected data, or in other words, if the memos were grounded in the collected data or not. As the researcher located memos that did not fit with the collected data, they were set aside (Streubert-Speziele & Carpenter, 2003), and their ability to introduce personal bias into findings were reduced. An example of a memo, in relation to the concept of “Commitment/Compassion,” appears below in Figure 9, which emerged during an observation.

Memo 4

January 30, 2012

Commitment/Compassion

On behalf of tutor to student-athlete

High level of commitment to ensure document was saved: female tutor assisting multiple student-athletes simultaneously

Methodological Note:

“I don’t know what I would have done without her...” kind of sums it up. While a long observation in the new area, this comment on behalf of the male student-athlete kind of dictates the purpose of SST tutors. As indicated by this observation, the female tutor was not going to give up, or get flustered, on ensuring the male student-athletes work was saved, so he could properly access it at home and double-check it before submitting it. The student-athletes more than likely feel a certain degree of comfort and assurance via the SST tutors, to ‘save them’ when they experience difficulties, or to make sure they have the best chance of academic success. I was impressed by the compassion on behalf of not only the initial female tutor who ensured the document would be saved, but also by the other male tutor, belonging to another group, who stepped in and assisted with the dilemma. While student-athletes are undoubtedly under tremendous pressure academically/sports-related, it seems like the SST tutors are cognizant of that, and give them the support to let the student-athletes worry just a little bit less, and to know they are supported and cared for.

---End Observation Four---

Figure 9. A detailed memo produced during the current study representing developing themes of “Commitment/Compassion,” used by the researcher to enhance confidence in findings.
Summary of Chapter Three

This study used a qualitative approach based in grounded analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the integration patterns of first-year student-athletes in collaborative peer tutoring, Structured Study Time, at Legacy University. Based on the researcher’s previous employment as a tutorial assistant within Legacy’s Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services, access to collaborative peer-tutoring sessions was secured. For the purposes of this study, the researcher attended numerous evening SST sessions over the course of the Spring 2012 semester, in addition to conducting multiple interviews with a diverse array of participants, as scheduling and time permitted. In addition, document analysis and additional interviews with SST administrators, advisors, and tutors were used to supplement the data collection.

The researcher’s analytical framework that formed the basis of discovery in the present study involved steady immersion in the data over the course of the entire Spring 2012 semester, continuous comparison of analyzed data, and necessary changes made to data collection instruments based on analysis of newly collected data. Data analysis was continuous and performed as it was collected. As data was analyzed, it served the researcher in making adjustments to observational settings and interview questions that sought to capture emerging concepts, thus serving to enhance and refocus the data-collection process. This same iterative process was employed throughout the subsequent coding and memoing processes to aid the researcher in building specific concepts and a grounded theory model.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the results of this grounded analysis, which fills existing knowledge gaps in the current higher-education literature on the concept of integration for first-year student-athletes at a high-profile Division-I institution. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the process by which first-year student-athletes’ academic and social integration unfolded in a collaborative tutoring arrangement. Specifically, this chapter presents how first-year student-athletes make meaning of their academic and social integration, two forms of integration important for academic success, in Structured Study Time, a collaborative peer-tutoring program housed in the Department of Student-Athlete Academic Services at Legacy University. For the purposes of this research, academic success is defined as the cumulative journey by which students make consistent progress towards a degree, a process precipitated by successful academic and social integration, as well as achievement of personal educational objectives (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

The chapter begins with a description of the conceptual framework constructed from the data to help explain the impact of a collaborative-tutoring arrangement on student-athlete integration. Next, the chapter describes each of the six general constructs that make up the conceptual framework, providing evidence to support the conclusions presented in the subsequent pages.

Supporting Connections (SC)

The Supporting Connections (SC) model uncovered in this study is a conceptual model describing the student-athlete integration process in a collaborative tutoring arrangement.
The model proposes that student-athlete integration is best achieved when student-athletes strengthen and stabilize connections with the institution’s people, places, and activities beyond the playing field (e.g., by building a strong connection with the tutor, the student-athlete feels a stronger connection to SST and, by extension, the multiple domains of the university’s life). The notion of connections, represented by the big, underlying arrow, indicates the overarching theme that permeates all the other items in the model. This continuous process, represented by the flow of the arrow, is the mechanism responsible for supporting student-athlete perceptions of connection to the whole college experience.

From left to right, the model first presents the three domains (e.g., academic, social, and athletic) that underlie student-athlete integration. These are the three areas that comprise the majority of campus life for a student-athlete, which must be successfully navigated to achieve optimal levels of integration. The three domains of life are inextricably connected to the others for student-athletes (e.g., one’s practice and travel schedule dictates which classes can be taken and with whom one will have opportunities to engage socially).

Each box in the model is “connected” to the next as one moves from left to right (e.g., ability to manipulate the elements of SST is connected to the behaviors and characteristics of the tutors). Furthermore, when indicated, items within a given box are connected (e.g., trust and empathy cannot exist without understanding). Certain relational assets built between tutorial staffs and student-athletes allow tutors to effectively manage elements of SST that influence the extent to which SST contributes to integration. The actionable personal traits of effective tutors are a) trust, b) empathy, and c) understanding. In demonstrating these attributes, tutors come to understand the academic, social, and athletic systems that shape their student-athletes’ lives. A
more detailed explanation of these relational assets and their power to influence integration for
SST participants will be discussed later in this chapter.

Three elements (e.g., social, serious, and socio-academic) of Structured Study Time are
presented in the model, which are variables of SST that influence the extent to which the
program contributes to academic, social, and athletic integration. Tutorial staffs manipulate the
aforementioned elements of SST in response to the current status, recent events, or anticipated
needs in three domains of student-athletes’ lives: a) academic, b) social, and c) athletic. The mix
of these three elements can be dynamically adjusted via tutors based on such things as academic
deadlines, limited social encounters, exhausting sporting schedules, or student-athlete feedback,
leading to the creation of a “supported study environment.”

Manipulation of the elements by the tutorial staff, based on events that occur in the three
domains, allows them to align and balance three desired student experiences: a) engagement,
b) enjoyment, and c) escapism. Student-athlete experiences are presented on a continuum in the
model, as events occurring in the domains are not static and tutors adjust experiences from
session-to-session based on the desires and needs of the athlete (e.g., revenue vs. non-revenue
athletes). While the desired balance of the three experiences can fluctuate daily, when student-
athletes perceive that their tutor has consistently provided the proper balance of these three
experiences, integration of the three domains of students’ lives is more likely to be achieved.
Student-athlete perceptions of integration of the three domains improve chances for student
success in all domains.

The triangle that encompasses the model represents students’ prior (precollege)
conceptualizations of college success. These conceptualizations are influenced by secondary
school experiences in the three domains of life, and many students begin their college journey
with unrealistic definitions of college success. As students are exposed to the SST program and staff, realistic definitions of college success begin to take shape. The ability of tutors to align and balance the three experiences is undergirded by students’ prior (precollege) perceptions of the three domains of life, but flexible enough to adjust based on short-term occurrences in any of these domains. Figure 10 below presents a graphic representation of the model.

Figure 10. An empirically derived theoretical model of student-athlete integration in college through participation in a supported study-time program.
Existing models have examined elements of academic and social integration patterns of traditional college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1986). However, these studies have focused primarily on integration as a factor in student-persistence decisions and not on how the integration process unfolds or is perceived. To date, a thorough review of existing literature reveals few attempts to systematically investigate and understand the integration process of student-athletes.

The grounded analysis performed in this study uncovered important elements of the student-athlete integration process. Integration is one important piece of the overall academic success definition. For traditional populations, wide-ranging studies of persistence have confirmed the general importance of academic and social integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1997). While student persistence was not specifically examined in the present study, or reflected in the SC model, a better understanding of integration patterns of student-athletes can potentially increase persistence and academic success.

While theoretical models that account for academic and social integration in persistence decisions exist for traditional non-athlete students, they were not designed with the unique experiences of student-athletes in mind. The two most widely known models are Tinto’s Student Integration Model (SIM) (1975, 1986) and Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement. These two models served as an important tool to guide initial inquiry in the present study, and data revealed similarities between these two existing models and the current SC model.

Tinto’s Student Integration Model (1975, 1986), explained and represented graphically in Chapter Two, relies on notions of academic and social integration and is one of the most recognized models to view the process of student departure from post-secondary institutions. The two most dominant forces in a college environment are academic and social, and Tinto’s model
puts forth that departure from college is a product of insufficient integration into either one or both of these realms. His model proposes a series of interactions among the student’s precollege characteristics, initial commitments, and integration patterns. These eventual integration patterns are said to have strong predictive power for whether a student will continue at the institution or depart.

Much like Tinto’s SIM model, the SC model proposes a series of interactions to help explain the integration process of student-athletes. Both models take into consideration precollege characteristics, albeit Tinto’s model more explicitly, in forming initial commitments and views towards college success. Data from the present study indicates that these initial views of college success have an effect on initial integration patterns, both inside and outside of Structured Study Time, in line with Tinto’s model. His model viewed academic and social integration to be a product of an assortment of interactions with college academic and social systems (e.g., diverse course offerings, formal/informal faculty interactions, peer culture, and involvement with social organizations), opportunities readily available for a traditional college student. First-year Division-I student-athletes are afforded multiple opportunities to engage these systems, but scheduling challenges associated with their athletic participation make it difficult for them to explore all of their potential academic and social system encounters. Therefore, the SC model was constructed based on a collaborative tutoring arrangement, Structured Study Time, which all first-year student-athletes are recommended or required to attend. The program was the ideal setting to view the integration process for student-athletes. Not only does SST encompass both academic and social elements under one roof, but it was, in most cases, the most consistent activity and block of time devoted to an endeavor outside of sport for study participants.
Astin’s Theory of Involvement (1984) describes the general mechanisms by which integration is achieved and puts forth the idea that academic and social integration are a product of both quantitative and qualitative elements of involvement. Structured Study Time recognizes the importance of academic and social integration (see Tinto, 1975, 1993) as crucial factors for academic success while providing the mechanisms for involvement by which academic and social integration can occur (see Astin, 1984).

Tinto’s (1975, 1993) Student Integration Model and Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement are both influential in Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) Model for College Student-Athlete Academic Success, the model most directly underpinning the current SC model. To date, the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model is the only one of its kind that takes into account the unique experiences of a Division-I student-athlete, grounded in previous literature, and applies them to integration patterns and consequent academic success. Therefore, it served as the logical conceptual frame upon which to view the integration process for first-year student-athletes in a collaborative tutoring arrangement at Legacy University.

Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) model design allows the academic success journey of a Division-I student athlete to be viewed either in sum or in stages. The current SC model expands on one piece of the model, student-athlete integration. Instead of looking at an assortment of involvement opportunities in the academic and social systems purported to promote integration in the original model, the current investigation looks at one program upon which integration is purposefully promoted by its staff.

The SC model is first of its kind to focus exclusively on the process of integration of first-year student-athletes in a collaborative tutoring arrangement. Understandings of the student-athlete integration process reflected in the current model can provide practitioners an idea of
important constructs to assess the potential of academic support programs. The model relies on notions of academic and social integration introduced in previous models (Astin, 1984; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Tinto, 1975, 1986) as requisites for academic success, with a refined application of these concepts using characteristics representative of Division-I student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The following section will describe each of the six general constructs that make up the conceptual framework in the current study, providing evidence to support the conclusions presented in the subsequent pages.

**Conceptualization of Academic Success**

Although precollege background or preparation characteristics were not a primary focus of this study, inevitably, college student-athletes interviewed in this study arrived at Legacy with fundamentally different ideas about the three domains of college life presented in the Supporting Connections model: a) academic, b) social, and c) athletic. Conceptualization of academic success is defined as the preexisting ideas that student-athletes arrived at Legacy with regarding the role of the three domains in their first-year college experience. This construct is important to the overall model because these early thoughts influenced which of the domains student-athletes prioritized upon entry into Legacy. These initial ideas shaped views on the role of academic success in the first year of college and thus influenced early encounters with academic and social systems.

SST is tasked with promoting integration and academic success for all participants, regardless of their incoming views of the three domains of college. Differing high school experiences with academics and sports lead to an assortment of initial views on the three domains and expectations of where academics fit into the cumulative college experience. Some students arrive at Legacy from secondary school cultures that place importance on sport over academics, while others arrive from systems that promote a healthy balance between the two.
SST tutorial staff serves both types of students to enhance chances of individual academic success.

For those who arrive at Legacy with unclear definitions of academic success, SST staff clarifies the realities of college academic life and provides them with the background knowledge and skills (e.g., eligibility requirements, time-management training, study skills, etc.) that may not have been stressed in the secondary environment. SST attempts to ensure that these students get the best of what they need to set the initial groundwork for a future of academic success.

Michael, an administrator, speaks of the need for SST to provide assistance to those who arrive at Legacy with unclear academic expectations:

Some would never have a chance of making it into Legacy if they weren’t an athlete, strictly because sometimes some students are pushed through the system, so they do need our assistance, which is why we are here as a staff. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

For those students who arrive at Legacy with realistic expectations of college academic life and the necessary tools to succeed, the goal of SST staff is to help these students reach even higher academic goals. Such efforts include using interdepartmental contacts to connect students with resources that may allow them to advance academic pursuits, such as undergraduate research. In the same interview, Michael notes the existence of students at the other end of the academic preparation spectrum:

If they weren’t a student-athlete, they could be a student and excel without absolutely any problem . . . some of the students that don’t necessarily need our help come and seek it from us. We have students who become Rhodes scholars, get into honors programs, and things of that nature . . . (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Fundamentally different ideas about academic success exist for first-year student-athletes entering SST, which were linked to high school experiences. Although actual secondary school academic, social, and athletic experiences were not discussed in great detail with participants, interview responses suggest that all three domains (e.g., academic, social, and athletic) had an
effect on forming initial views of academic success in college. It is likely that coaches, parents, administrators, and peer groups all contribute to how student-athletes initially view academic success upon college entrance. Data from the current study suggests that academic habits learned in high school carried with students upon entry into Legacy. Both groups of students, those academically prepared and those not prepared, reference academic and sporting experiences in high school being responsible for forming initial views on college academic success. When asked about initial views of academic success before entering Legacy, some students needed SST’s help to establish a firm base for academic success at Legacy.

