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Up, Down, and All-Around: The Swirling-Transfer Collegiate Athlete Experience

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Abstract

Intercollegiate athletics have become an integral part of campus life (Denhart et al, 2010; Mixon & Trevino, 2005; Shulman & Bowen, 2001), and have grown exponentially in the resources universities put forth to participate in this extracurricular activity (Clotfelter, 2011). One of the biggest evolutions of intercollegiate athletics has been the collegiate athlete transfer phenomenon (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014); however, little research has been conducted on transfer collegiate athletes, or the transfer collegiate athlete experience. As such, the purpose of this instrumental case study was to discover and describe the experiences and perceptions of swirling-transfer collegiate athletes at Athletic State University. A purposive sample included nine collegiate athletes (six football and three baseball) interviewed and observed to gain a holistic experience of the swirling-transfer phenomenon, with multiple supporting documents also collected and analyzed. Participants of this study describe this unique experience as “the roller coaster experience.” Each collegiate athlete perceives their participation in athletics and higher education as a means for social mobility and intends to pursue professional league opportunities. Recommendations to intercollegiate athletic governing associations, institutions, and scholars are included, with an emphasis of creating a database to track this subpopulation of transfer collegiate athletes, as well as educating practitioners who support these collegiate athletes every day.

Keywords: Collegiate athletes, FCS, NCAA, Swirling transfer experience

Intercollegiate athletics has grown tremendously in areas such as facility development, media deals, and collegiate athlete support since its inception in 1852 (Clotfelter, 2011; Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001). Since then, one of the biggest evolutions of intercollegiate athletics has been the collegiate athlete transfer phenomenon (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014). Transferring among collegiate athletes has steadily increased in the past decade (National Collegiate Athletic Association, [NCAA], 2018b). Almost 12% of all collegiate athletes transfer from their initial university in a variety of ways, such as: lateral transfer, which occurs when students transfer from the same institution type to another (Bahr, 2009); reverse transfer, which occurs when students begin at a four-year university and transfer to a two-year school (Lee, 1976; Townsend, 2001); and swirling-transfer, which occurs when a student starts at a four-year university, reverse transfers to a community college, and then transfers back to a four-year university (de Los Santos & Wright, 1989, 1990; NCAA, 2018b). While the NCAA recognizes and monitors lateral and reverse

transfer collegiate athletes, the NCAA does not monitor or indicate how many swirling-transfer collegiate athletes participate in intercollegiate athletics. Thus, this paper examines an understudied population of collegiate athletes and brings light to their unique experience.

The swirling-transfer phenomenon was first introduced to mainstream media with the inception of the Netflix documentary, “Last Chance U” (Leibowitz & Ridley, 2018). In this documentary, many collegiate athletes from East Mississippi Community College and Independence Community College hope to get a second chance to return to play Division I football. In one example from the documentary, a collegiate athlete played football at a Division I four-year university, became academically ineligible, and did not return to his university. He then enrolled at East Mississippi Community College and earned an associate degree and is now at another four-year university to complete his remaining years of eligibility.

In published literature, swirling-transfer was first introduced by de Los Santos and Wright (1989,

1990). The use of the term “swirling” was utilized to describe the actual movement of students between community colleges and four-year institutions (de Los Santos & Sutton, 2012). Adelman (2005) stated that approximately 8% of all college students can be classified as swirling students, yet no data currently exists to know how many collegiate athletes engage in the swirling transfer process, even though the NCAA provides transfer guidelines to assist universities in enrolling these students. Research conducted on traditional swirling-transfer students by de Los Santos and Sutton (2012), however, discovered students who swirl typically do not finish their intended degrees because their coursework credits do not always transfer to their new university and they are less engaged than students who started at a four-year university as freshmen. Filling a void in the literature on this increasing collegiate athlete population (Swingle & Salinas, 2020), the purpose of this instrumental case study was to discover and describe the experiences and perceptions of swirling-transfer collegiate athletes who completed the swirling-transfer pathway at Athletic State University. The research question guiding this study was: What are the academic, athletic, and social experiences of swirling-transfer collegiate athletes?

Background Literature

Collegiate Athlete Transfer

Transferring among collegiate athletes is not uncommon, as 62,560 male collegiate athletes (13.6%) and 42,320 female collegiate athletes (9.2%) transfer at least once during their time enrolled in the higher education system (NCAA, 2018b). With such strong numbers of collegiate athletes transferring from their initial university, minimal research has been conducted to understand how transferring influences the collegiate athlete experience (Cooper & Hawkins, 2014; Flowers et al., 2014). In a quantitative study of 18 Division I universities, Potuto and O’Hanlon (2007) discovered male collegiate athletes transfer for an athletics-related reason more than female collegiate athletes, and collegiate athletes who possess higher athletic identity are more likely to transfer for athletic reasons such as playing time or a better chance at playing professionally. In a qual-

itative case study of 12 collegiate athletes’ transfer process, Flowers et al. (2014) discovered emotional maturity aided collegiate athletes in their transition, collegiate athletes become more motivated in the classroom after transferring, and collegiate athletes indicated they switched their major for eligibility purposes because transfer credits did not count at their new institution.

