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An Examination of Athletes and Non-Athletes' Academic Performance at the Division III Level

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of graduation with Distinction

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Abstract

This research examines athletes and non-athletes' academic performance at the Division III collegiate level. The sample that was taken for this study was comprised of two groups of Division III college students. Athletes, that participate in intercollegiate athletics and non-athletes, that do not.

Results of this study supports the following hypothesis: Division III college athletes have similar to lower academic success than those that do not participate in sports. A behavioral and demographic survey was administered to one hundred and sixty seven students and student-athletes (84 non-athletes and 83 athletes) at a Division III University, in the Midwest. A twelve question survey was given to the students and student-athletes which asked for: gender, academic class, the sport they currently participate in (if they indeed do participate in a sport), hours per week spent on classwork, classes missed per week due to participation in sport, hours spent socializing with friends, sports participated in during high school, composite ACT score, high school GPA, hours working (other than for academic credit), and cumulative college GPA.

This research is significant for a number of reasons. It indicates that athletics do not play a negative role in academic achievement at the Division III level and that the negative perceptions of student-athletes are not accurate. Predetermined predictors such as ACT scores, and high school GPA, are useful in determining non-athletes academic success (non-athletes ACT: $p < .05$; $p=.002$; non-athletes GPA: $p < .05$, $p=.001$) and the high school GPA of a Division III college athlete was determined to be significant towards academic achievement in college,

while their ACT score did not (athletes ACT: $p > .05$; $p=.076$; athletes GPA: $p < .05$; $p=.000$).

Overall, there is not a significant difference between athletes and non-athletes based on their academic performance at the Division III level.

Introduction

For many years, athletes and athletics have been synonymous with academic underachievement. Athletes have long been perceived to be less prepared, less motivated, and less intelligent than the general student population (Horton, 2009). "Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL. We ain't come to play SCHOOL classes are POINTLESS." A tweet from redshirt sophomore quarterback, Cardale Jones of The Ohio State University, and 2014 National Champion, supports the underachievement description. Cardale has since changed his attitude and is excelling in the classroom but this tweet is not the first time a student-athlete has expressed his/her opinion on the struggle of being a student first. The same underachieving description can be used for all college athletes, even at the Division III level. These perceptions are often posed as stereotypes without the facts. Many have argued that important skills and qualities are developed through participation in sports that are not acquired through the academic curriculum. On the other hand, according to some researchers, the time demands of athletics force athletes to sacrifice attention to academics thus play a negative role in academic achievement (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004). Questions need to be asked such as, what role do athletics play in academic achievement? Is the time commitment to practices and competition holding the student back from achieving a higher GPA, and is there a predetermined predictor using ACT scores and high school GPA to whether or not the student-athlete and non-athlete will perform well in the classroom?

Traditionally, college athletes, no matter what level, have been labeled and negatively stereotyped. They have been criticized as unmotivated individuals who lack a positive perspective towards academics (Chen, Mason, Middleton, & Salazar, 2013). Multiple studies

have reported that athletes go through multiple stages of identity or role focus throughout their college years. These authors showed that during the beginning years in college, athletes were more committed to their athletic roles and devoted less time to academics (McPherson, 2013). For some, this caused a decline in academic performance, but for others, academic performance was not effected. The athletics before academics mindset can be changed but according to McPherson, athletes in their beginning years generally care more about their athletic performance than their academic success. Athletics play a huge role in a student-athlete's college experience regardless of how many years they participate. This study will examine whether that role is positive or negative.

Studies have also mentioned that student-athletes at highly selective liberal arts colleges have lower entering academic profiles than non-athletes, but the academic performance of athletes was not below what would be expected based on their entering profiles (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004). When talking about entering profiles, high school GPA's, and ACT scores will pose as representation of predictor variables in this study. Those that are non-athletes, have slightly higher entering academic profiles, therefore, their academic expectance in college, is higher. That leads to two more main points being researched. The time commitment that college athletics ask for and its effect on academic achievement, and whether or not there is a predetermined predictor using ACT scores and high school GPA's that can determine how successful an athlete or non-athlete will be in the classroom. After being researched, these main points will justify whether or not there is a significant difference between athletes and non-athletes based on academic performance at the Division III level.