Joey, a first-year non-revenue athlete, had unrealistic views of academic success:

I mean, just passing all your classes, I mean I’m not the greatest student, I can’t really say that I am here to get straight A’s . . . just enough to be able to play ball . . . out of high school it was always [my sport], of course, school was nothing, I didn’t do anything in high school. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Henry, a first-year revenue athlete, demonstrates similar academic unpreparedness:

I did what I had to get done in high school. I did whatever it took to graduate. I see now that college is going to be a lot harder than high school, a lot more time to study, more reasons to study, more quizzes and tests. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Dwayne, a first-year revenue athlete, represented extreme academic unpreparedness:

In high school, I’m not even going to lie; academic success was one of the least things that I cared about. I didn’t care about it, because it’s like, everything I got was a handout because I was a good athlete. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

However, other SST students arrived at Legacy with realistic expectations of college, and could be characterized as those that needed assistance in leaping to higher academic levels, ones that exceeded basic preparation (e.g., references by staff to mathematics labs or writing centers). Student-athletes who arrived at college academically prepared were more likely to report that SST had little effect in changing their ideals associated with high academic achievement compared with those who arrived academically underprepared.
Christina, a first-year student-athlete, displays a firm understanding of academic success:

In high school, I was always a really good student, and I never received a B, I got straight A’s my entire life, so I don’t really think that it changed because of SST... (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Bruno, a first-year revenue athlete, seems to also understand academic success from high school:

I still have the same view on academics because I know that if [my sport] didn’t work, I had to rely on school, and I also had to get a high SAT score, so I had to hit the books hard, in high school. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Definitions of academic success are also important to the overall model because precollege views on academics, social life, and athletics influenced which of life’s domains the student-athletes prioritized upon entry into Legacy. Early views ran from such extremes as sole intentions to use college as a platform for professional sports, to mid-range views that academics held a limited role in college life, to realization that college academics were primary and sports participation secondary.

Sarah, a first-year athlete, represented an extreme case:

I mean, when I first came into college, I had the view that, of going professional. I used this [college] initially as a means to carrying on playing sport, for free, so I could go pro after, and I’m not like super focused on having A’s and a 4.0 GPA. It’s not a priority. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Joey, a first-year non-revenue athlete, follows a more balanced approach:

I’m here just to play ball and I think school work is like second on my list. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Dwight, a first-year revenue athlete, differs from the other two respondents, in that he realized academic experiences extend beyond the college years, even before arriving at Legacy:

I mean if you goof off with your grades, you just don’t play, so you’re really pretty much in college for no reason and it’s an embarrassment to the university, to the school, just to your family, so you definitely don’t want that, so my outlook on that is very different...
it’s telling you what you are going to do for the rest of your life. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

He even went on to add that while in high school, he did research and discovered an interesting fact that bolstered his early consideration of the academic domain of college:

What most people don’t know, in [my sport], the average player only lasts three years, so I mean, by the time [my sport] is done, you are still 24 or 25 years old . . . there’s an after-life for everything, you don’t want to fall back on not having your degree. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

**Precollege Perceptions: Revenue versus Non-Revenue Sports**

The data from this study indicate that precollege ideas about the domains and high school academic and sporting experiences differed resoundingly between revenue and non-revenue athletes. In the current study, all female student-athletes were classified as non-revenue athletes by Legacy University. Data suggests that the revenue athletes received preferential treatment in high school by coaches and school staff, which led to less academic preparedness compared to their non-revenue counterparts.

Dwayne, a first-year revenue athlete, comments on the preferential treatment he received in high school based on his star athletic status:

I didn’t care about [academic success], because it’s like, everything I got was a handout because I was a good athlete. I kind of threw academics off in high school. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

In stark contrast, Christina, a first-year non-revenue athlete, claims that her incoming views of college academics were positively impacted by influential secondary groups:

I think [academic success] means a lot, it represents like what people think of you, and what people think of the sport that you play, it represents your family, and your friends, I don’t know, I think it means a lot. (Excerpt from interview transcript)
Furthermore, revenue athletes seem to enter college with a mindset that typically favors sport over academics, largely based on perceptions of taking their playing careers to the professional ranks.

Bruno, a first-year revenue athlete, admits that prospects of going professional can occur very early in high school for a revenue athlete and shape academic views of college:

I mean, my first two years of high school, I didn’t care, like my thought was I need to get drafted, I want to play professional ball. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Dwayne, a first-year revenue athlete, characterizes how professional pursuits can cause revenue athletes to initially ignore the importance of college academics:

Revenue athletes can more easily go to the professionals in baseball, basketball, or football. That’s kind of why we horseplay, because we know our talent will take us there. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Joey, a non-revenue athlete, comments on what he feels drives revenue athletes to initially favor sport over academics:

I don’t see many non-revenue sports that have something to look forward to in the future, getting paid well and all that, mostly male revenue sports, like baseball, football, basketball, is where you get all of the money from. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

These conditions are necessary for SST staff to consider when establishing initial and realistic academic success goals and program initiatives for participants.

Differing precollege views about the domains of college life affect initial integration patterns of revenue and non-revenue student-athletes in SST and the outside college environment. A main objective of SST is to promote integration for all participants, irrespective of student athletes’ early views on the domains or initial preparation patterns. Student-athletes’ early views generated from high school experiences lead students to prioritize certain domains upon college entrance. In talking about the wide assortment of academic and sporting backgrounds that athletes come from, Michael noted that no two athletes’ needs are the same:
In the truest sense, all of our student-athletes are unique. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

**SST- Supported Study Time**

Tutorial staffs are able to manipulate three of the elements in SST (i.e., SST—Social Study Time, SST—Serious Study Time, and SST—Socio-academic Study Time) in response to the current status, recent events, or anticipated needs in three domains of student-athletes’ lives: a) academic, b) social, and c) athletic. The mix of these three elements can be dynamically adjusted via tutors, based on such things as academic deadlines or student-athlete feedback, leading to the creation of a “supported study environment.”

Manipulation of the elements by the tutorial staff, based on needs that result from the cumulative student-athlete experience, allows them to align and balance three student experiences: a) engagement, b) enjoyment, and c) escapism. When student-athletes perceive that their tutors have consistently provided the proper balance of these three experiences, germane to their individual needs (e.g., revenue vs. non-revenue athletes), integration of the three domains of students’ lives is more likely to be achieved, which improves chances for student success in all domains.

Findings from the current study suggest that SST tutors are able to effectively manipulate elements of SST that achieve the desired experiences of student-athletes, based on the close connections they establish with student-athletes. Although first-year student-athletes arrive at Legacy from an assortment of different backgrounds and display varying degrees of academic preparedness, it is the job of academic support programs like SST to facilitate integration and eventual academic success.

Data reveals that student-athletes feel that the tutorial staff is the lifeblood of Structured Study Time. All participants in this study made reference to at least one tutor who was able to
accurately and consistently anticipate their needs (e.g., academic, social, athletic, or personal) and align and balance experiences to meet those needs. In turn, this helped students integrate these various domains and bolster perceptions of student success in all domains. More than just academic aids, tutors are seen as confidants, friends, and otherwise trusted individuals who serve as positive influences in the lives of student-athletes. Following are a series of quotes from various interviewees, followed by an experience or experiences they felt their tutor was effective in aligning and balancing during sessions to satisfy their needs.

For certain athletes, desired experiences provided by tutors heavily favored engagement opportunities. Henry, a first-year revenue athlete, feels at home in SST because of his tutor (engagement):

My tutor is very nice. She’s very helpful, and I know one thing, she will get on me in a heartbeat if I ever mess up, in class, or if I am missing study hall, class, or not somewhere I am supposed to be. I would say our relationship is she’s kind of like a mother to me as well, because she doesn’t play around and she makes sure that I do what I have to do and get through school. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Joey, a first-year non-revenue athlete, describes his favorite tutor like a big sister (engagement):

We have a good relationship. I mean we always talk and she always reminds me I have to go to tutoring on certain days. She helps me with all my papers and she even knows how I write, so she’ll help me out and tell me what looks and sounds good. She’s a really big help. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Christina, a first-year athlete, appreciates that her tutor is able to keep her focused on academic tasks in a manner that is not overbearing (engagement):

Right when I get here, she asks me what I need to do, what I need to get done and checks up on me throughout. I mean she doesn’t sit there and stare at me when I am getting my work done, but she helps me, and keeps checking up on me, to make sure that I get my stuff done. (Excerpt from interview transcript)
Abigail, a first-year athlete, likes that tutors are sometimes strict but fair when something important needs to get done (engagement):

I mean the tutors are really good at laying out for us what we have due each day, and if we get too crazy, or too distracted, they will be like, ‘Hey do your work,’ so it definitely helps that they are there to push us along to do things that we really don’t want to do if it is something important. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Abigail also states that tutors are responsible for making her feel academically comfortable in a college environment (engagement):

My first semester, I really struggled at the beginning of school because it was all new to me and classes were much harder than high school, and it wasn’t what I was expecting. I started off really bad and then I started having meetings with the tutors, who taught me how to study, taught me how to prepare for exams, just kind of transitioned me from high school to college, and so, the tutors have definitely helped me a ton. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

For other student-athletes, desired experiences in SST deviated from pure engagement to include either a large or partial focus on enjoyment.

Sarah, a first-year student-athlete, claims that tutors are not only friends, but go the extra mile to build closer relationships (enjoyment):

I get along well with all my tutors. I would say I have a good friendship with all of them, as opposed to the idea that they are kind of like just a tutor teaching me. It’s more of an equal relationship and I enjoy coming, because I enjoy hanging out with them. On a couple of occasions, some of them have come and watched our games, and they’ve just been really cool and supportive. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Bruno, a first-year revenue athlete, describes the connection he has with his tutor as symbiotic, because they can talk about their days outside of SST with one another (enjoyment/escapism):

After seeing that person every day, you actually have a connection by the way you help each other out. We enjoy our time together and can provide mutual advice to each other about events outside of SST. (Excerpt from interview transcript)
Dwayne, a first-year revenue athlete, speaks of one tutor in particular that he looks forward to seeing each session (engagement/enjoyment):

He’s my boy. He helps me out a lot and helps me study and stays on me when I have to get something done. I always request to have him. He is a hard working guy in graduate school and he is just a good guy. I have a close relationship with him and we bonded real quickly. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Some student-athletes desired that SST provide all three experiences (e.g., engagement, enjoyment, and escapism). Manuel, a first-year non-revenue athlete, enjoys the fact that SST sessions with his tutor don’t involve only academic talk (engagement/enjoyment/escapism):

My relationship with my tutor is pretty chill and relaxed. I can talk to her about anything. She helps me, and I mean it’s just a great environment for me to learn and to talk about my life in general with someone who has the time and is willing to listen. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Dwight, a first-year revenue athlete, states that his relationships with tutors are much more than simply a business arrangement (engagement/enjoyment/escapism):

I think that you have to be very close with your tutor. I mean if you’re not close with your tutor, if it’s just business and you just come up here and do your work and leave, it would be harder to do it, than if you guys really have a connection. I really have a connection with my tutors and it’s a big help. They might say things like, ‘You have been struggling in this class, let’s knock it out, or come in and talk to me about whatever is on your mind or you know you can come up here after practice, you can talk to me about your problems, or something like that.’ (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Certain relational assets built between tutorial staffs and student-athletes allow tutors to effectively manage elements of SST that influence the extent to which SST contributes to integration. The actionable personal traits of effective tutors are a) trust, b) empathy, and c) understanding. In demonstrating these attributes, tutors come to understand the academic, social, and athletic domains that shape their student-athletes’ lives. In turn, they can manipulate elements of SST that achieve the desired experiences of individual students, which lead to perceptions of student success in the overall college experience. Athletics Department
administration, tutors, and student-athletes are all in strong accord that the tutorial staff underlies higher perceptions of integration, a necessary ingredient for academic success. Data reveal this is likely due to the close connection and strong relationships that tutors develop with student-athletes based on demonstration of the actionable personal traits mentioned above.

Although student-athletes would likely perceive feelings of connection to Legacy irrespective of program administration and tutorial staff, evidence from this study strongly suggests that program personnel largely magnify connections to Legacy, both academically and socially. Jennifer, an administrator, suggests that students are provided early on with examples of a program philosophy that seeks to build strong relationships with them that stems from the top of the organization:

I would agree that the relationships and connections for students with the support team is imperative to their success. I always tell students, especially when they first arrive, that I don’t care who it is but they need to find one person who they feel connected to within the department. It can be me or another advisor or another student services type administrator, but they need one person they feel they can count on in their lives. These support people aid in the transition of the student and assist in setting them up for success. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

As George, an administrator, states, building trust among student-athletes is essential in tutors’ ability to manipulate the elements and facilitate integration:

I think a key with that is we have people that are passionate and care about these students as people, and I think anytime when you care about individual students, or in this case student-athletes, you develop what’s called trust. When you have trust, you can help lead them in the way they need to be led. I think that is the key, developing those relationships with student-athletes, to attain and gain that trust among them and to be able to then teach them what are the support roles of those academic support administrators, advisors, and tutors in regards to their educational mission. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

As George states, tutorial staffs are able to build relationships with student-athletes based on trust because they are able to separate the athletic and personal identities of their participants and recognize them as individual students with unique needs. This quality served to enhance
perceptions of integration among student-athletes as they felt they could perform comfortably in an environment where they were not being judged based on their athletic performance. Pressure to succeed was generally lessened, and student-athletes enjoyed the opportunity to work alongside individuals they considered friends. Abigail, a first-year athlete, exemplifies George’s sentiment of tutors demonstrating care for student-athletes as people, which serves to build trust and allows tutors to provide advice to students that may aid in their overall integration:

*I feel that the tutors could care less if you go out and win your game* [emphasis added]. That’s not what they know you for and they don’t know you as that athlete. I would say I talk to my tutors about what they’re doing this summer or the next job that they are going to. I would say that we have a pretty friendly relationship. I feel like I can go to them for advice. They have kind of been here and they are obviously really good at school. They are just really good people to go get advice from. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

In addition to a sense they were cared for as people, trusting relationships between student-athletes and tutors were enhanced when student-athletes felt they could depend on their tutors to be there for them and support them in any and all aspects of integration. Findings suggest that student-athletes always had someone supporting them in pursuit of overall success. On one particular session, a student-athlete was observed to have a problem saving a document that he had been working on for several evenings due the following day. The student-athlete was visibly flustered and complained of physical exhaustion, explaining he did not have enough time the current evening to start the assignment over. His female tutor immediately stepped in and calmed him down, ensuring him that she would do anything in her power to resolve the issue, even if that meant staying past her appointment or consulting another tutor for assistance. The look on the student’s face went from panic to immediate calm following the interaction, and the issue was eventually resolved with the assistance of another male tutor.