In another qualitative case study, Cooper and Hawkins (2014) focused on collegiate athletes who transferred to a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) from a Predominately White Institution (PWI). Their study unveiled that while African American collegiate athletes felt overrepresented in athletics but underrepresented in general settings at PWIs, they also felt they were treated differently than other teammates who did not transfer. Finally, in their study of seven collegiate athletes who transferred from a community college to a four-year university, Burgess and Cisneros (2018) discovered athletic motivation was the main determinant for enrolling at a community college, many participants understood the NCAA requirements to transfer, and adjusting to the new university took a semester to feel fully acclimated to all expectations. While these studies help inform us about lateral, reverse, and upward transfer, only Flowers et al. (2014) mentioned the possibility of swirling-transfer, and none have solely focused on the swirling-transfer collegiate athlete experience.

Swirling Transfer

As stated earlier, the phenomenon of swirling transfer first was studied by de Los Santos and Wright (1989, 1990) and is the pattern where students transfer multiple times from four-year universities, to community colleges, and back to four-year universities. Adelman (2005) concluded that the phenomenon of swirling transfer has a negative relationship with degree obtainment and persistence in higher education settings. Kearney et al. (1995) discovered that students who swirl-transfer engage in this action because of the school’s academic quality, affordability, location, and programs the final university offered. Furthermore, their study indicated swirling-transfer students believed they had a positive experience and found a better fit academically, socially, financially,

and geographically at their last four-year university (Kearney et al., 1995). Additionally, it has been found that loss of credit hours, less engagement in one's new college environment, and restrictiveness to degree programs are the most common challenges swirling-transfer students encounter (de Los Santos & Sutton, 2012). While these studies focus on traditional college students, the reality of this experience for collegiate athletes remains unknown, until now.

Community College Athletics

Athletics in community colleges began in 1938 when the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) was conceived after the NCAA denied permission of collegiate athletes at 13 community colleges to participate in the 1937 track and field championships (NJCAA, 2017). Following the rejection, the NJCAA established a governing board and guidelines for community colleges to participate in athletics. Since that development, athletics has become an essential part of the community college experience and has provided athletic and academic opportunities to community college collegiate athletes (NJCAA, 2017).

In a qualitative study of eight community college collegiate athletes, Horton (2009) illustrated collegiate athletes typically attend community colleges for reasons such as: community colleges are less expensive, students find more comfort in smaller schools, students were unsure of college preparedness, and students had an opportunity to play their sport at the collegiate level. In addition, Horton (2009) discovered that collegiate athletes defined their happiness by passing all classes, maintaining eligibility, and having a good athletic season. Building on his previous work, Horton (2015) quantitatively examined 513 community college collegiate athletes and concluded that White females obtained the highest-grade point average (GPA), whereas African American males obtained the lowest.

Research on the community college collegiate athlete experience also has discovered community collegiate athletes had higher GPAs than their non-athlete peers (Mendoza et al., 2012). However, Knapp and Raney (1988) discovered community college collegiate athletes did better in elective classes not related to their major and saw a significant drop

in GPA if they transferred to a four-year university. A major component of the success of collegiate athletes is the support services provided, which is an anomaly at community colleges since many lack the funds to offer support services to collegiate athletes, unlike larger four-year universities (Lawrence et al., 2009). Nevertheless, support from administrators is crucial for the success of these programs, as more community colleges are adding athletics to increase enrollment (Ashburn, 2007; Bush et al., 2009).

Four-Year University Athletics

While research is scant on community college athletics, there is an abundance of research on four-year university collegiate athletes. The academic experience of collegiate athletes has been a continuous issue in intercollegiate athletics, escalating since the early 1990s (Huml et al., 2014). Through reform and scandals, many criticize that collegiate athletes are exploited and do not get the education they deserve. Fountain and Finley (2009, 2011) discussed that time demands of collegiate athletes and NCAA policies, especially those focused on transferring, increase the likelihood of athletic academic advisors putting collegiate athletes in the easiest majors at universities to keep them eligible, also known as academic clustering (Houston & Baber, 2017; Paule-Koba, 2019; Schneider et al., 2010). Other studies focusing on the collegiate athlete academic experience suggest collegiate athletes are at a disadvantage once they step on campus (Martin et al., 2010; Paule & Gilson, 2010; Paule & Gilson, 2011).