Methods

Participants

Undergraduate students at a small Division III university in the Midwest were asked to take a simple survey to collect quantitative data. The participants of this study were voluntary and could quit taking the survey at any time. The surveys were administered to 167 athletes and non-athletes (83 athletes, 84 non-athletes) in May of 2015. With the support of various professors and coaches, the data was successfully collected. The surveys were administered to students from a variety of classes and areas in order to achieve maximum authenticity for the study. When all of the surveys were collected, and the results were being analyzed, all information that may indicate who took the survey was removed. Completion of an IRB application was required and approved at the school tested.

Procedures

This study used a demographic and behavioral survey which was handed out to students and student-athletes at a Midwestern Division III university. To view the survey, see Appendix B. The survey used multiple choice questions that provided data on demographics, study habits, prior academic performance, socialization, athletic participation, work ethic, and an open-ended question for suggestions. Participation in the study was voluntary and all participants could stop taking it at any time. A consent form, see Appendix A, was given to each participant prior to their participation explaining the minimal risk in taking the survey and that each athlete's coach would never see their answers. The information gathered was entered into a spreadsheet using code numbers. Frequencies were gathered along with descriptive statistics of the 167 students that

took the survey. Once the data was entered into a spreadsheet, it was copy and pasted into SPSS, a statistical software that performs data analysis. This software can find the significance of different variables being tested. In this studies case, a hypothesis test for analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypothesis.

Results

After analyzing the data, important statistics were found towards examining athletes and non-athletes' academic performance. Figure 1 shows the number of hours per week spent on class work during the semester. Results show the opposite of what is thought to be. A majority of the athlete stigma on college campuses have been studied at large, pubic, state universities, which has been proven to have a negative perception of athletes' work ethic. These athletes spend a lot of time practicing, competing, and traveling which would lead to less time studying and doing class work. According to the results, at the Division III level, athletes actually spend longer hours studying and doing class work per week, than non-athletes.

Figure 1.

Student	Percentage of students that spent 9+ hours per week on classwork
Athletes	65.1%
Non-Athletes	59.5%

Figures 2 and 3 show the amount of time spent by athletes and non-athletes socializing with friends and family, per week. Even with the amount of hours practicing, competing, and studying, athletes found a way to interact with friends and family more often than non-athletes.

Figure 2. (Non-Athletes)

Hours spent socializing with friends and family per week during school year	Percent
0-4	9.5%
5-8	31.0%
9-12	28.6%
13-16	19.0%
17-20	6.0%
More than 20	4.8%

Figure 3. (Athletes)

Hours spent socializing with friends and family per week during school year	Percent
0-4	4.8%
5-8	18.1%
9-12	31.3%
13-16	28.9%
17-20	12.0%
More than 20	4.8%

These figures show that 77% of athletes spent 9 or more hours per week socializing with friends and family while only 58.4% of non-athletes spent 9 or more hours per week socializing with friends and family.

Division III college athletes in this study had slightly lower entering academic profiles according to the research. Figures 4 and 5 show the composite ACT score averages for non-athletes and athletes at the Division III university that was tested.

Figure 4. (Non-Athletes)

ACT Score	Percent
13-18	2.4%
19-24	50.0%
25-30	36.9%
31-36	2.4%

Figure 5. (Athletes)

ACT Score	Percent
13-18	2.4%
19-24	56.6%
25-30	32.5%
31-36	4.8%

Even though there were more athletes that scored from a 19 to 24 on the ACT exam, non-athletes tested higher overall (39.3% of non-athletes scored a 25-36 while 37.3% of athletes scored a 25-36), but not by a very large margin.