In a reflective memo written shortly after observing this incident, the tutors’ compassion was noted and the possibility that such compassion allowed the student-athlete to take comfort in
knowing that the tutors would do their best to help the student succeed, even if it meant working extra to “save” a student’s work from a computer malfunction:

“I don’t know what I would have done without her,” said the male student-athlete, shortly after the issue was resolved. I was impressed by the compassion on behalf of not only the initial female tutor who ensured the document would be saved, but also by the other male tutor, belonging to another group, who stepped in and assisted with the dilemma.

(Excerpt from memo transcript)

Charlotte, an SST tutor, did not have a background in intercollegiate athletics, nor did she know many athletes who participated in sport during her undergraduate studies, but took the time to get to know her students and attempt to understand their lives:

I find that by taking a few minutes just to chit chat with them about their day, how they’re feeling, talk about something going on in their life . . . They tend to build that relationship with me. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Not only did this serve to diversify and balance sessions, adding an important social component, but it also made students want to work harder for her because they admired her for attempting to get to know them on a deeper and more personal level.

Christina, a first-year athlete, provides an example of tutors’ understanding the often chaotic schedules of student-athletes:

I know one time, I had two separate practices in a row and then I had to get dinner real quick. I was a little bit late for my session and I mean my tutor was okay with it and said don’t worry if you’re struggling to get here on time, it’s fine. Let’s just get it done.

(Excerpt from interview transcript)

Spending time getting to know athletes personally and establishing deeper connections allows tutors to not only better understand the student-athlete experience, but develop feelings of empathy. Tutorial staff members came to respect the time demands and rigorous scheduling associated with Division-I sports competition. This allowed tutors to initiate academic productivity and overall integration for student-athletes in a more forgiving and relaxed environment than the ones typically encountered by student-athletes. Joey, a first-year non-
revenue athlete, states that this empathy shown on behalf of tutors is a sigh of relief compared to other academic environments:

I feel like they understand what we go through and it’s a great feeling. When you come from a classroom, and you ask your teacher, “Do you think I can work on extra credit stuff because I have been real busy, and she’s like ‘oh no,’” he or she may say no because you had your chances earlier in the year, but in here, they get what we go through, and sometimes we’re tired, and are not expected to always get it right on the first try. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

During an evening session, a first-year male student-athlete took a short study break and went to check something on a computer located in the study area. He came across an online blog where a critic had spoken harshly of a recent sporting performance of his. The student was overheard sharing with others how badly this made him feel. A male tutor in the area got up from his seat, placed his hand on the shoulder of the student, and told him to brush the event off and stated that these types of things happen when you compete at high levels. In a reflective memo written shortly after observing this incident, the tutor’s empathy was noted as was the possibility that such empathy helped students to feel cared about:

The observation of the male tutor trying to make the male student-athlete feel better and brush off the gentlemen who apparently was saying hurtful things on an online blog forum, cemented the fact that the tutorial staff shows a great deal of empathy to participants. Furthermore, while I am not sure how many of the tutorial staff engaged in intercollegiate sports competition, they certainly exhibit high degrees of empathy in their dealings with student-athletes. It was apparent the tutor was attempting to diffuse the situation, and the tone in his voice signaled that he cared about the student-athlete. (Excerpt from memo transcript)

Despite variations, all student-athletes in the current study felt that tutors were able to accurately and consistently anticipate their needs (e.g., academic, social, athletic, or personal) and align or balance experiences to meet their needs in SST. Three actionable traits of tutors were uncovered in the current study: a) trust, b) empathy, and c) understanding, which allow them to build strong and connected relationships with their students and establish a supported
study environment. In developing such relationships, tutors were able to manipulate elements of SST that achieve the desired experiences of individual students, which lead to perceptions of student success in their overall college experience. More than just academic aids, tutors are seen as confidants, friends, and otherwise trusted individuals who serve to positively influence integration patterns of student-athletes.

**SST- Social Study Time**

For integration to occur, student-athletes need to perceive adequate levels of tutor tolerance of social activity during SST. Student-athletes expect to have the ability to participate in social encounters with academic staff and fellow athletes while completing academic tasks. The need to socially engage in SST develops from a lack of social interaction during the course of the day, during which most student-athletes are practicing, traveling, participating in games, or in class. Student-athletes who perceive the ability to freely participate in social encounters are more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes toward SST attendance, which increases willingness to complete academic tasks.

Sarah, a first-year athlete, suggests that freedom to socialize seems to make academic work feel less burdensome:

This is designated study time, so I come here, and it forces me to do my work, which I might not do otherwise. But I also like the social side as well, because there’s a lot of my other friends here, athletes, like it’s cool just to hang out. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Dwight, a first-year revenue athlete, claims that a perception to freely socialize provides a comfortable environment to complete academic tasks:

I mean you’re on their time, but you’re on your own time too, I mean if you sit there and focus and get your stuff done, you can get it done, if you want to talk and get your work done, it’s just whenever you get done. (Excerpt from interview transcript)
Randall, a first-year revenue athlete, suggests that a perception of being able to freely engage socially provides a favorable academic environment:

We don’t have a lot of time off, we really don’t get a chance to see each other like that, so when we get in here, and see each other, we just talk. I mean, we might laugh and joke around, but at the same time, it motivates me to get my work done. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Perceptions to freely participate in social encounters seem to assist student-athletes form relationships with other athletes at higher rates.

Dwayne, a first-year revenue athlete, indicates that a perception to freely socialize allows him to explore new social encounters:

There’s a lot of athletes, I don’t think I would ever say anything to, outside of SST, but there are a lot of sports up here at one time, and a lot of players have SST. Like I told you, it’s not so strict, nobody is telling you what to do, so basically if you want to talk to a person, you can speak to them, and you can start a conversation with them. It does help me associate with a lot of people in here. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Sarah, a first-year athlete, suggests that athletes’ ability to freely socialize may lead to the exploration and subsequent development of profound social connections:

There’s always people here, there’s always other athletes, and my friends are here, so I guess this is also kind of my social interaction as well. This could be considered an athlete sorority [emphasis added]. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Interview data seems to suggest that a perception of freedom to engage socially has positive effects on both academic and social integration.

Student-athletes must first feel comfortable that social engagement is encouraged in SST before they take initiative to interact with other athletes, a fact recognized by the athletes’ tutors. Charlotte, a member of the tutorial staff, was able to draw a contrast between the structured daily lives of student-athletes and the need to establish a relaxed environment where social interaction was encouraged:
You have to give them a little breathing room. I think having that breathing room, and being able to collaboratively work, or work in an environment where there is collaboration, they can still succeed and get their work done. They need this little bit of time to relax, without so much purpose to structure. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Charlotte, later in the interview, explained why encouraging social interactions was necessary during SST sessions:

I think they thrive on that, because their lives are so structured all day long, and then here they come to SST, and its structure, but it’s not forced, like minute-by-minute structure in their sports . . . (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Students getting to know each other from different teams in SST oftentimes extend those relationships beyond SST into shared classes. Perceptions by student-athletes that social interaction is encouraged in SST led student-athletes to form relationships with athlete counterparts they may not normally associate with. Conversing with athletes from outside their own sports, both in SST and in shared classes, allows them to get to know their counterparts on deep levels and increase comfort levels in social interaction. These relationships, which may not have been initiated without perceptions that social interaction is encouraged in SST, led to academic bonds between athletes. Some athletes suggest that social freedom carries with it certain academic benefits such as increases in learning and having people to sit next to in class.

Dwayne cites that in his case, being able to roam the SST room and socially engage fellow athletes enhances his own learning:

When I’m up here sometimes, I just think, I don’t even know how to do certain things on the computer, and it gets to me, because I know how to do almost everything on the field; some simple stuff I’m supposed to know on the computer. It motivates me, because I see other people doing it, and ask myself why can’t I do it? I’m good enough to know everything. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Abigail, a first-year student-athlete, describes how social interaction with non-teammates in SST has allowed her to make new friends in shared classes that she can sit next to:
I’ve met a ton of my friends up here. Being up here all the time, you eventually get to know the people, especially the people in your tutoring group, if it’s you and one other athlete, you’re going to obviously talk to that person at least once a week, and then if you have them in your class, you end up sitting by them, so it definitely makes friendships up here, I would say. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

All interviewees felt comfortable with the levels of tutor encouragement of social activity during SST. However, revenue athletes used social encounters differently than their female and other non-revenue counterparts. While social encounters were more geared towards academic collaboration and small talk for the latter group, the frequent behavioral trends of revenue athletes demonstrated *escapism*, a term that appears in the social psychology literature. The term refers to a type of behavior or set of activities that individuals may engage in “to escape unpleasant realities and to distract themselves from unhappy events,” which present the individual an opportunity to alleviate anxiety and achieve a more desirable state of being than the current one (Hirschman, 1983, p. 64). Examples of behaviors that reflected escapism ranged from behaviors that had potential to create short-term disruptions among other athletes, such as horseplay and joking around, to those much less invasive, such as hanging around in staff offices listening to music or watching videos on lab computers.

All of the revenue athletes in the current study claim to love their sport, but also to need an escape from the tough and unrelenting schedules of their sport that permit little free time for relaxation and social interaction with athletes other than teammates. Escapism seems to be more important for this group of athletes, as rigorous schedules afford them the least amount of time to engage in informal conversation or activities not directly related to sport compared to counterparts.
Charlotte, a tutor who works with many revenue athletes, speaks of how revenue student-athletes’ experiences differ from other athletes and traditional students and why tutors need to provide the escapism experience for this group:

When I think back on my own undergraduate experience, how many hours I spent hanging out around the union, or hanging out in the library, and having those conversations with my peers, about educational topics or academic topics, but also talking about completely random things. I think about how essential those experiences were for me, and I kind of would liken their experience, in SST, very similar to that. This is their library, this is their union, this is where they can come to learn and socialize. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Randall, a first-year revenue athlete, explains why it is important that his tutors provide escapism for him and what he expects when first arriving at an SST session:

Just to talk, we don’t have a lot of time off and we really don’t get a chance to see each other like that, so when we get in here and see each other, we just talk. Sometimes, I’m tired from practice, or worn out, so I might not feel like doing as much. We have a pretty specific schedule to go through with our sport. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Dwight speaks about escapism from a viewpoint that describes temporarily getting away from certain negative results inherent in a tough schedule of athletic activities:

You come off of practice some days, and you are just not feeling it . . . I’m just tired, bruised-up, and I have a headache. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Compared to non-revenue counterparts, revenue student-athletes were more likely to express the need for higher levels of tolerance for social activity during SST. Tutorial staff acts to balance and tolerate this escapism experience for the revenue athletes throughout SST sessions, which assisted this group to complete academic assignments. Part of this observed balance that led to academic productivity was allowing revenue athletes to get social stuff out of the way first. Based on long practice schedules, revenue athletes oftentimes arrived to SST directly from practice or training sessions and benefitted from the ability to decompress from recent sport competition.
SST- Serious Study Time

Student-athletes’ mindset upon entry to SST, a mindset often shaped by recent occurrences in their sport (e.g., a bad practice, raised academic expectations from coaches, physical exhaustion, etc.), in turn shape the students’ initial seriousness of purpose or intensity of effort directed toward academic activities in SST. No athlete is completely immune to this phenomenon as even those who generally performed at peak academic levels experienced difficulty in maintaining focus on certain days. Most of the interviewees state that rigorous schedules are the most common reason affecting initial seriousness of intensity of effort toward academics.

Bruno, a first-year revenue athlete, states that recent events associated with sport may delay his ability to focus when he first arrives to SST:

I mean coming from a long meeting or a practice when my coaches got onto me, you get tired of [your sport] and you come here and want to talk to some other people about other sports and things going on for a little bit, and then eventually get your work done. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Manuel, a first-year non-revenue athlete, states that sometimes sport occurrences at practice or games make academic focus nearly impossible:

You come here, you’re like listen I’m not into this [academics] right now, plus I’m tired. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Randall, a first-year revenue athlete, states exhaustion affects his initial attitudes towards academics when coming into SST:

I’m tired from practice, or worn out, so sometimes I might not feel like doing as much school work. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Sarah, a first-year athlete, cites her mindset can be influenced by a combination of exhaustion and raised academic expectations from coaches:

I know our practices are like a good four hours of our day, and then after that you’re in the training room having your treatments . . . Coach is on our tail, because every year, our
coach wants the team to excel academically. Not only is our coach on our tail to do well in school, but also our advisors and stuff… Being tired and thinking about the pressures can make focusing on school stuff difficult at times. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Joey, a first-year non-revenue athlete, also feels that the combination of exhaustion and raised expectations can be overwhelming and affect initial academic focus:

Sometimes I get here and have too much to do and shutdown . . . Usually I don’t have any other time to do work, because of practice. I get out of practice, and it’s mandatory for me to come to SST and our coaches make us come here and do it. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Upon entry into SST, tutorial staff plays a crucial role in lessening the effect of outside distractions to ensure academic productivity during current or future sessions. Tutorial staff understands that athletes’ mindset upon entry to SST is shaped by recent occurrences in their sport or life and will not be consistent on a daily basis. Reduced academic motivation levels can oftentimes be counteracted by tutors taking a few moments to divert attention away from sport and speaking informally with their student. These types of conversations influence students to feel cared about and connected to their tutors, allowing athletes to speak more honestly and openly about their willingness to complete academic assignments during a particular session.