Collegiate athletes also are responsible in fulfilling their athletic demands, yet there is "scarce literature on the impact of athletic participation" (Gayles et al., 2012, p. 552). Navarro and Malvaso (2016) and Paule-Koba (2019) indicated that collegiate athletes declare majors that do not revolve around their academic and career aspirations, rather ones that help them stay eligible and take less time, so they can watch more film, work out more frequently, and get ahead athletically. However, in a study of 59 Division I collegiate athletes, all participants responded that they were satisfied with the amount of time they spent on athletic activities and felt it was not the only reason they were on campus (Ayers et al., 2012).

Adler and Adler (1991) discovered collegiate

athletes used higher education as a means for upward social mobility and interactions occurred more frequently between other collegiate athletes. Over time, other studies have demonstrated that similar to their non-athletic peers, collegiate athletes participate and are involved with campus activities other than athletics. For example, Gayles and Hu (2009) discovered Division I collegiate athletes often interact with non-athletic peers more than their own teammates regarding classes, school activities, and social life. In another quantitative study of 3,680 collegiate athletes at 46 universities, collegiate athletes showed high commitment to social activism no matter their involvement to athletics and were engaged more with political and nationwide policies, such as the debate of collegiate athletes being paid (Gayles et al., 2012). Yet, a few studies have found collegiate athletes experience negative components while on their respected campuses (Bimper et al., 2013). For example, Melen-dez (2008) found that Division I collegiate athletes felt victims to unfair stereotypes about African Americans; felt judged by teammates, coaches, and classmates; and felt they had to give up their culture to fit in. Concludingly, while some experiences have been unfortunate, Godfrey (2013) found that Division I collegiate athletes, in general, have a social advantage because of their connectedness through athletic personnel and teammates, along with the connection to their peers and faculty members through their coursework. While the swirling-transfer collegiate athlete experience has not been researched, the research conducted on transfer, community college athletics, and four-year university athletics provides background information that informs this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory as a theoretical framework. Patton et al. (2016) posited that this framework allows one to understand how one manages transitions and evaluates how one utilizes personal and institutional resources to cope with new changes. Schlossberg (1981) created the 4S framework to discuss coping resources such as situation, self, strategies, and support to better understand one's transition. Situation refers to the situation one is experiencing as they transition. Chickering and Schlossberg (2005) noted that duration, internal and

external factors, sources of stress, and who or what also contributes to the situation. In this study, the collegiate athletes encounter several situations that make them transfer or want to transfer from their institutions. The second variable, self, refers to one's inner strength to cope with the situation (Schlossberg, 2008, 2011). Each collegiate athlete discusses how their self-awareness grew through this unique experience and allowed them to grow holistically. Schlossberg and Kay (2010) addressed the third variable, support, as external social support systems such as family, friends, institutions, and communities. In this study, each collegiate athlete used their family, collegiate athlete support services departments, and teammates as their support system. The last variable, strategy, is used to cope with the endings and beginnings of transitions (Schlossberg et al., 1989). In this study, each collegiate athlete developed strategies to allow them to graduate and participate at a four-year university again. Building on the works of Flowers et al. (2014), Jacoby and Garland (2004), and Rodriguez-Kiino (2013), this framework allows one to understand the transition of collegiate athletes, as the framework provides a structure to examine any transition (Schlossberg, 2011).

Method

An instrumental case study design was used as the method to guide this study. Stake (1995) discussed this type of case study is used when a researcher is focused on an issue or concern and selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue. Stake (1995) also discussed an instrumental case study is utilized to understand more than what is obvious to the observer and focuses on a phenomenon of one specific case. While the single institution is a delimitation to the study, Tellis (1997) asserted "Single-case studies are also ideal for revelatory cases where an observer may have access to a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible" (p. 5). While there are numerous qualitative research designs that could be utilized to investigate the swirling-transfer collegiate athlete experience, the selection of an instrumental case study was appropriate as Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) addressed instrumental case studies allow for holistic illuminations to transpire and can further advance the knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated.

Site of the Study

The site for this study was Athletic State University, which recently was classified as a Doctoral/Professional University. Athletic State University was given as a pseudonym to protect the identity of the institution and participants of this study. This university has three major campuses, with a total enrollment of approximately 26,000 students. Athletic State University sponsors 17 Division I intercollegiate athletic sports and provides support for roughly 400 collegiate athletes. It is a Division I, Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) university, in the Athletic Valley Conference. Collegiate athletes graduate at a higher rate (69%) than their non-athletic peers (54%), with Black or African American collegiate athletes graduating at 46% and White collegiate athletes graduating at 71%.