Figures 6 and 7 show the average high school GPA's for those same non-athletes and athletes,

Figure 6. (Non-Athletes)

High School GPA	Percent
2.5-2.8	2.4%
2.9-3.3	25.0%
3.4-3.7	39.3%
Higher than a 3.7	33.3%

Figure 7. (Athletes)

High School GPA	Percent
2.5-2.8	2.4%
2.9-3.3	27.7%
3.4-3.7	44.6%
Higher than a 3.7	25.3%

Even though there were more athletes to earn a 2.9-3.3 GPA, non-athletes earned higher overall GPA's (72.6% of non-athletes earned a 3.4 or higher while 69.9% of athletes earned a 3.4 or higher), but not by a very large margin.

Using ANOVA, the high school GPA and ACT score statistics were tested to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis that these ACT scores and GPA's are not significant towards cumulative college GPA.

Null Hypothesis - ACT scores and high school GPA's are not good indicators of cumulative college GPA.

Alternative Hypothesis - ACT scores and high school GPA's are good indicators of cumulative college GPA.

Based on a 95% confidence interval of the difference, non-athlete's ACT scores and high school GPA's posed as significant (non-athletes ACT: $p < .05$; $p=.002$; non-athletes GPA: $p < .05$, $p=.$

001), thus reject the null hypothesis that a non-athlete's ACT scores and high school GPA's are not good indicators of cumulative college GPA. The same test was given to the athletes as well.

Based on that same 95% confidence interval of the difference, athletes' GPA posed as significant but the ACT score did not (athletes ACT: $p > .05$; $p=.076$; athletes GPA: $p < .05$; $p=.000$). This

means that the null hypothesis of athletes' GPA of being a bad indicator of cumulative GPA, gets rejected but the ACT score fails to reject the null hypothesis. Failing to reject the null hypothesis

means that the athletes' ACT score is not a good indicator of cumulative college GPA. This

means that there is a predetermined predictor using athletes and non-athletes' high school GPA to determine their cumulative college GPA. This also means that there is a predetermined predictor

using non-athletes' high school GPA, but there is not when using athletes ACT scores.

Figures 8 and 9 on the next page show the similarities and differences of the cumulative college GPA disbursement between athletes and non-athletes.

Figure 8. (Non-Athletes)

Cumulative College GPA	Percent
2.1-2.4	6.0%
2.5-2.8	4.8%
2.9-3.3	28.6%
3.4-3.7	33.3%
Higher than 3.7	27.4%

Figure 9. (Athletes)

Cumulative College GPA	Percent
2.1-2.4	1.2%
2.5-2.8	14.5%
2.9-3.3	30.1%
3.4-3.7	26.5%
Higher than 3.7	27.7%

More athletes have a 2.5-2.8 cumulative college GPA than non-athletes but the percentages from top to bottom are very similar. With these numbers, it's safe to say that athletes and non-athletes aren't very different from an academic performance standpoint.

Discussion and Conclusion

Perceptions of Athletes

Student athletes are expected to be both successful in academics as well as the athletic domain. This can be quite the challenge for a lot of athletes. A less recognized challenge faced by athletes is the negative perceptions and expectations by faculty, students, and others about their academic capability and motivation (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jenson, 2007). There have been several studies of how athletes at the Division I and II level are viewed by others. Many found negative perceptions that revolved around athletes lack of academic preparation and motivation. Based on the dumb jock stereotype, media, and experiences with underprepared athletes whose behavior attributes to the stereotype, athletes are stereotyped in higher education. One aspect of the stereotype is that athletes expect and need special treatment from school's faculty. The view is that the athletes aren't smart enough to succeed on their own. There are times that athletes get special treatment from professors who sympathize with the athletes because of the time commitment, or perhaps the professor is a big sports fan. Regardless, 26.6% of athletes reported they always, often, or sometimes received special treatment while 73.4% reported they rarely or never received preferential treatment (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jenson, 2007).

The perception doesn't seem to be all negative, however. According to Parsons (2013), participants in her study reported positive academic habits from athletes like attending class regularly, turning assignments in on time and respectable grade point averages. Although the dumb jock stereotype existed, the participants reported an overall positive perception with only 12% of the participants indicating a negative perception. It is also important to know that

Parson's study was conducted at a small Division II school which may have played a factor in the perceptions.