Charlotte, a tutor, acknowledges that these informal conversations can go a long way with her students and have the potential to salvage an evening when a student enters SST not in an academic mindset:

I find that by taking a few minutes just to chit chat with them about their day, how they’re feeling, talk about something going on in their life . . . They tend to build that relationship with me and then when I need to tell them that it’s time to get down to business, you have to get this done, or I need you to do this for me, they’re more willing to do those things for me as their tutor, because they know that I care about them. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Randall, a first-year revenue athlete, states that getting to know his tutor better through informal conversations motivates him to do better academically overall by alleviating pressure
to perform at peak levels when he is not in the mindset:

I think me and my tutor, we have a great connection, because he knows, sometimes, I’m
tired from practice, or worn out, so I might not feel like doing as much on a particular
day. But, he knows that he can work with me, and most other days, I come in, I sit down
and get everything done that I need to. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

In some cases, when sport occurrences were major and resulted in a mindset completely
void of academics, tutors could not increase academic motivation levels. In such cases, tutors
oftentimes rescheduled appointments for their students. When tutors demonstrated this type of
understanding and sensitivity to negative occurrences that may have happened in sport, students
felt closer to their tutors and were more likely to appreciate SST and pick up the pace
academically when conditions improved.

Joey, a first-year non-revenue student-athlete, noted:

Sometimes I arrive and I say I’m not into this right now and she’s like I understand.
Maybe we can reschedule this? That makes me feel better. I can be reasonable with her,
and she’ll understand and she’ll be able to reschedule it, and everything. I don’t know I
just feel like it’s just a good environment that we have here. (Excerpt from interview
transcript)

Dwight, a first-year revenue athlete, also appreciated the tutors’ sensitivity and
flexibility:

If you normally work, and you come off of practice one day, and are not feeling it, ‘You
know Ms. Advisor, today is not my day. Can I just make up this hour tomorrow?’ Then,
we can do an extra hour the next day, and it actually makes a difference. I don’t think you
would be as focused, or comfortable, if you could not tell them those types of things.
(Excerpt from interview transcript)

This study uncovered no evidence to suggest that any particular type of student-athlete
was more or less affected by athletic stresses that affected the ability to focus on academics
during SST. Likewise, the tutors appeared universally flexible and willing to accommodate the
moods of all their athletes if and when needed.
**SST- Socio-academic Study Time**

Socio-academic Study Time is the label given to the construct that describes student-athlete perceptions of congruence between academic and social experiences provided in SST. It proposes that academic and social integration be viewed as a combined integrative process, rather than separate processes. This construct fuses elements from two previous constructs (e.g., Social Study Time and Serious Study Time) and suggests that academic and social experiences must be linked in a relaxed format for perceptions of integration to develop.

SST is unique in that it provides a forum for students to engage both academic and social encounters simultaneously. Although the construct implies a fused relationship between academic and social encounters, it does not necessarily mean that all academic encounters are of a social nature or vice versa. In order for student-athletes to cultivate strong feelings of membership in SST, they must perceive sufficient levels of freedom to navigate their educational experiences, both academic and social. When athletes are provided high autonomy to determine the level of intensity with which they engage chosen academic and social encounters, perceptions of an enjoyable SST experience are more likely to develop.

Michael, an administrator, is a strong proponent of SST’s academic mission. He had the following to say in response to the reputation that the program has for being fun and socially interactive:

I want students to be able to interact and engage with each other, absolutely, but sometimes the interaction and engagement can sometimes supersede the academic intentions behind the program; not that there is anything wrong with social engagement, but it is not the central focus of SST. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

However, Michael recognizes that allowing for social interactions in the program creates a more enjoyable experience for participants, both in and out of session:

You will find sometimes other student-athletes will wander the area, when they have no tutoring going on, because they know that’s where their friends from the team and other
Dwayne, a revenue student-athlete, responds that he enjoys being in a relaxed environment where he can have a little fun during social interactions and engage academic pursuits at his own pace:

You might have a friend that comes up to you and just wants to play around and that will make you laugh. You do have time for that, because you aren’t always with a tutor. Nobody is constantly telling you we are doing this or that or you have to focus on this . . . (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Dwight, a revenue student-athlete, agrees:

While you’re having fun and doing your work, you’re not even realizing that the time is going by fast. You can have a quick conversation with a friend, knock out some problems, or ask a tutor or friend to help you understand something, and then go back and do some more problems. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Dwight also points out that much of the overall integration he perceives in SST stems from a feeling of freedom that he can choose his own academic and social encounters:

It’s your choice if you want to be in a single room by yourself, or if you want to be here. Whenever you go to tutoring, there’s always going to be at least twenty other athletes in there and you’re going to talk. You’re going to talk, unless you go into the room, and I mean, you are getting things done, and the tutors make sure you get your things done. So, I mean you’re on their time, but you’re on your own time too. I mean if you sit there and focus and get your stuff done, you can get it done. If you want to talk and get your work done, it’s just whatever you choose to do and whenever you get done, so I think it definitely helps you socially. It’s just better than being in a room, not having a social life. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Henry, a first-year revenue athlete, chooses SST to complete his academic work because of its laid-back feel, especially a relaxed atmosphere where assistance is not forced, but available when needed:

I wasn’t even recommended by anyone to come here, but I realized myself that SST, means a lot and that it can help me a lot. I actually enjoy the sessions, but I wasn’t
recommended or required to attend these sessions by any advisor. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Henry also appreciates the fact that he isn’t required to work on one particular subject while in the program, but has the freedom to work on assignments that may help him accomplish long-term goals:

Other tutoring sessions I have during the week, I’m required to focus on subjects like English and Math only or different subjects that I take throughout the week. In Structured Study Time, I can combine them together, as I see fit, and try to learn what I want to learn. Who wants to go to the pros if they can’t count their money, or if they can’t read the dotted line on a contract? So, I think that reading and writing take place a lot in your life, and I can use SST to practice these skills. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Christina, a first-year athlete, appreciates the unrestrictive nature of the SST environment that allows her to reap both academic and social benefits from the program:

It’s not always strictly work all the time, I mean we get here, you can talk to other people for a little while, get your work done, it’s not so strict, you need to do your work, it’s like time to do what you need to do. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Findings suggest that student-athletes claim to feel comfortable performing academically when academic and social interaction levels are not static, even chaotic at times. There was not a great deal of context provided by athletes to explain this phenomenon, but evidence from the current study suggests it may be due to the nature of chaotic and unpredictable sports environments that most athletes are used to performing in. Sarah, a first-year athlete, mentions that she is used to an abruptly changing environment in sport, and commotion in SST is not much different than practice or a game:

When you come in early, it’s kind of chill, it’s like a few people doing some stuff. As it gets later, people may come in and create a ton of noise. I always get work done when I’m here, either way, and feel comfortable in this type of environment. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Bruno, a first-year revenue athlete, states that accomplishing academic tasks in SST is no different than performing in sport:
You are always put in that environment when you play a sport, you got the fans going crazy and you have to focus on one thing, so you have to know how to ignore things. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Joey, a first-year non-revenue athlete, claims that he particularly likes the social interactions in SST and states that a session can sometimes mirror a sporting event. However, when it is time to perform academically, he feels comfortable with the environment and has no problem settling down and getting started:

My tutor will be talking to me and it will be really loud. At the same time, I focus on what’s important because I have to get my stuff done. I mean you have to concentrate and just focus on it and do it. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Randall, a first-year revenue athlete, claims that a chaotic environment has little effect on his academic productivity in SST:

We do function in a crazy environment in our sports, and when we come in here, it might be crazy sometimes, but we’re used to it and just sit down and get to work. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

The current investigation did not reveal any large-scale differences among variations of student-athletes. The ideal environment for integration to occur in SST for study participants is one in which they perceive a combined academic and social experience. This is an atmosphere where academic and non-academic talk is permitted, even behaviors such as light joking and limited horseplay. Students feel the most comfortable and connected to the SST environment when they can engage academic subject matter at their own pace, do not perceive excessive pressures to perform academic work, and are given high levels of autonomy to choose their own academic and social encounters.

**Student-athlete Integration**

Tutorial staff is able to manipulate elements of Structured Study Time based on needs that develop in three domains of student-athletes’ lives (e.g., academic, social, & athletic). In doing so, tutors are able to align and balance three student experiences: a) engagement,
b) enjoyment, and c) escapism, which meet students’ needs. This proper balance is undergirded by students’ prior (precollege) perceptions of the three domains of life, but flexible enough to adjust based on short-term or immediate occurrences in any of those domains. When students feel that SST has consistently provided desired experiences, the end result is student-athlete integration, or a perception of connection to all domains of their college life. The student-athlete integration process in SST facilitates stronger feelings of connection to academic goals, program staff, athletes of other sports, and Legacy University, which improves chances for student success in all domains. All student-athlete participants agreed that the program overall, specifically relationships with tutorial staff, aid in the formation of academic and social connections within the program and the university; that would not have been as likely in its absence.

Student-athletes arrived at Legacy with a variety of precollege characteristics and expectations of the various domains. Program staff, specifically tutors, has to consider both the unique attributes of all student-athletes, along with their expectations, and implement customized solutions that seek to enhance perceptions of integration, both academically and socially. Program staff was able to effectively communicate the academic realities of college life for students, which served to bolster academic identities.

Henry, a first-year revenue athlete, states that interactions with tutors helped him to realize that college was much more than just sport, resulting in a complete shift in his precollege views on academic success:

I see now that college is going to be a lot harder than high school, a lot more time to study, more reasons to study, more quizzes and tests, and that academic success is going to take me a long way. Academic success is going to help me and I am going to need to buckle down and study and actually get something out of my academics. My views about academic success have changed a lot because of my tutors and it does mean a lot to me now. (Excerpt from interview transcript)
Joey, a first-year non-revenue athlete, states that involvement with his tutors has instilled in him a pride in academics, a pride that did not exist upon entrance into SST:

When I first came here, I didn’t care about school. My SST tutor helps me a lot, writing papers, homework, and studying. Sometimes I look forward to writing a paper or just doing homework when I never used to like it before and now, I feel accomplished when I do. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Christina, who indicated that she arrived at Legacy ready for academic life, stated social connections with tutors and other athletes in SST helped her navigate early college experiences:

Just getting acquainted in general, helping me find my classes, and just getting to know my schedule. It helped, especially the first semester of being a freshman, since you don’t really know many people, or what to do, so I appreciate the social connections in SST. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

Student-athletes in the present study considered SST an important factor for integration both inside and outside of the program and chances for academic success at Legacy. Although student-athletes used SST for different purposes (e.g., time to complete academic work, academic support, social opportunities with friends and staff, or simply a diversion from sport-related stress), data supports the finding that SST assisted student-athletes in forming connections to Legacy University, both academically and socially.

Jennifer, an administrator, states that forming connections with the university outside of sport is not an easy process for student-athletes:

The students are just like any other student on campus who might be having trouble with a roommate or a boyfriend/girlfriend, but they don’t have the time available to reflect or seek out answers. They also don’t have many connections that aren’t on the team or coaching staff. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

However, Jennifer states how SST is able to aid in the formation of university connections outside of the program:

We are connected to campus in a way that many other athletic department employees are not connected. We can point students in the right direction on campus and help them find the path to assistance. (Excerpt from interview transcript)
Bruno, a first-year revenue athlete, recalls an experience that allowed him to both feel more like a traditional college student and grow academically:

SST staff put me in a reading and writing center to get some extra help, which is a place where regular students go. I actually got credits for that, which helped me out a lot. (Excerpt from interview transcript)

The program provides avenues for students to meet with support programs outside of SST, learn about different non-sport campus academic programs and social activities, and gain a greater appreciation for being a college student at Legacy. Such connections improve chances for student success in all domains of student-athletes’ lives.

**Summary of Chapter Four**

Chapter Four presents the results of this grounded theory research. The purpose of this grounded analysis was to gain a deeper understanding of how the process of first-year student-athlete integration unfolded in a collaborative tutoring arrangement. The conceptual framework constructed from the data to help explain the impact of a collaborative tutoring arrangement on student-athlete integration is entitled *Supporting Connections* (SC). The model proposes that student-athlete integration is best achieved when student-athletes strengthen and stabilize connections with the institution’s people, places, and activities beyond the playing field (e.g., by building a strong connection with the tutor, the student-athlete feels a stronger connection to SST and, by extension, the multiple domains of the university’s life).

Supporting Connections, as a process-oriented model, presents three elements (e.g., social, serious, and socio-academic) of Structured Study Time, which are variables of SST that influence the extent to which the program contributes to integration. Tutorial staffs manipulate the aforementioned elements of SST in response to the current status, recent events, or anticipated needs in three domains of student-athletes’ lives: a) academic, b) social, and c) athletic. The mix of these three elements can be dynamically adjusted via tutors, leading to the
creation of a supported study environment. Manipulation of the elements by the tutorial staff, based on events that occur in the three domains, allows them to align and balance three desired student experiences: a) engagement, b) enjoyment, and c) escapism. When student-athletes perceive that tutors have consistently provided a proper balance of desired experiences, chances for integration in all three domains and overall college success are likely to increase.