Sample

For this study, nine male swirling-transfer collegiate athletes (six football and three baseball) were interviewed. At the time of this study, no female swirling-transfer collegiate athletes attended Athletic State. Table 1 below provides a general overview of each collegiate athlete; however, it is important to note that each name and prior universities are pseudonyms to protect each individual's identity. Each interview ranged from 55 to 98 minutes. Each interview was semi-structured (Bernard, 1988) and covered the recruiting process, the transition from high school to college, athletic demands at each institution, social experiences at each institution, academic experiences at each institution, reason(s) for transferring, support used at each institution, and lessons learned at each institution. In addition, several documents were collected and analyzed to further understand the swirling-transfer collegiate athlete experience. Examples of documents included NCAA transfer guidelines, athletic department press releases, collegiate athlete recruiting profiles, and university policies as it pertains to transfer and resources. Documents were a valuable source of data in this study as they allowed the researchers to identify verifying information, provide specific details about events, and allowed the researchers to make inferences (Yin, 1989, 2003). Also, 47 observations took place at Athletic State

University in the athletic academic support department, academic staff meetings, athletic practices, and university sanctioned events. Each observation was approximately 45 minutes to 2 hours and 30 minutes long. Observational evidence is useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied and can occur both formally and informally (Yin, 1989, 2003). Fieldnotes were taken during each observation and were further reflected on afterward.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred through Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral. In this process, one author took primary responsibility, but the second author was involved to ensure trustworthiness and rigor of the data. This data analysis is comprised of six steps starting with data organization. In this study, the researchers first created and organized files for all data including transcripts from interviews and documents (Creswell, 2013). In the next step of the analysis, the researchers read through all forms of data collected and began to form initial, inductive codes. Saldaña (2016) discussed attribute coding is best in this first stage, as coding occurs for all data, including interview transcripts, document analysis, and field notes from observation. Afterward, the researchers described the case and its context to provide reference to the audience. Fourth, the researchers used categorical aggregation to establish themes of pattern. In this second round of coding, eclectic coding was utilized as the researchers refined the first coding. Fifth, in the third round of coding, the researchers utilized in-vivo coding to finalize categories that ensured as much insight as possible can be illuminated and allowed results to be direct quotes from the participants, rather than summarized exploratory phrases (Saldaña, 2016). Finally, the researchers "present an in-depth picture of the case using narrative, tables, or figures" (Creswell, 2013, p. 191). The techniques described above helped the researchers avoid the common problems of using descriptive coding and code proliferation, which weakens the findings of a study (Saldaña, 2016). A brief example of the coding process could be as followed: inductive coding: athletic opportunity, mental exhaustion, poor experience; eclectic coding: overcoming hardship; in-vivo coding: "thrown into the gauntlet."

Table 1
Collegiate Athlete Demographics

Participant (Pseudonym)	Sport	Gender	Race	Academic Class	Major	Expected Graduation	First University	Community College	Current University
Tom	Baseball	Male	White	Senior	Business Management	Spring 2019	Sunflower State University	Rogers Community College	Athletic State University
Buzz	Baseball	Male	White	Senior	Administrative Management	Spring 2019	Sunflower State University	Bates Community College	Athletic State University
Andy	Baseball	Male	White	Junior	Sport Administration	Fall 2019	Palmetto State University	Galloway Community College	Athletic State University
Walter	Football	Male	Black	Junior	Economics	Spring 2020	University of Lincoln	Bryant Community College	Athletic State University
John	Football	Male	Black	Junior	Kinesiology	Spring 2020	Watson State University	Kelly Community College	Athletic State University
Craig	Football	Male	White	Senior	Communication	Spring 2019	Pelican State University	Newsome Community College	Athletic State University
Jay	Football	Male	Black	Junior	General Studies	Fall 2019	Magnolia State University	Turner Community College	Athletic State University
Tony	Football	Male	Black	Junior	Sociology	Fall 2019	Peach State University	Kelly Community College	Athletic State University
Ralph	Football	Male	Black	Sophomore	Chemistry	Spring 2021	Natural State University	Bentley Community College	Athletic State University

Findings

Triangulated with interviews, document review, and observations, three findings emerged from data analysis to answer the research question: What are the academic, athletic, and social experiences of swirling-transfer collegiate athletes? The findings are: 1) “Thrown Into The Gauntlet”: The First Four-Year University Experience; 2) “Working My Way Out”: The Reverse Transfer Experience; 3) “Let’s Do It Again, But Better This Time”: Completing the Swirling-Transfer Process at Athletic State University. In the first finding, the collegiate athletes discuss their experience at their first four-year university. After experiencing hardship, the collegiate athletes then discuss their experience reverse transferring to a community college. Finally, the collegiate athletes graduate with their associate degree and complete the swirling-transfer pathway by enrolling at Athletic State. Collectively, the findings encapsulate the complex experience of the swirling-transfer pathway for collegiate athletes.