Importance of Athletics

Important skills and qualities can be learned from the participation in high school and college athletics (Dosh 2010). Many argue that athletics only play a negative role in a student's maturation process but that is not true. Effort, preparation, discipline, teamwork, and time management skills are a few qualities that the research finds very important (Dosh 2010).

Athletics typically reward those that give the most effort. An athlete that gives the most effort cannot question themselves in the end regardless of the outcome. This theory also applies to everyday life. For example, if a college student chooses to give 100% effort on a project, no matter what the outcome may be, that student will feel satisfied knowing they gave their absolute best. Even if the project receives a lower grade, the student knows in the back of their mind, that there is nothing that they could have done more.

Preparation is another important quality learned from athletics. Athletes that prepare with a hard purposeful work ethic, are less likely to make mistakes and success will more likely follow. Preparation is extremely vital in the real world and will only lead to a better chance at success.

Athletics also do a great job of teaching discipline. This skill can be described as the ability to maintain and carry out orders. This includes understanding one's own individual strengths and weaknesses and knowing how to use them. Good self-discipline will help someone stay on task no matter what distractions may get in the way.

No matter what the sport may be, athletics teach the importance of teamwork as well. This can be defined as the ability to work with others to complete a common goal. A team will only be successful if each individual fulfills their role and pulls their own weight. In life, working with others is an essential part of being successful because a lot of problems aren't solved by one individual person nor are creative ideas thought of by one individual person.

Lastly, athletics play a huge role in teaching the importance of time management. This is vital skill to master when being a student-athlete. It's also important when that student-athlete stops playing their sport and has to manage their time juggling all sorts of tasks. One must be well balanced at handling all aspects of their life so that they're not overwhelmed and become nonfunctional. Athletics do a terrific job of teaching this.

Many critics have raised concerns that college athletics interfere with students' academic pursuits and maturation process. Athletic participation has long been viewed by faculty members, critics, and others as a hindrance to students' success in the classroom and associated with a decreased graduation rate (Horton, 2009). The perception is that student athletes are overly concerned and occupied with activities associated with sport, such that they devote minimal attention and focus to their academic studies and development (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, and Jensen, 2007). These arguments and others have severely weakened the belief that student-athletes are truly students before athletes (Horton, 2009). Although this research acknowledges students-athletes' negative perceptions by others and the reasonings behind those negative perceptions, it also aims to highlight some of the positive effects of athletic participation and sports.

It is imperative that a well-balanced academic and athletic life for student-athletes should be promoted and maintained (Chen, Mason, Middleton, & Salazar, 2013). Athletic administrators

and coaches must deal with the problem of insufficient time spent on classwork and excessive time in practices and competitions. That was not the purpose of this study. The accuracy of the reported data may be heavily subjective to the honesty of the each participant.

According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Bylaw 2.14, students competing in intercollegiate athletics are limited in the number of hours they can participate in athletically sponsored activities both in season and out of season. These limitations were established to help ensure that student-athletes are given quality time for academic pursuits similar to non-athletes. According to NCAA Bylaw's 17.1.5.1 and 17.1.5.2, countable athletically related activities may occur no more than 20 hours per week with a maximum of four hours per day when a student-athlete's sport is in-season (NCAA). An exception to the four-hour maximum exists for golf, but the 20-hour total remains. Out-of-season total countable athletically-related activities may occur no more than eight hours per week. No maximum athletically-related activities can occur outside of an academic semester. Whether coaches abide by these rules is besides the point. This means that student-athletes are spending more time practicing and competing per week than doing actual classwork. According to a recent study conducted at an NCAA member institution, student-athletes spend 21.50 hours per week practicing and competing and only 12.73 hours per week working on classwork (Ayers, Pazmino-Cevallos, Dobose, 2013). With that being said, students should be working on classwork for a minimum of two hours per credit hour (The Forum of Education Abroad). Division III student-athletes must be enrolled in at least 12 semester or quarter hours, regardless of an institution's own definition of "full time (NCAA)." If a student-athlete takes 12 credit hours per semester in order to stay eligible, then they should be working on class work for a minimum

of 24 hours per week. Many would argue that athletics are the reason that these student-athletes is not working on class work for the minimum of 24 hours, the research conducted here showed interesting results regarding the non-athletes. Non-athletes that took the survey averaged 9 to 12 hours of class work per week. With these students not taking part in athletics and averaging a similar to lower amount of hours spent on classwork, this shows that the time spent on athletics aren't the reason for students spending less time than they should working on classwork.