The SC model is first of its kind to focus exclusively on the process of integration of first-year student-athletes in a collaborative tutoring arrangement. Understandings of the student-athlete integration process reflected in the current model can provide practitioners an idea of important constructs to assess to gauge the potential of various academic support programs. The model relies on notions of academic and social integration introduced in previous models (Astin, 1984; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Tinto, 1975, 1986) as requisites for academic success, with a refined application of these concepts using characteristics representative of Division-I student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings from the current study. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how the process of first-year student-athlete academic and social integration unfolded in a collaborative tutoring arrangement. The interview, observational, and document data collected for this study was analyzed following the techniques, procedures, and guidelines of grounded analysis outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This grounded analysis addresses a specific research question: Does participation in collaborative peer tutoring facilitate academic and social integration for first-year student-athletes?

Chapter Five begins with a discussion of the findings. Next, the chapter presents conclusions drawn from each of the six model constructs of the Supporting Connections model and compares them to the existing literature. Finally, the chapter provides implications for research and practice grounded in the study data that may enhance the college experience for student-athletes.

Discussion

The Supporting Connections model developed in this study is a conceptual model describing the student-athlete integration process in a collaborative tutoring arrangement, Structured Study Time at Legacy University. Rather than applying a distinction between academic and social integration, as most existing models have that mention the two concepts (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1986), the current SC model combines the two into a single construct, referred to as student-athlete integration.
Study findings suggest that participants weighed academic and social forces as equally important (see Tinto, 1997) and expected both to coexist for perceptions of connection to SST to develop. Based on findings from her study on perceptions of integration using a diverse sample of two-year college students, Deil-Amen (2011) found that all participants provided examples of integration opportunities that combined academic and social elements. Based on these findings she suggests, “Operationalizing the two forms of integration separately reinforces a false dichotomy and could be understating the true importance of socio-academic integrative experiences by recognizing only half of their socio-academic function” (p. 84). This idea lends support to the notion that academic and social encounters may share more of a fused relationship for non-traditional student integration (e.g., student-athletes) than may have been previously thought. In a critique of his original model of four-year residential student persistence, which proposes that academic and social systems be viewed separately, Tinto (1997) posits a more robust and interconnected relationship between the two types of encounters. Participant responses reveal that SST is as much a social networking program, providing desired opportunities for social engagement, as it is an academic support program.

Prior to the present study, existing literature was not able to provide a clear description of student-athlete integration. The definition of integration that served to guide initial inquiry in the present study synthesizes ideas from studies that examined notions of academic and social integration for non-athlete populations (Deil-Amen, 2011; Tinto, 1993):

A subjective sense of belonging and membership in the academic and social systems of a college; marked by perceptions of congruence between the student and the values, social rules, and academic quality of the college community.

In the current study, integration in the context of student-athletes describes feelings of academic and social connection to the SST organization, which leads to perceptions of
connection to all domains of their college life (e.g., academic, social, and athletic). SST involvement is a vehicle to integration and aids in the development of affective and subjective feelings of membership to all domains of college life. The definition of integration used to guide initial inquiry was refined to analyze academic and social encounters provided within the context of a specific program (e.g., academic support program), rather than those provided by the entire college community.

Feelings of connection arise from involvement with the academic and social encounters provided in SST (e.g., peer tutoring, study groups, peer-group interactions, informal contact with staff, involvement in an organization, etc.); academic and social encounters are the two most dominant forces at play in the program. Findings reveal that Structured Study Time (SST) seems to embody many characteristics of general academic and social systems of the institution (e.g., formal/informal faculty interactions, peer culture, and involvement with social organizations) in one distinct location. In sum, SST is a microcosm of the general types of academic and social systems found at Legacy. It provides opportunities for similar types of academic and social experiences enjoyed by traditional students for athletes, albeit in a more abbreviated format (e.g., sessions in sum account for only a small fraction of weekly time demands) and with less exposure to a diverse student population. Such opportunities likely compensate in part for missed campus involvement opportunities resulting from intense time demands associated with sport.

Although traditional student populations can access such academic and social encounters in multiple locations and times of their own choosing, student-athletes are subject to rigorous schedules that limit their campus involvement patterns. SST permits student-athletes to have formal or informal academic interactions with administrators and graduate student tutors who teach the classes they assist student-athletes with. In addition, the program provides opportunities
for social interactions to occur by which athletes forge friendships with athletes outside of their sport, which oftentimes extend beyond SST. Such social encounters help to broaden student-athletes’ understandings of peer cultures outside of their own team.

The SC model proposes a series of interactions that occur on the path to student-athlete integration. Precollege characteristics, expectations of social encounters, and a relaxed study environment, along with recent events occurring in the athletic, social, and athletic realms of athletes’ lives, shape integration patterns in SST and in the campus community. The tutorial staff comes to know the Division-I student-athlete experience and the athletes themselves by building strong connected relationships through demonstration of the actionable traits of trust, empathy, and understanding. Deil-Amen (2011) found that close interpersonal contact with faculty regarding academic matters enhanced perceptions of integration for two-year students. Tutorial staff in SST acts as surrogate faculty members in the sense they are tasked with providing a relatively large share of academic assistance for participants. In building such connected relationships, tutorial staff is able to guide athletes down a path where integration into all domains of their college life is more likely, which leads to perceptions of student success in the overall college experience.

The model recognizes that involvement patterns in the academic and social systems of SST, the primary vehicle to integration, may vary along some of the student-athlete variations mentioned in Chapter Two (e.g., revenue vs. non-revenue athletes). No two athletes will desire the same types of academic and social encounters in SST. Members of the tutorial staff are able to steer participants into particular encounters that balance the needs and expectations of the individual athlete, a process that maximizes satisfaction with the overall SST experience and enhances potential for academic success.
The Supporting Connections model developed in this study is a conceptual model describing the student-athlete integration process in a collaborative-tutoring arrangement. This section will present conclusions drawn from each of the six model constructs of the Supporting Connections model and compare them with existing literature.

**Conceptualization of Academic Success**

Student-athletes provided a variety of descriptions about their secondary school experiences. Although precollege background or preparation characteristics were not a primary focus of this study, differing high school experiences with academics and sport led to a wide variety of incoming views about the academic, social, and athletic domains of college. Some students arrive at Legacy from secondary school cultures that place importance on sport over academics, while others arrive from systems that promote a healthy balance between the two. These views, likely shaped by coaches, teachers, and peer groups influenced initial commitments to academics during the first year. In addition, precollege characteristics shape perceptions of time and effort needed to succeed academically and set the tone for where athletes feel they will spend their free time outside of sport.

Conceptualization of academic success appears in the Supporting Connections model and data suggests it shapes student-athletes’ feelings toward initial academic and goal commitments in college. The effects of background characteristics on initial academic and goal commitments have appeared in academic success models for student-athletes (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011) and persistence models for traditional students (see Tinto, 1975, 1986). These models suggest that initial commitments affect involvement patterns with different academic and social systems (e.g., diverse course offerings, formal/informal faculty interactions, peer culture, and involvement with social organizations). Although these models propose that initial commitments
are likely to change for both athletes and traditional students based on involvement with academic and social systems, little is known about the degree to which such commitments can be changed and how involvement patterns alter commitments for student-athletes. Although student-athletes may appear to have the opportunity to engage in the same types of academic and social encounters as traditional students, rigorous schedules limit their involvement to only a handful of involvement opportunities. The possibility of an academic support program to facilitate change in initial commitments has received little examination in the current literature.

Structured Study Time is tasked with promoting integration and academic success for all participants, regardless of their incoming views of the three domains of college life (e.g., academic, social, and athletic). The types of experiences that student-athletes seek while in SST are due in part to these precollege perceptions of the three domains of college life. Differing high school experiences with academics and sports lead to an assortment of initial views on the three domains and expectations of where academics fit into the cumulative college experience. SST tutorial staff serves all types of students to perpetuate academic success. Findings from the current study support the notion that when groups such as academic tutors in support programs purposefully build strong and connected relationships with athletes, they yield a strong influence in positively influencing academic commitments.

Revenue athletes or those participating in football and men’s basketball tend to arrive at Legacy with definitions of academic success that differ the most from their non-revenue counterparts. While the majority of non-revenue athletes had the perception that they arrived at Legacy with fairly accurate perceptions of college academic life, revenue athletes typically expected that the sporting experience would overshadow academics and that a relatively small amount of time and effort could be spent to achieve academic success. Although revenue
student-athletes in this study did not provide a sufficient level of detail as to specific behaviors of coaches and other influential secondary school groups, existing literature puts forth that there is a prevailing sentiment that athletes participating in revenue-generating sports at Division-I institutions are professionals masquerading as amateur competitors (Marx, Huffmon, & Doyle, 2008). It may be that influential groups around future high-profile revenue athletes perceive sport preparation as more important than schoolwork and do not stress academics as much with this group while in high school.

In addition to incoming attitudes that typically favor sport participation over academics, insufficient preparation patterns may have also played a role in shaping initial commitments to the domains of college life for revenue athletes. Existing evidence suggests that revenue athletes may be limited in their access to proper college preparation resources when compared to their non-revenue and non-athlete student counterparts. Sellers (1992) reports that male athletes in the revenue-generating sports are generally expected to be less successful academically in college, based on poor secondary school educational opportunities. Many of the revenue student-athletes arriving at Legacy made brief mention of arriving at college from low-income communities and referenced sport as being a vehicle to enhance their personal opportunities. Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) found that access to a rigorous curriculum (e.g., advanced-placement courses) is disproportionately low for members of low-income communities and can impact postsecondary educational outcomes.

Regardless, SST staff clarifies the realities of college academic life and provides many revenue athletes with the background knowledge and skills (e.g., eligibility requirements, time-management training, study skills, etc.) that may not have been stressed in the secondary school
environment. SST attempts to ensure that these students get the best of what they need to set the initial framework for a future of academic success.

**SST- Supported Study Time**

Tutorial staffs are able to manipulate three of the elements, or constructs, presented above in SST (i.e., SST—Social Study Time, SST—Serious Study Time, & SST—Socio-academic Study Time). In other words, encouragement of social encounters, adjustment of intensity of sessions based on recent sport occurrences, and provision of a highly networked and relaxed study environment are all elements that can be dynamically adjusted via tutors. Such elements are adjusted in response to the current status, recent events, or anticipated needs in three domains of student-athletes’ lives (e.g., academic, social, & athletic).

Manipulation of the elements by the tutorial staff allows them to provide an experience in SST that meets student-athletes’ individual needs. Accordingly, the tutorial staff serves as the backbone behind the creation of a supported study environment. In a study of perceptions of integration using a diverse two-year college student sample, Deil-Amen (2011) asserts that student perceptions of what assisted their integration revolve around institutional agents that facilitate the process for them. In her study ($n = 125$), it was found that “92% highlighted a college-specific ‘agent’ or ‘agents’ who were instrumental to their sense of adjustment, comfort, belonging, and competence as college students” (p. 61). Such findings lend support to the notion of the strong influence of institutional agents, such as tutorial staff, in facilitating integration for student-athletes. In fact, Deil-Amen (2011) found that many participants described such relationships with institutional agents as “friendships,” a finding revealed several times in the current study (p. 80).
Tutor influence is critical in providing a framework to assist first-year student-athletes integrate the three domains of college life. Much like many non-traditional populations, time demands limit student-athletes’ access to information necessary to successfully navigate the college environment. In addition to facilitating academic and social integration, relationships with institutional agents serve as a valuable resource of information-exchange for non-traditional populations, who may not have access to complete information needed to make important academic decisions, set appropriate goals, and engage in reasonable career planning (Deil-Amen, 2011). Deil-Amen (2011) offers a term, “procedural agency,” (p. 75) which describes proactive attempts made by faculty and other institutional agents to encourage non-traditional students in goal accomplishment and ensure they have proper knowledge to navigate routine issues (e.g., accessing financial aid or locating academic assistance). Current findings support the idea that tutors, as institutional agents, can provide student-athletes valuable information to assist in development of accurate, balanced understandings of the three domains of student-athletes’ collegiate life (e.g., academic, social, and athletic). When students perceive integration of the three domains, a process undergirded by the tutorial staff, chances for student success in all domains become more likely.

Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement puts forth that students learn more when they share in both the academic and social aspects of college life. The theory provides the general mechanisms by which students academically and socially integrate into the college community (e.g., investment of psychological and physical energy in tasks, people, and activities). Some of the most important types of involvement center upon academic endeavors and interaction with peer groups (Astin, 1996), key components in the SST program. However, such theories were based on traditional student populations and suggested that the student herself is responsible for
determining levels of engagement. Compared to athletes, traditional non-athlete student populations are afforded greater amounts of time to freely choose levels and types of academic and social encounters on campus. Current findings contribute to this theory and its potential applicability to student-athletes by suggesting that support groups (e.g., tutorial staff) may be necessary to intervene on behalf of student-athletes to facilitate engagement. Notions of the positive role played by faculty and staff in guiding academic and social involvement patterns for traditional students have appeared in existing literature (see Astin, 1984), and the same seems to hold true, and is perhaps even more important, for student-athletes.

Evidence from the present study suggests that tutorial staff members broker academic and social integration opportunities for student-athletes in SST. Existing studies mentioning integration have focused mostly on traditional students, with little mention of integration patterns of non-traditional groups like student-athletes. For traditional students, current literature suggests that academic and social integration affect each other in an interdependent manner in their influence on academic success (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986). While data from the present study confirms that both academic and social forces dually influence academic success, the current research has proposed specific elements (e.g., encouraging social encounters, adjusting intensity of sessions based on recent sport occurrences, and provision of a highly networked and relaxed study environment) that may be useful for consideration by athletic support programs seeking to promote academic success.