“Thrown into the Gauntlet” at their first four-year university

Each year, thousands of potential collegiate athletes sign their National Letter of Intent (NLI), signifying the commitment to a university for the purpose to further their academic and athletic career (NCAA, 2018a).

For all collegiate athletes in this study, this was no different, and they were excited to start their higher education experience by signing this voluntary letter. Selecting a university to attend is a difficult decision for collegiate athletes (Klenosky et al., 2001). Each participant of this study discussed how the recruiting process was hectic as they had multiple universities to choose from, and this allowed them to see which school would be the best fit for them. The recruiting process for Andy, a baseball collegiate athlete like seven other participants, began when he was a sophomore in high school. He reflected:

I was 16 years old, so I was kind of wide eyed. I looked at all the facilities and thought this is outstanding. The coaching staff was really nice to me and they gave me a good [scholarship] offer. I knew this was important because I didn't want my parents to have to pay for my school.

The recruiting process for John and Tony, both football collegiate athletes, was hindered because they did not meet the NCAA qualifications needed to be eligible to play Division I football out of high school. John commented:

I was talking to big Power 5 schools, but once my grades and transcripts came through, the schools fell off because I didn't meet the requirements. Watson State University was the only school interested in me still, so I just went with it. I figured this opportunity was better than no opportunity.

Although John did not meet the NCAA Division I requirements, he still was able to receive a NCAA Division II scholarship. Tony attended a preparatory school to improve his high school GPA and ACT score and then signed his NLI to a different university.

All of the collegiate athletes in this study, except Tony, arrived at their first university the summer before their freshman fall semester. During the summer semester, they attended a summer bridge program at their four-year institution, to ease the transition from high school to college. The collegiate athletes mentioned they were enrolled in a general education course and attended workshops focused on time management and study skills to help them adjust to their new educational setting. The summer bridge programs

helped shape some of the collegiate athletes' academic experience, but for others it was the beginning of the "gauntlet." For Walter, the summer semester was his first-time taking college-level coursework and he felt underprepared. Walter mentioned:

Coming out of high school to college was a challenge. In high school, I never really had to study or any of that, so that was definitely a shock. In college, I was having to really understand and grasp the material because the tests were different and cover a lot more information that you need to comprehend. When I took my first test at the University of Lincoln and got an F on it, I was like, "Oh boy, this is about to be a long four years."

Walter had a difficult time adjusting to the new academic rigor at the college level. The main "gauntlet" for Tony and Walter was the academic experience of their first university. Both of these students were underprepared through their high school academic experiences and did not understand how to navigate college-level coursework. Because of this, they learned how to lean on their athletic academic center for support to get through this adversity. The remaining six collegiate athletes encountered a more encouraging academic experience. For example, Andy mentioned:

I had a great academic experience at my first school. I actually was able to be in classes with some of my teammates, which helped. Our coaches gave us time outside of baseball to focus on our schoolwork too. I think the thing that helped me most was the athletic academic center. This center had all the resources available for us to succeed as students. It really eased the transition from high school to college.

Albeit many of the collegiate athletes had a positive academic experience, all would become aware of the difficulties of being a collegiate athlete and face the biggest obstacle of the "gauntlet" they were "thrown" into—athletics. Buzz described the athletic hardship endured at his first university by stating:

We were thrown into the gauntlet. I was so burnt out from the off-season stuff, that once season came around, I was physically

and mentally defeated. I burnt a whole year of eligibility because of a few innings on the field in four games that the coach made me pitch in, so my athletic experience was horrible.

After an extremely difficult first year in competition, Tom, Buzz, and Andy encountered coaching changes. Tom mentioned how his athletic experience was influenced by that coaching change:

As soon as I showed up on campus, it was weights at 6 a.m., class from 9 a.m. to noon, and then summer games three to four times a week. It got very demanding on our bodies and I didn't know what we were getting into. In the fall, we did workouts called boot camp and that really put a toll on us. Once the season began, everybody was burnt out and we didn't do too well. The coach lost our respect and the lack of winning culture really put a damper in the whole situation.

While athletic demands for NCAA Division I collegiate athletes can be overwhelming, for Tom and Buzz the athletic demands became unbearable. Early in their season, Tom and Buzz found out that 10 out of 12 freshmen from the previous year had transferred to other institutions. The three baseball collegiate athletes (Andy, Buzz, Tom) of this study all encountered hardships during their time practicing, playing, and keeping up with the demands that were asked of them athletically. Even though the football collegiate athletes (Craig, Jay, John, Ralph, Tony, Walter) had a more positive athletic experience, they still encountered other challenges.

All the football collegiate athletes in this study had a red-shirt year at their first four-year university. Ralph discussed that being a red-shirt mentally took a toll on him:

It was tough. Me knowing that I could have played as a freshman was difficult. I'm not saying my teammates weren't as talented as me, but I knew I could have been playing and making plays on the field. At the end, it really helped me more than I thought it did. But going through practice and traveling and not playing, it gets to you.