Results of this study supports the following hypothesis: Division III college athletes have similar to lower academic success than those that do not participate in sports. Based on the data collected from the surveys administered, athletes and non-athletes had similar cumulative college GPA's along with similar entering academic profiles. The academic profiles researched ended up being significant toward predicting cumulative college GPA's for both athletes and non-athletes except for athletes' ACT scores.

Part of the research was intended to try and eliminate some of the stereotypes related to college athletes as well. It's well versed that college athletes are negatively stereotyped no matter what size school they attend. This research demonstrates the facts that support Division III athletes as being dedicated students as well as athletes. Not only do student-athletes spend more time doing classwork per week than non-athletes, they also were more interactive with friends and family and learned some important life skills along their athletic journey that non-athletes don't get the luxury learning. It is simply not fair to label student-athletes as less prepared, less motivated, and less intelligent than the general student population.

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Appendix A

My name is Troy Lemke and I am a Sport Management student and an athlete at Otterbein University and I am interested in researching the relationship between athletic participation and academic success. For this research it is important to gather data from students and student-athletes. It should only take just a few minutes to complete this survey.

Please know that no one other than me and my academic advisor, Dr. Greg Sullivan (gsullivan@otterbein.edu, 614-823-3559) will see your responses. Your name or school will never be used in connection with this study. You will be completely anonymous.

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Again, it is important for you to know that your participation will always be confidential. You will NEVER be identified in any way as a participant and if you are an athlete, your coach will NEVER see your responses.

- I agree to participate in the study
- I do not agree to participate in the study

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix B

Gender:

- male
- female

Academic Class:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

In which intercollegiate sport(s) do you participate on, currently?

- I do not currently participate in intercollegiate sports at Otterbein
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cheerleading
- Cross Country
- Football
- Golf
- Lacrosse
- Soccer
- Softball
- Tennis
- Track & field
- Volleyball

Typically, how many hours per week do you spend on class work during the semester?

- 0-4
- 5-8
- 9-12
- 13-16
- 17-20
- Other _____

On average, how many classes do you miss per week because of your sport?

- I am not an athlete.
- 0
- 1
- 2

- 3
- 4
- 5
- More than 5

On average, how many hours do you spend socializing with friends and family per week during the school year?

- 0-4
- 5-8
- 9-12
- 13-16
- 17-20
- More than 17-20

In which interscholastic sports did you participate as a senior in high school?

- I do not participate in intercollegiate sports in high school
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cheerleading
- Cross Country
- Football
- Golf
- Lacrosse
- Soccer
- Softball
- Tennis
- Track & field
- Volleyball
- Wrestling
- Other _____

What was your composite ACT score?

- 13-18
- 19-24
- 25-30
- 31-36
- I did not take the ACT exam

What was your high school final GPA?

- 2.0 – 2.4
- 2.5 – 2.8
- 2.9 – 3.3
- 3.4 – 3.7
- Higher than 3.7

During the academic year, how many hours do you work/intern (other than for academic credit)?

- 0
- 1 – 5
- 5 – 8
- 9 – 12
- 13 – 16
- 17 – 20
- More than 20

What is your cumulative college GPA?

- Less than 1.50
- 1.50 – 2.00
- 2.0 – 2.4
- 2.5 – 2.8
- 2.9 – 3.3
- 3.4 – 3.7
- Higher than 3.7

What suggestions would you have for your school in assisting student/athletes to achieve greater academic success?