The idea that a specific group (e.g., tutorial staff) can manipulate academic and social forces specific to the needs of student-athletes, thereby providing greater opportunity for overall student success, contributes to the existing student-athlete literature. A keen understanding of the academic responsibilities of their athletes, coupled with an understanding of student-athletes’
non-academic social expectations, allows tutors to provide a proper balance of integration for participants. It is likely that without the guidance of tutorial staff, first-year student-athletes may not have been as likely to achieve high levels of academic and social integration in SST.

**SST- Social Study Time**

Student-athletes expect to have the ability to participate in social encounters with academic staff and fellow athletes while completing academic tasks. The need to socially engage in SST develops from a lack of social interaction during the course of the day, when most student-athletes are practicing, traveling, participating in games, or in class. For most participants, academic and social experiences were seen as equal contributors to integration in SST.

In the present study, the majority of participants felt that their chances of academic success were enhanced based on opportunities to engage in social encounters while in the program. Primarily, student-athletes felt that SST was able to fill social voids resulting from busy schedules. Participants generally responded that the ability to socialize while performing academic tasks led to perceptions of higher academic productivity. Secondly, perceptions by student-athletes that social interaction is encouraged in SST led student-athletes to form relationships with athlete counterparts they may normally not associate with. Such encounters led athletes to forge academic bonds with their counterparts that resulted in positive arrangements such as study partnerships. Consistent with findings from previous studies (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Stahler, 1997) that looked at interdependent learning environments where social encounters are vital to learning, findings from the present study suggest that such collaborative energies result in greater efforts put forth towards goal achievement.
There is a great deal of literature addressing the social integration of traditional college students (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1986). Higher levels of social integration have been accompanied by rises in persistence for traditional populations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1997). Notions of favorable social encounters and their positive impact on academic success have also appeared in student-athlete academic success models (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). This study proposes a new way of looking at social integration opportunities for student-athletes. Whereas previous considerations of social integration emphasized specific activities or quantifiable measures of social engagement, the current construct reflects a student’s perception that social encounters are encouraged within a particular program, not the actual levels or effectiveness of the social encounters themselves.

Once student-athletes in the current study perceived that their SST tutors could effectively manipulate the environment to offer them desired levels of social engagement, perceptions of integration and academic success increased. Several studies (see Deil-Amen, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Stage, 1989; Tinto, 1975) describe the relationship between academic and social integration on academic success to be more of a compensatory relationship, whereby higher levels of one form of integration compensate for weaker forms of the other form of integration. Insights from the present study support this compensatory relationship, but add to the current literature by suggesting that academic support programs may play an even stronger role in compensating for the lack of social encounters faced by student-athletes than might have been assumed previously.

All interviewees felt comfortable with the levels of tutor tolerance of social activity during SST; however, revenue athletes used social encounters differently than their female and other non-revenue counterparts. The researcher used the word escapism from the social
psychology literature to refer to the frequent behavioral trends of many revenue athletes witnessed in SST. The term refers to a type of behavior or set of activities that individuals may engage in “to escape unpleasant realities and to distract themselves from unhappy events” (Hirschman, 1983, p. 64), which present the individual an opportunity to achieve a more desirable state of being than the current one and may alleviate anxiety. Examples of behaviors that reflected escapism ranged from behaviors that had potential to create short-term disruptions among other athletes, such as horseplay and joking around, to those much less invasive, such as hanging around in staff offices, listening to music, or watching videos on lab computers.

There is much attention in the literature of pressures inherent in Division-I sporting competition, especially those present in the revenue sports. All revenue participants in the current study report to love their sport; playing the sport itself is not a source of stress. Time pressures, social isolation issues, and pressures to succeed academically were referenced by revenue athletes as high stressors and have all received attention in the current literature (Dudley, Johnson, & Johnson, 1997; Gayles, 2009; Wolverton, 2008). Findings from the current study provide a better understanding of why revenue athletes report needing higher levels of social activity for purposes of escapism compared to their non-revenue counterparts.

**SST- Serious Study Time**

Recent occurrences in sport (e.g., a bad practice, raised academic expectations from coaches, physical exhaustion, etc.) shape the students’ initial seriousness of purpose or intensity of effort directed toward academic activities in SST. As discovered in the current study, recent sport-related events associated with being a high-profile athlete can affect initial academic seriousness, even those not occurring on the athletic field (e.g., pressures to maintain academic eligibility). Serious Study Time describes the general attitudes displayed towards academic
productivity upon entry into the tutoring. Students’ initial seriousness is likely to change daily, and all student-athletes interviewed fell susceptible to this phenomenon at one time or another. Student-athletes interviewed in the present study report that rigorous schedules, exhaustion, and pressures to succeed academically and in sport levied by advisors and coaches can affect initial academic seriousness.

Accounts from student-athletes in the present study describing the various stressors inherent in athletic competition during the first year of college are similar to findings reported in other studies. Gayles (2009) reports balancing athletic and academic demands can be particularly difficult for first-year student-athletes based on the need to maintain academic standards in order to remain eligible for competition. Different from non-athletes, student-athletes’ lives are further complicated beyond typical academic stressors by a need to achieve success in their sport (Sellers, Kuperminc, & Damas, 1997). Humphrey, Yow, and Bowden (2000) and Papanikolaou, Nikolaidis, Patsiaouras, and Alexopoulos (2003) suggest that collegiate athletic status can result in the loss of star status that student-athletes may have experienced in high school, injuries, and conflicts with their coaches. Although other studies have uncovered potential stressors complicating the life of a first-year student-athlete, the present study is the first to propose a link between sporting experiences and initial attitudes toward completion of academic tasks.

All participants describe the student-athlete experience, one that typically begins early in the morning and ends late in the evening (e.g., workouts, team meals, classes, practices, traveling, and tutoring sessions), as time-consuming. The majority of participants claim that the collegiate student-athlete lifestyle requires large adjustments compared to secondary school routines. At the same time, interview responses suggest that all athletes also experienced the same challenges as traditional students in making academic and social adjustments to college,
which was only complicated by high-profile sports competition (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Regardless of student-athlete variations, recent occurrences during the first year of high-profile sport competition could temporarily or completely shut down academic motivations on any given night in SST.

In the present study, all student-athletes entered Legacy with a strong athletic identity and fondness for sport competition. The fact that bad practices and poor sporting performances were mentioned frequently as reasons for diminishing academic motivation seems to suggest that athletic identity continues to be prominent in the first year of collegiate competition. Findings reveal that issues with coaches or mishaps on the field were highly internalized and thought about repetitively by participants, both inside and outside of SST. These findings parallel existing literature, which has found that this high level of sport competition presents unique challenges and pressures for participants, affects role and conceptualization of sport in college life, and blurs the line between student and athlete identities (Adler & Adler, 1991; Urban, 2000; Watt & Moore, 2001). Furthermore, some first-year athletes may receive levels of attention on campus and nationally that they are not used to or had never anticipated. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) state that, “Despite their relatively small representation on college campuses, Division-I student-athletes occupy a socially prominent space, whether as the subject of controversy or of celebration” (p. 235). The meshing of academic and athletic identities is inevitable in SST, so tutors need to adapt to this by helping to shape student-athletes’ perceptions to balance all three domains of students’ lives.

**SST- Socio-academic Study Time**

Socio-academic Study Time describes student-athlete perceptions of congruence between academic and social experiences provided in SST. It proposes that academic and social
integration be viewed as a combined integrative process, rather than separate processes. Dei-Amen (2011) suggests that the concept of “socio-academic” reflects an idea that “fused socio-academic encounters” are essential for non-traditional student integration, which parallels its current usage (p.72). This construct fuses elements from two previous constructs introduced in the current study (e.g., Social Study Time and Serious Study Time) and suggests that academic and social experiences must be linked in a relaxed format for perceptions of integration to develop. Although this construct does involve a strong social component, in that student-athletes consider social encounters with peers and staff to be enjoyable and important for academic success, it also describes perceptions of a loosely controlled and relaxed environment that allows students to navigate their educational experiences.

Findings that student-athletes are comfortable in academic environments that are constantly changing and highly networked have not been reported in previous studies. However, for traditional student populations, there exists a body of literature devoted to generational differences in learning resulting from growing up in the technology age. Fundamentally, today’s younger students have had exposure to a wider array of technologies, like computers, video games, and cell phones, than any generation before it. In speaking of this new millennial generation, which study participants could be considered a part of, Prensky (2001) asserts, “Our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach” (p. 1). As a result of growing up and interacting with these new technologies during their formative years, this generation prefers parallel processing, multitasking, and learning in networked environments, characteristics of learning far different from previous generations. Such existing literature may provide additional support to claims
proposed in the present study that suggest student-athletes are comfortable performing academic tasks in rapidly changing and socially interactive environments.

Rigorous schedules leave student-athletes little time to explore the academic and social encounters available to traditional students. Student-athletes in the present study claim to want to enjoy their time outside of their sporting schedules, yet report that most free time outside of sport is spent sleeping, nursing injuries, or getting caught up with studying or missed assignments due to travel. Structured Study Time, by default, becomes an enjoyable activity where student-athletes expect to fill social voids resulting from sport participation.

Findings suggest that student-athletes learn more when they perceive higher levels of social encounters with staff and peers. This finding seems to counter claims put forth in existing studies of traditional student persistence and the general belief system held by educators and college professors. Tinto (1997) found that increases in academic involvement were accompanied by rises in social involvement in residential students. However, Tinto (1997) reports that academic integration had the strongest effects on persistence when social integration was relatively low, and inversely, as social integration increased, the positive effects of academic integration were attenuated. For student-athletes, the link between high levels of social encounters and increased learning is still not well understood. However, findings from the present study seem to parallel findings from previous studies on traditional students (see Stage, 1989) that suggest students have the best chance to persist when both academic and social integration occur.

Another finding from the present study suggests that student-athletes are able to effectively multitask and complete academic work in an environment that is somewhat chaotic and constantly changing. Interview responses provide evidence that athletes are comfortable
performing in such environments and, in some cases, even prefer this format. Although little
evidence exists in the extant literature to support this claim, many participants claim this comfort
with study session chaos is due to their experiences of participating in chaotic and unpredictable
sporting events (e.g., cheering crowds, rapid changes in game tempo, listening to numerous
coaches simultaneously, etc.). Such an explanation may be valid in understanding why some
athletes claim to thrive in such an environment that would have others likely struggle.

The general assertion for traditional students is that learning environments must be
interactive, provide flexibility to the student to engage academic material at his or her own pace,
and be perceived as fun for learning to occur and true connections to be felt (Prensky, 2001).
Current findings seem to confirm that levels of perceived learning and overall integration
increase when student-athletes perceive an environment identical to the one described above.
More than any other element uncovered in the study, the importance of such socio-academic
study environments for student-athletes mirrors a resemblance to characteristics of a traditional
student population in respect to favorable outcomes associated with learning environments.

**Student-athlete Integration**

The phenomenon of integration has received attention in student-athlete academic
success models, studies looking at perceptions of the concept for two-year students, and
persistence models of four-year residential students (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Deil-
Amen, 2011; Tinto, 1993). The term integration has been associated with descriptors like
affiliation, belonging, commitment, congruence, and membership in existing studies examining
student persistence (Deil-Amen, 2011; Tinto, 1993). Connection, as proposed in the current
study, contributes a term to this list unique to student-athlete integration that can (a) offer a better
conceptual understanding of the integration process, (b) more effectively operationalize integration, and (c) increase perceptions of belonging to campus organizations.

When students feel that SST has provided desired experiences, the end result is student-athlete integration, or a perception of connection to all domains of their college life. Program staff, specifically tutors, has to consider both the unique attributes of individual student-athletes along with their expectations, and implement customized solutions that seek to enhance perceptions of integration, both academically and socially. The student-athlete integration process in SST facilitates stronger feelings of connection to academic goals, program staff, athletes of other sports, and Legacy University, which improves chances for student success in all domains.

Existing studies have examined elements of academic and social integration patterns of traditional student populations at four-year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1986) as well as for non-traditional student groups at two-year colleges (Deil-Amen, 2011; Nora, Attinasi, & Matonak, 1996). However, these studies have focused primarily on integration as a factor in student persistence decisions, but less so on how the integration process is perceived or unfolds. Notions of academic and social integration have also appeared in student-athlete academic success models (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Fewer studies have attempted to provide actual definitions of academic and social integration, and such studies have focused on groups other than student-athletes. In a review of the literature on persistence decisions of minority students at two-year colleges, Nora (1993) defines academic integration as, “The development of a strong affiliation with the college academic environment both in the classroom and outside of class. Includes interactions with faculty, academic staff, and peers but of an academic nature (e.g., peer tutoring, study groups)”
(p. 235). Nora (1993) defines social integration as, “The development of a strong affiliation with the college social environment both in the classroom and outside of class. Includes interactions with faculty, academic staff, and peers but of a social nature (e.g., peer group interactions, informal contact with faculty, involvement in organizations)” (p. 237). Findings from the present study incorporate themes from Nora’s (1993) definitions and mechanisms of integration to offer a better conceptual understanding of the integration process for another non-traditional college population, student-athletes.

For student-athletes, integration is a process of strengthening and stabilizing connections with the institution’s people, places, and activities beyond the playing field. Better understandings of the process by which student-athletes form connections, and their relative impact on integration, can allow researchers the ability to more effectively operationalize student-athlete integration. The ability to enhance connections (e.g., people, places, and activities of the university) is likely to increase perceptions of belonging to campus organizations and chances for success in all aspects of college life for student-athletes.