Similar to Ralph, Craig thought he would be a first-year starter, but after an injury he and his coach de-

cided it would be best to red-shirt. Walter also faced injuries and academic hardships, which is why he was red-shirted. In the case of John, it was entirely the coach's decision to red-shirt him.

Red-shirt years are not uncommon for incoming freshman collegiate athletes (Ornstein, 1996). However, for the participants in this study, the red-shirt year altered their athletic experience at their initial four-year university. Although the athletic experience for all the collegiate athletes was not what they envisioned when signing their NLI, it still was noted as time they appreciated as their experience at their initial institution helped mold them into who they are today.

Through being "thrown into the gauntlet" of academics and athletics, the collegiate athletes learned how to suppress these experiences by enjoying their social life. During the interviews, each participant discussed that the bonds they built with their teammates and classmates helped shape their social experience. For example, Tom and Buzz had become close friends through the hardship of their baseball season. Tom commented, "To get through it all, we all bonded together and became good friends. We all lived close to each other and were with each other all the time. It's really the only blessing I saw out of my first university." While the time demands of being a collegiate athlete were difficult to manage at their initial university, many of the collegiate athletes still were able to be involved in student religious organizations such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) or StuMo. Craig said:

It was just about finding the balance between fun, academics, and sport. The athletic experience wasn't going the way I wanted, so sometimes my focus was on the wrong things. But in socializing, I learned what I wanted in my future schools.

For all the collegiate athletes, one or more of the academic, athletic, and social experiences were undesirable and they decided it was time to move forward and create a second chance. On average, each participant attended their initial four-year university for two semesters and then decided on their next move. While an escape from their current reality sounded great, in a few months' time they soon would recognize they were working their way out of the community college they enrolled in.

“Working My Way Out”: The Reverse Transfer Experience

Ultimately, there was no universal reason for the collegiate athletes to leave their first four-year university. Walter and Tony decided to transfer because of their low academic performance. Andy, Buzz, and Tom said coaching influence was the primary reason they decided to transfer. Finally, Craig, Jay, John, and Ralph said they decided to transfer as an investment in one's self. While there were various reasons students decided to leave their first university, all participants in this study decided to enroll and attend a community college because they understood they would be eligible to play as soon as they enrolled on campus without having to wait a year in residence, unlike if they decided to lateral transfer to another four-year university, per NCAA (2018d) policy. Tony understood this best and commented:

I transferred to a junior college because if you leave a four-year university and go to another one, the NCAA has rules that you must sit out a year, but if you go to a community college, you are eligible to play right away. Once you get your [associate] degree, you can transfer back to a four-year and play immediately for them too.

The collegiate athletes knew they were going to be able to play right away if they transferred to a community college because of the Netflix documentary “Last Chance U.” While each collegiate athlete did have discussions with their soon-to-be former coaches and collegiate athlete support staff, the documentary was their main source of information on how the reverse transfer process worked and what that reality would look like. Even though many collegiate athletes had other four-year university offers, they understood the community college route was their best option because they wanted to be able to play right away.

Enrolling at a community college was a relief for the collegiate athletes who had encountered academic, athletic, or social challenges at their initial university. On reflection of leaving their first four-year university, each participant did not feel like they broke a commitment to the university, rather they felt like the university broke a commitment to them. For example, Buzz stated:

I feel like my first university broke the commitment to me. I feel like when you sign at

a Division I university, no matter what level, they sign on to coach you, to lead you, and to try to get you to the next level, whether that is as a business man or as a professional player. My life was surrounded by academics and athletics when I was there, so when that investment wasn't returned, I don't feel like I broke a commitment because it's a two-sided deal.

Walter had the most academic challenges when he was at his initial university. During his interview, he discussed how the weeks leading up to his enrollment at a community college allowed him to reshape his mindset and set clear goals so that did not occur again. He remarked:

In those weeks, I decided that I was going to raise my GPA and take school seriously. I was going to work my way out and get back to another four-year university. I told myself I was going to have the best GPA possible so the next school wouldn't question whether I could do it or not. After my experience at my first university, I knew I couldn't do that again and this was my last chance.

During Walter's community college experience, he was able to achieve high grades and earned a spot on the Dean's list for the first time. Like Walter, the other collegiate athletes were able to achieve their academic goals at a similar or higher level. John credited his positive academic experiences to his professors:

Well, unlike my first university, I knew the reason I was taking my classes. My class sizes weren't as big and my professors at the community college actually knew me. They wanted to see me succeed because we were all part of the community.