**Implications for Research and Practice**

Existing models that have examined notions of academic and social integration (Astin, 1984; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Deil-Amen, 2011; Nora, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 1975, 1993) may be inappropriate to assess the integrative potential of campus support programs for student-athletes. First, previous studies have primarily focused on persistence decisions and were designed with characteristics of four-year residential populations and, to a smaller extent, two-year college students in mind. Models that apply characteristics of student-athletes to better understand integration processes have been limited, with Comeaux and Harrison (2011) as the main exception.
The student-athlete experience is different from that of a non-athlete and is complicated by a range of additional time demands and pressures. While student-athletes are not forbidden to engage in academic and social encounters outside of support programs, rigorous schedules limit such opportunities. Relative to total time spent outside of sport, involvement in support programs accounts for large shares of time for student-athletes and provides them useful opportunities to experience multiple academic and social encounters. Therefore, support programs may serve as valuable research forums to perpetuate further examination of student-athlete integration models. A better understanding of integration characteristics of athletes that may differ from non-athletes can allow practitioners to intentionally facilitate desired academic and social encounters that may lead to greater connections with support programs and perceptions of success in all college domains.

Second, further attempts should be made that qualitatively explore integration for student-athletes. Existing studies (e.g., Dudley, Johnson, & Johnson, 1997) have made attempts to quantitatively measure academic and social integration (e.g., participation or involvement in academic and social systems), but have not largely focused on subjective and affective appraisals of the integration process. Current scholarship can benefit from further research that focuses on how students make sense of their integration and what types of interactions lead to greater perceptions of connection to support programs. Identification of the subjective value that students place on particular interactions with program staff or peers may help practitioners identify behaviors that either enhance or diminish perceptions of connection to the program.

In addition, further research will benefit from attempts to verify descriptions generated from the present study on student-athlete integration among other athlete populations (e.g., Division II, Division III, etc.) at other institutions. The current study experienced limitations in
that it utilized data from only one public Division-I academic support program and participants did not represent the full diversity of collegiate athletes that may be found nationwide.

While many scholars (e.g., Adler & Adler, 1991; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gayles, 2009; Urban, 2000; Watt & Moore, 2001) contend the Division-I student-athlete experience is distinct from other classes of competition (e.g., Division II, Division III, etc.), it is not well known if integration experiences in support programs compare similarly for all athletes. Attempts to validate the Supporting Connections model proposed in the current study, with additional cohorts of Division-I student-athletes and athletes of other classes of competition, may have the potential to lead to more generalizable theory that can assist practitioners in better understanding student-athlete integration patterns. Having such information may allow practitioners to more effectively customize integration strategies to enhance the college experience for all types of student-athletes.

Finally, the Supporting Connections (SC) model broadens the conversation about non-traditional student integration in suggesting the notion that there may exist additional domains (e.g., other than academic and social) that must successfully be navigated to optimize integration for these groups. In the context of the current study, identification of a third domain (i.e., athletic) served (a) to incorporate a major segment of student-athletes’ lives into integration discussion and (b) to identify forces (e.g., beyond academic and social) that may play a pivotal role in the development of integration.

Further exploration into the possible existence of additional domains for other student groups (e.g., part-time students, historically underrepresented populations, LGBT students, or adult learners), whose distinctive characteristics may not be considered in traditional support
programs, could serve to enhance the college experience for these groups. Additionally, existing persistence models for traditional students (see Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1993), that both dominate the current literature and serve as the underpinning for most support programs, could potentially be revised to incorporate newly discovered domains (e.g., domains outside of academic and social) that affect integration patterns. Such research efforts may have the potential to provide more customized approaches that take into account the diverse nature of today’s traditional students and thus potentially lead to greater levels of persistence and eventual degree completion.

In practice, efforts should be made by the administration to immediately connect student-athletes with tutors, or other institutional agents, whom they can count on to aid them in their transition into college life. Deil-Amen (2011) found that proactive attempts to connect two-year students with positive role models early on, who serve as mentors and valuable resources of information, aid two-year students in forming perceptions of integration. Findings from the current study suggest that tutors can, likewise, serve a critical role in assisting student-athletes navigate their first-year experience.

Student-athletes are often introduced to their tutors within the first week of school, during the same time they are making complicated academic and social adjustments to life as a student-athlete. Tutors can provide advice on matters as simple as location of campus buildings and ones as complex as understanding eligibility requirements. These findings are lent support by Deil-Amen (2011), who describes this type of “procedural assistance” as important for non-traditional student populations (p. 78). Positive encounters early on with support staff limit opportunities for student-athletes to become stressed, which may affect initial willingness to seek academic or other social encounters. Tinto (1993) claims that early academic and social experiences, even
ones occurring as early as the first few weeks of college, can have long-term effects on future persistence towards degree completion for traditional populations. While it is not known how salient initial academic and social encounters are for student-athletes in future persistence decisions, the current study suggests that student-athletes may be, likewise, affected by their earliest encounters with the academic and social domains of collegiate life.

When working with student-athletes, administrators should not encourage tutors to focus solely on academic matters during initial encounters. Rather, tutors should make attempts to get to know the athlete as an individual and place effort into understanding their unique athletic experience. During the beginning of the semester, when academic workloads are typically the least demanding, time should be set aside when academic tutors and student-athletes are given time to engage in informal conversations of a nonacademic manner. Such times are where athletes and tutors can learn about each other’s academic and personal experiences, laying the groundwork for future conversations and increased levels of comfort. Traditional orientation and team-building exercises used in college classrooms, such as informal interviews or role-plays may serve as valuable tools for administrators to initiate dialogue between athletes and tutors. In the present study, strong initial encounters were influential in forming what many players considered friendships, instead of business relationships, with their tutors.

Particular effort should be made of staff in determining the athletes’ individual desires, expectations, and needs in the support program early on such that personnel may provide, as best as possible, a fulfilling academic and social experience for the athlete. Though programs like SST are designed for purposes of academic support, athletes enter college with different ideas about what academic success means or how it can be achieved. Tutors can manipulate various academic and social elements of the program to meet individual athlete expectations. For
student-athletes, demonstration of particular relational assets by tutors (e.g., trust, empathy, and understanding) is important for perceptions of academic and social integration.

A final recommendation for support programs is to create more formal and structured opportunities for student-athletes to socially interact with one another either before, during, or after a session. Over a decade ago, Dudley, Johnson, and Johnson (1997) examined a collaborative study group for student-athletes that provided breaks during sessions where athletes were encouraged to socialize with each other. In the time since, little attention has been given to notions of making intentional effort to create social opportunities for student-athletes. Simply designating short blocks of time in a common area, away from academic materials and computers, may spur even greater amounts of social interactions between athletes. In light of findings that in-session social encounters led to friendships outside of Structured Study Time, oftentimes resulting in academic partnerships, it is likely that more purposeful attempts to encourage social encounters may lead to even greater student-athlete perceptions of academic and social integration.

**Summary of Chapter Five**

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings from the current study. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how the process of first-year student-athlete academic and social integration unfolded in a collaborative-tutoring arrangement. The interview, observational, and document data collected for this study was analyzed following the techniques, procedures, and guidelines of grounded analysis outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This grounded analysis addresses a specific research question: Does participation in collaborative peer tutoring facilitate academic and social integration for first-year student-athletes?

The grounded theory model constructed from the data to help explain the impact of a collaborative tutoring arrangement on student-athlete integration is entitled Supporting
Connections (SC). Rather than applying a distinction between academic and social integration, as most existing models have that mention the two concepts (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1986), the current SC model combines the two into a single construct, referred to as student-athlete integration. Study findings suggest that participants weighed academic and social forces as equally important and expected both to coexist for perceptions of connections in SST to develop.

Student-athlete integration has received attention in student-athlete academic success models, studies looking at perceptions of the concept for two-year students, and persistence models of four-year residential students (see Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Deil-Amen, 2011; Tinto, 1993). The term integration has been associated with descriptors like affiliation, belonging, commitment, congruence, and membership in existing studies examining student persistence (Deil-Amen, 2011; Tinto, 1993). Connection, as proposed in the current study, contributes a term to this list unique to student-athlete integration that can (a) offer a better conceptual understanding of integration, (b) more effectively operationalize integration, and (c) increase perceptions of belonging to campus organizations.

Findings from the present study can be used to offer recommendations for research and practice for those interested in student-athletes. Further development of integration models that apply characteristics unique to student-athletes, additional attempts to qualitatively explore student-athlete integration, and future efforts to verify descriptions generated from the present study on student-athlete integration to additional athlete populations (e.g., Division II, Division III, etc.) at other institutions may all serve as future areas of inquiry that can enhance the college experience for student-athletes. Recommendations for practice in working with student-athletes in support programs involve efforts by administration to immediately connect student-athletes
with tutors, or other institutional agents, whom they can count on to aid them transition into college life. This includes efforts by tutors to make attempts early on to get to know the athlete as an individual and place effort in understanding their unique athletic experience. A final recommendation may be for support programs to create more formal and structured opportunities for student-athletes to socially interact with one another before, during, or after a session.
APPENDIX A

SST ADVISOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Student-Athlete Academic Services

SST Advisor Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student:</td>
<td>Advisor:</td>
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</table>

1. Why is this student being placed in SST?
   - [ ] Being weaned off a Learning Specialist
   - [ ] Being weaned off tutoring
   - [ ] Needs monitored study time
   - [ ] Other (describe briefly)

2. In what area(s) should the SST tutor focus? (time management, raising gpa, study skills, effectiveness...)

3. What goals do we need to set in order for this student to no longer be in SST?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are some milestones for the student’s goals?</th>
<th>Goal(s) related to:</th>
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APPENDIX B

SST STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Student-Athlete Academic Services

SST Student Questionnaire

Student: ___________________________ Tutor: ___________________________

1. What is your personal definition of “academic success” in college?

2. How important is academic success to you, and why?

3. What has prevented your academic success in the past? (Check all that apply.)
   □ Personal or family situation of some kind
   □ Alcohol or drug use
   □ Social or extracurricular activities
   □ Learning disability or ADD (diagnosed or suspected)
   □ Athletic Involvement
   □ Uncertainty about major
   □ Class attendance
   □ Job commitments
   □ Time management
   □ Study skills or habits
   □ Other (describe briefly)

4. Name and describe three specific things that you need to do to improve your academic performance this semester.

5. How do you feel a SST tutor will be able to better assist your academic development?

6. What are three academic goals you would like to establish for this semester?
APPENDIX C
SST ACADEMIC SUCCESS PLAN

Student-Athlete Academic Services
SST Academic Success Plan

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Advisor:</td>
<td>Semester:</td>
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Semester Goals: (To be completed by student and SST tutor)

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This student agrees to complete these actions in order to meet the goals stated above.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
(Student's signature)

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
(Tutor's signature)
## APPENDIX D

### SEMESTER AT-A-GLANCE CALENDAR

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APPENDIX E

ASSIGNMENT TRACKER

Assignment Tracker

Student's Name: ____________________  Tutor's Name: ____________________

Semester: ____________________  Subject: ____________________

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APPENDIX F

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE: CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

CONSENT FORM

Request to Participate: Consent Form for Research

Read in its entirety to potential participants:

Overview of Purpose: My name is Glenn Walters, and I am a doctoral candidate seeking a degree in Higher Education. I am conducting this research project to learn a little more about Structured Study Time [SST] and how it helps freshmen athletes like you academically and socially integrate into this university. This project will assist me in completing my doctoral studies, in addition to assist the department personnel with recommendations on improving the overall SST experience for freshmen student-athletes.

I was wondering if you would be willing to sit down with me for about 30-45 minutes and allow me to interview you about your academic and social experiences in SST. This is completely voluntary, and if it is something you feel uncomfortable with, or if you feel the need to opt out during any portion of the interview, you are under NO obligation at all to continue. At any time, any data collected will be destroyed and not used for this project upon your request. The only record I will have of this conversation will be via audio-recorder. You will be assigned a unique identifying number, such as 1R or 1NR, and only I will know who the number corresponds to.

The following paragraph indicates measures that will be taken to ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law. Athletic Academic Support will know that I interviewed you, but NOBODY except me will know what was discussed or that it originated from you. Your interview data will be analyzed and might end up as a narrative story in the final write-up; however, the narrative that may be created will in no way be linked to you, but will only be classified as [ethnicity], [gender], [revenue or non-revenue sport], and [freshman] said the following.

The interview format is designed in such a way that I will ask broad types of questions about academic and social experiences in SST, but the purpose is to allow for a comfortable conversation, and the freedom for you to bring up any related topics of your choosing. Any student-athlete involved in the study will not be interviewed more than twice, and following this interview, I may ask to follow-up [no more than one-time] on any topics that needed further clarification.

1). Do you understand the script I just read to you?

2). Do you have any questions for me?

3). Are you willing to continue?

4). I will need to obtain your signature to continue with the interview, indicating you understand the risks and benefits of this research project, and that you fully understood all issues addressed in the script I just read to you. Your signature page will never be shared with anyone, except the researcher. You will be provided with a copy of important contact information, including: myself, my major professor, and the FSU IRB in the case you have any questions/concerns with how this research is being conducted.

HSC# 2011.7057
CONSENT FORM

If yes, then let’s begin, I will begin recording now -or- if no, thank you very much for your time, and I wish you the best in your academic and sporting pursuits.

Name of Participant (printed): 

Signature of Participant: 

Date: ____/____/2011

HSC# 2011.7057
Important Contact Information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title/Organization</th>
<th>Phone Number/e-mail address</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Walters</td>
<td>Researcher/Doctoral Student/Department of Higher Education, FSU College of Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Bradley Cox</td>
<td>Lead Committee Professor/Supervising Research/Assistant Professor of Higher Education, Department of Higher Education, FSU College of Education</td>
<td>850-644-8446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSU Institutional</td>
<td>Human Subjects Committee/Research Compliance</td>
<td>850-644-7900 [office]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Board (IRB)</td>
<td>Simple text or link to website</td>
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APPENDIX G

ORIGINAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (IRB)

**General Overview Questions:**
1). Can you please indicate your ethnicity, gender, and year in school?

2). What is your sport, and when did you arrive here on campus?

3). How did you become involved in Structured Study Time [SST]?

4). What were your initial thoughts about SST before you began attending, and how was the program explained to you by your advisor, or any other personnel in the department?

5). What was your initial impressions of SST overall when you first began?