Transferring to another four-year university was the primary goal for all participants, and this time they understood academics was a primary component. As such, all participants took their academics seriously and engaged in practices such as study hall, tutoring, and visiting professor's office hours to attain Dean's list and other academic honor rolls. Craig, however, felt his academic experienced completely shifted and he felt like his community college was a “downgrade.” He noted:

My academic experience at the community college was absolutely horrible. I'm sure it could have been worse, but coming from a place where they really pride themselves

academically, to a place they didn't give two cents, it was an interesting situation for sure. After that first semester, I realized our football staff were more on us academically than our academic people and I just needed to move on as fast as I could. For me, I didn't care if I got the minimum GPA and barely skid by, I just needed to find a way out.

The other eight collegiate athletes were able to succeed and used their time at the community college as a "stepping-stone" in their experience to build a foundation of knowledge. Although the collegiate athletes had success academically to "work their way out" of their community college, they would work even harder athletically to be able to play at another four-year university again.

For all participants in this study, the athletic experience at their initial university did not occur the way they anticipated when they were recruited to go there. Learning from this, each collegiate athlete relied on the recruiting process to be better informed about athletic expectations and to know if they would be in the mix for a starting position. All of the participants noted that their athletic involvement was the most positive aspect of their community college experience. While they enjoyed their time playing sports at a community college and took advantage of this time to get better athletically, it was noticed that community college athletics is not as progressive or lucrative as four-year university athletics. Andy and Buzz took this time to delve further into the athletic role and used additional coaches and athletic support to increase the likelihood of being able to attend another four-year school. Andy mentioned:

I worked very hard [athletically]. I had a hitting coach who wasn't a part of the school, he was like 20 minutes away and I saw him a lot. With community colleges, they don't have time limits like Division I schools have, so I could practice as much as I wanted. Luckily our coach didn't push the limits, but I used the autonomy to improve my hitting.

Putting in this extra work, Andy was able to achieve national and school accolades.

All of the collegiate athletes also took advantage of the time they had at their community

college and focused more on athletics than their academic or social life. In all cases, each collegiate athletes' team won at a higher winning percentage than their initial university, and some collegiate athletes were able to advance to the NJCAA World Series or the football playoffs. At their community college, it was the first time many of the collegiate athletes were able to play their sport at the collegiate level and many of them appreciated the experience. Jay reflected:

Going to the junior college, I thought it would be at a certain level, but when I got there, they impressed me and I'm appreciative of that. These guys are working just as hard, if not harder than guys at Division I schools. Our coaches treated us like family, and we won quite a bit. It made me grateful I selected them.

Academically and athletically, the collegiate athletes' experiences at the community college were seen as fundamental or a "stepping-stone." That said, each participants' social experience hindered at the community college partially on choice, but also because of the lack of institutional resources.

During their time at the community college, the collegiate athletes academic and athletic experience was improving, but at the sacrifice of their social life. The collegiate athletes mentioned that because the community colleges they attended lacked the programs, clubs, and other resources their initial university had; it was easier to focus on their main goal of transferring back to another four-year university. The lack of clubs and organizations helped the participants prioritize their academic and athletic goals to transfer from the community college to a new four-year university. On average, the participants spent around three semesters at their community college and were able to graduate with their associate degree.

Going to the community college, all the participants, except Craig, believed it was a necessary step to get back to a four-year university and did not see it as a hindrance or step back. Rather, they saw the community college as a "stepping-stone" to help them achieve their lifetime goals. In an abrupt three semesters, each participant's goals of playing at another four-year university soon would be a reality after transferring from their community college to Athletic State University.

**“Let’s do it again, but better this time”:
Completing the swirling-transfer process at
Athletic State University**

The completion of the swirling-transfer process was accomplished with each collegiate athlete transferring from a community college to Athletic State University. For many of the participants, transferring to a Division I university was monumental for their overall development. The collegiate athletes’ experience had been “full of ups and downs thus far,” but none may have been as intricate as Buzz’s. On his feeling on getting back to another four-year, Division I university, Buzz commented:

It was a huge weight off my shoulders. With all the adversity I had faced and to be able to turn it around and come to another Division I school after my first university; it was just an honor for me. It was gratifying to know someone else believed in me out there and that community college had helped me get here [Athletic State].

All participants felt like they had learned multiple lessons from being recruited out of high school, from their previous four-year university, and community college. Through their transfer experiences they learned it was important to pick an institution that would be academically and athletically beneficial to them. In this study, the collegiate athletes had a few reasons why they selected Athletic State to be their final university in the swirling-transfer pathway. It was Jay’s first Division I scholarship offer; Tony said the coaching staff made him feel most comfortable. The other participants picked Athletic State for the success of their programs.