6). Did you feel comfortable immediately when you first began attending SST?

7). Were there attempts by the SST coordinator or staff to introduce themselves and explain the purposes of the program?

8). Describe briefly a typical session in SST.

**Academic Integration Questions:**
1). Tell me about your overall academic experience in high school. Where there programs at your high school like SST? Did you participate in any of them?

2). How did you view academics while in high school?

3). After attending SST, in your own words, describe its purpose.

4). Has your perception of academics changed as a result of your involvement in SST?

5). How do you think academics play a role in your college experience? Do you think your academic experience is any different than that of non-athletes?

6). Describe the academic impact you feel SST has had in your personal experience?

7). From an academic standpoint, what has SST helped you with? What do you think are the strongest academic components of the program? The weakest?

8). Is there anything relating to academics and SST that you would like to discuss further?
Social Integration Questions:
1). Tell me about your overall social experience in high school. Did you participate in social experiences alongside your peers?

2). How did you view social experiences while in high school?

3). While in college, who do you consider your primary peer group?

4). Do you feel there is a social component in Structured Study Time [SST]?

5). Do you feel comfortable communicating with your peers in SST?

6). Is social interactions encouraged/promoted by staff while attending SST sessions?

7). Has social interactions benefited you in any way, such as academically, or meeting any new people you may not have had a chance to meet outside of SST?

8). Do you feel like participation in athletics has in any way limited your opportunities to participate socially on-campus or in organizations?

Read in its entirety to participants:

Summary:
Thank you so much for participating in the interview. It has been my pleasure to sit down with you today and learn about your academic and social integration patterns in SST. At this point, I will end the audio-recording.

Later in the semester, would it be possible to arrange another likely shorter interview session to clarify any topics we discussed that came up after the data was analyzed? Have a great day, and I look forward to potentially talking with you again. Best of luck with your academic and sporting pursuits and your assistance was greatly appreciated.

Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX H

MODIFIED SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ONE

Updated February 7, 2012

Academic and Social Integration (Combined) of First-Year Student-Athletes:
Researcher Note: Observations began January 17, 2012, and since then, observational data in the field has led the researcher to simplify and make changes to original interview protocol, reflected below [to be used for initial interview].

1). Tell me a little about yourself, i.e., your name, sports team, year-in-school, and what you are planning to study.

2). In a few sentences, describe what Structured Study Time (SST) means to you, and what you personally get out of it?

3). Has an advisor recommended or required for you to attend this session?

4). It appears that most of the student-athletes separate themselves by their team. Is this because of the fact that you share the same schedules, or would you say most student-athletes feel more comfortable with their own teammates in SST?

5). A name that comes to mind when I observe SST sessions is organized chaos, or when I look around, there is a lot of stuff going on, i.e., talking about non-academic stuff, some joking/horsing around, socializing, etc., but yet at the same time, a lot of student-athletes seem to be getting school work done. Do you feel this is a fair description? Do you have anything you could add to this?

6). When I observe male and female student-athletes, it seems like there are different socialization processes occurring. What I mean, is that oftentimes I see the female student-athletes very engaged in their academic work, and the males oftentimes are talking about their sport or having a good time. Would you say male and female student-athletes use SST differently?

7). Tell me a little about what your SST tutor does and how you view your relationship with him/her. Also, tell me a little about what your advisor does and how you view your relationship with him/her.

8). What does academic success mean to you as a college student-athlete? Has SST changed your view about academic success at all since arriving at college, in any way? Please describe.

9). Is socializing important to you, with other student-athletes, or non-athletes in general? Has SST had any effect on your ability to have social opportunities, with other student-athletes, tutors, or academic advisors, either inside or outside of SST?
10). Finally, outside of SST, what other items do you think assist you in achieving academic success? [i.e., other support programs, faculty interactions, peer interactions, extracurricular activities, etc.].

*Read in its entirety to participants:*

**Summary:**
Thank you so much for participating in the interview. It has been my pleasure to sit down with you today and learn about your academic and social integration patterns in SST. At this point, I will end the audio-recording.

Later in the semester, would it be possible to arrange another likely shorter interview session to clarify any topics we discussed that came up after the data was analyzed? Have a great day, and I look forward to potentially talking with you again. Best of luck with your academic and sporting pursuits and your assistance was greatly appreciated.

Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX I

MODIFIED SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL TWO

Re-updated March 20, 2012 (Final Format Used for Study)
Researcher Note: Observations began January 17, 2012/Interviews on February 9, 2012; since then, observational/interview data in the field has led the researcher to simplify and add/make changes to the original interview protocol, reflected below:

----------: Item deleted
ADDED: Item added

Student-athletes

1). Tell me a little about yourself, i.e., your name, sports team, year-in-school, and what you are planning to study.

2). In a few sentences, describe what Structured Study Time (SST) means to you, and what you personally get out of it?

3). Has an advisor recommended or required for you to attend this session?

4). It appears that most of the student-athletes separate themselves by their team. Is this because of the fact that you share the same schedules, or would you say most student-athletes feel more comfortable with their own teammates in SST?

5). A name that comes to mind when I observe SST sessions is organized chaos, or when I look around, there is a lot of stuff going on, i.e., talking about non-academic stuff, some joking/horsing around, socializing, etc., but yet at the same time, a lot of student-athletes seem to be getting school work done. Do you feel this is a fair description? Do you have anything you could add to this?

6). When I observe male and female student-athletes, it seems like there are different socialization processes occurring. What I mean, is that oftentimes I see the female student-athletes very engaged in their academic work, and the males oftentimes are talking about their sport or having a good time. Would you say male and female student-athletes use SST differently?

7). Tell me a little about what your SST tutor does and how you view your relationship with him/her. Also, tell me a little about what your advisor does and how you view your relationship with him/her.

ADDED: DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR TUTOR OR ADVISOR HAS IN ANY WAY CONTRIBUTED TO EITHER YOUR ACADEMIC OR SOCIAL INTEGRATION AT THE UNIVERSITY? IF SO, IN WHAT WAYS?

8). What does academic success mean to you as a college student-athlete? Has SST changed your view about academic success at all since arriving at college, in any way? Please describe.
9). Is socializing important to you, with other student-athletes, or non-athletes in general? Has SST had any effect on your ability to have social opportunities, with other student-athletes, tutors, or academic advisors, either inside or outside of SST?

10). Finally, outside of SST, what other items do you think assist you in achieving academic success? [i.e., other support programs, faculty interactions, peer interactions, extracurricular activities, etc.].

**ADDED: DO YOU FEEL ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION ARE MORE OF THE SAME THING IN SST?**

---

**Administration/Advisors/Tutors**

ADDED:

1). A name that comes to mind when I observe SST sessions is organized chaos, or when I look around, there is a lot of stuff going on, i.e., talking about non-academic stuff, some joking/horsing around, socializing, etc., but yet at the same time, a lot of student-athletes seem to be getting school work done. Do you feel this is a fair description? Do you have anything you could add to this? Such as, how are student-athletes able to get so much out of SST, in an environment that can almost be characterized as hectic?

2). Many of the student-athletes state that the role of their administrators/advisors/tutors is essential to their academic success. Would you agree that the role of the aforementioned group is essential for the integration of student-athletes? What is it that this group does that lead to the integration of student-athletes?

3). Would you say that academic and social integration are more of the same thing in SST, i.e., socio-academic integration?

*Read in its entirety to participants:*

**Summary:**

Thank you so much for participating in the interview. It has been my pleasure to sit down with you today and learn about your academic and social integration patterns in SST. At this point, I will end the audio-recording.

Later in the semester, would it be possible to arrange another likely shorter interview session to clarify any topics we discussed that came up after the data was analyzed? Have a great day, and I look forward to potentially talking with you again. Best of luck with your academic and sporting pursuits and your assistance was greatly appreciated.

Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX J

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

Use of Human Subjects in Research - Approval Memorandum

Human Subject: [humansubjects@magnet.fsu.edu]

Sent: Monday, October 31, 2011 12:31 PM

To: [Redacted]

Cc: [Redacted]

Attachments: 705705.pdf (20 KB)

Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(950) 644-9231 - FAX (950) 644-4292

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 10/31/2011

To: Glenn Waiters

Address: [Redacted]

Dept.: EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND POLICY STUDIES

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research

Collaborative Peer Tutoring As An Academic And Social Integration Device For Freshmen Student-Athletes

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and one member of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110 (7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 10/29/2011 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as necessary to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is FWA0000168/IRB number IRB0000046.

Cc: Bradley Cox, Advisor
HSC No. 1011.7057
APPENDIX K

STUDENT-ATHLETE EVALUATIONS

Student-Athlete Evaluation of Strategic Tutor Performance

The Office of Student-Athlete Academic Services is extremely interested in feedback regarding our employed tutors. Please complete this form openly and honestly. Once completed, please return it to Student-Athlete Academic Services in person to the Tutor Coordinator's mailbox.

Course Tutored: __________________________

Tutor’s Name: ___________________________ Date: 4/19/12

Student’s Name: ___________________________ Sport: ______________
(Optional)

Please use the following scale to rate your tutor (circle or highlight your response):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1=Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2=Disagree</th>
<th>3=Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>4=Agree</th>
<th>5=Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutor taught me time management and test taking skills.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor communicated ideas in a way I could understand.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Tutor attended to all students in session equally.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Tutor encouraged me to improve my study habits.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Tutor attempted to get to know me as an individual.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor treated me with respect.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor was on time for sessions.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor presented his/herself in a professional manner.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this tutor to others.</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

1. Please describe any areas in which you feel your tutor could improve in providing services to student-athletes. If you indicated that would disagree or strongly disagree with recommending this tutor to others, please explain.

2. Please describe any areas where you feel Athletic Academic Support Services could improve in providing services for student-athletes.

   More computers

3. Do you feel that Athletic Academic Support Services promotes an environment of academic integrity? Why or why not?

   Yes, it does because all of the work put in by everyone working in academics.

4. Did you have any concerns related to your tutors academic integrity or level of professionalism or did you witness such concerns among any other tutors? If yes, please explain.
Student-Athlete Academic Services

Student-Athlete Evaluation of Strategic Tutor Performance

The Office of Student-Athlete Academic Services is extremely interested in feedback regarding our employed tutors. Please complete this form openly and honestly. Once completed, please return it to Student-Athlete Academic Services in person to the Tutor Coordinator’s mailbox.

Course Tutored: SST

Tutor’s Name: _____________________________ Date: ________________

Student’s Name (Optional) _____________________________ Sport: Football

Please use the following scale to rate your tutor (circle or highlight your response):

1=Strongly Disagree  2=Disagree  3=Neither Agree nor Disagree  4=Agree  5=Strongly Agree

Tutor taught me time management and test-taking skills.
1  2  3  4  5

Tutor communicated ideas in a way I could understand.
1  2  3  4  5

Tutor efficiently used time during the session.
1  2  3  4  5

Tutor attended to all students in session equally.
1  2  3  4  5

Tutor encouraged me to improve my study habits.
1  2  3  4  5

Tutor attempted to get to know me as an individual.
1  2  3  4  5

Tutor treated me with respect.
1  2  3  4  5

Tutor was on time for sessions.
1  2  3  4  5

Tutor presented himself/herself in a professional manner.
1  2  3  4  5

I would recommend this tutor to others.
1  2  3  4  5

1. Please describe any areas in which you feel your tutor could improve in providing services to student-athletes. If you indicated that you would disagree or strongly disagree with recommending this tutor to others, please explain.

   Whenever I called upon her for assistance she was always willing to help.

2. Please describe any areas where you feel Athletic Academic Support Services could improve in providing services for student-athletes.

3. Do you feel that Athletic Academic Support Services promotes an environment of academic integrity? Why or why not? Yes because every tutor has their own regimen to help with whatever needs to be done.

4. Did you have any concerns related to your tutor’s academic integrity or level of professionalism or did you witness such concerns among any other tutors? If yes, please explain.

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Student-Athlete Academic Services

Student-Athlete Evaluation of Strategic Tutor Performance

The Office of Student-Athlete Academic Services is extremely interested in feedback regarding our employed tutors. Please complete this form openly and honestly. Once completed, please return it to Student-Athlete Academic Services in person to the Tutor Coordinator’s mailbox.

Course Tutored: SST

Tutor’s Name: ___________________________ Date: 4/19/12

Student’s Name: ___________________________ Sport: Football

(Optional)

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1. Please describe any areas in which you feel your tutor could improve in providing services to student athletes. If you indicated that would disagree or strongly disagree with recommending this tutor to others, please explain.

she was perfect

2. Please describe any areas where you feel Athletic Academic Support Services could improve in providing services for student-athletes.

no need for improvement

3. Do you feel that Athletic Academic Support Services promotes an environment of academic integrity? Why or why not?

yes

4. Did you have any concerns related to your tutor's academic integrity or level of professionalism or did you witness such concerns among any other tutors? If yes, please explain.


APPENDIX L

IRB RE-APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
P. O. Box 3062742
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

RE-APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 09/28/2012
To: Glenn Walters
Address: [Redacted]
Dept.: EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND POLICY STUDIES
From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Re-approval of Use of Human subjects in Research:
   Collaborative Peer Tutoring As An Academic And Social Integration Device For Freshmen Student-Athletes

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by 09/26/2013, you must request renewed approval by the Committee.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your renewal request, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this re-approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting of research subjects. You are reminded that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report in writing, any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chairman of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols as often as necessary to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

Cc:
HSC No. 2012-9025
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Glenn E. Walters, Jr. received his Bachelor of Science degree in Marketing from The Florida State University in 2004 and his Masters in Higher Education Administration from The Florida State University in 2009. He was a former high school social studies teacher before returning to graduate school, and has worked in not-for-profit drug prevention programs and numerous higher education administrative positions for the last six years. His research into collegiate athletics spawned from a desire to learn more about this unique population and his own experiences working with academic support programs geared towards student-athletes.