Once the collegiate athletes selected Athletic State as their final university in the swirling-transfer pathway, their first academic responsibility was to get their transcripts sent to Athletic State. The next step was to pick a major to study. While picking a major was the collegiate athlete’s decision, Athletic State’s athletic academic center also assisted during this process. The participants in this study selected majors in business management, administrative management, sport administration, economics, kinesiology, communication, general studies, sociology, and chemistry.

The collegiate athletes experienced “ups

and downs” in their academics, but generally the students discussed they did not encounter transfer shock, or the declining of their GPA, and had a constructive experience. Walter, John, and Tony, however, had a more difficult time adjusting to the academic setting at Athletic State and it was not their best experience. Being enrolled in upper division courses, each collegiate athlete mentioned the academic rigor contained in their courses. For example, Walter mentioned, “I’m in my major now, so it is very rough. I try to use my past things I’ve learned as a foundation and reach out to my resources when I need help.” To combat the students’ academic challenges and to ensure collegiate athletes receive the best education, Athletic State University recently appointed an academic mentor to help the collegiate athletes. Providing an academic mentor allowed the collegiate athletes to become more academically committed to the university and provided them with skills that will be transferable throughout their life, such as time management, organization, and critical thinking.

Ralph and the other participants discussed how being at a teaching institution turned the academic experience into one of the brightest aspects of their swirling-transfer journey. Additionally, all participants pointed to the athletic academic center staff and advisors as the most utilized support (Otto et al., 2019; Schlossberg, 2011). This center offers study hall, academic tutoring, advising, and career readiness programs to assist all collegiate athletes while they are enrolled and for life after college. From their initial academic experience at their first four-year university, the participants in this study now take their coursework more seriously and always try their best. While the academic experience was productive at Athletic State, athletically, the baseball collegiate athletes continue to have an exuberant experience, while the football players encounter a less satisfying athletic experience.

Tom, Andy, and Buzz have known each other since high school, competing against or with one another in summer leagues and even at the collegiate level. When they became teammates at Athletic State, their prior relationships helped the team become successful and further the baseball’s team’s winning culture. Providing a holistic description on his athletic experience thus far, Tom explained:

It's been really good so far. The coaches here and the facilities here, you can't ask for better. We probably play in the nicest college field in the country. And again, the culture here is super positive and the coaches see us as a person first. Coach Toby genuinely cares about us and that's the way it has been since we started talking in the recruiting process.

Tom, Andy, and Buzz said they could not be happier for selecting Athletic State to finish their collegiate baseball careers. They were able to achieve Athletic Valley Conference honors and made it to the baseball postseason. While the baseball athletic experience was a complete turnaround from their initial university and a continuation of the successful community college experience, the experiences of the football collegiate athletes in this study have not lived up to their expectations.

The athletic experience for the football players was "a roller coaster experience" up to this point. They red-shirted at their initial university, started and became an impactful player at their community college, and expected to start and be an impact player at Athletic State. However, that was not the case and instead of the athletic experience continuing to increase, it decreased and was a let-down for many of the collegiate athletes.

Others also have struggled with playing time and getting used to the Division I level. As Tony stated, "The transition here has been difficult. The athletic side is so advanced and it's hard to grasp the concepts. It's just different, so I'm trying to figure it out again." At this point, these collegiate athletes have learned new terminology and playbooks for three different schools. This was seen as the biggest difficulty from their perspective.

Walter, however, was able to learn the system and saw his playing time increase during his time at Athletic State. On this past season, Walter reflected:

I mean this is why I wanted to get back to a four-year, to do it better this time. Even if I am a transfer, I still feel like a veteran player. I've worked hard with my coaches and teammates and it's paying off.

Athletic State's football record dipped below .500 in the 2018 season, but players saw many potential op-

portunities for growth. The football collegiate athletes saw this as a rebuilding year and see the potential for the upcoming season. Although the athletic experience for the football collegiate athletes has not been as gratifying as the baseball collegiate athletes, they still are appreciative of the culture they have been building and the foundation they are providing for the next recruiting classes.

While the participants' academic and athletic experiences have varied at Athletic State, all agreed that their social experiences have been superb. For many, the social experience has been a blend of their first university where they may have been too social, to their community college experience where they could have been seen as reclusive. The collegiate athletes in this study have utilized their teammates as a social crutch to meet new people and to experience new things. As Walter discussed:

My social experience has been solid. I would say I talk to more people than I had before at my previous schools, but my teammates are a reason why. As a collegiate athlete you can get caught up in a lot of extras, but now I socialize with people that are going to help me reach my goals.

The demands of being a collegiate athlete has limited their involvement on campus, but many still try to be involved. However, each participant mentioned they did not know what type of opportunities are present at Athletic State.

In addition to the 300 student organizations, Athletic State recently appointed a full-time director of collegiate athlete development and community relations. Opportunities were plentiful during the Spring 2019 semester to help collegiate athletes become prepared for life after college, with the director conducting more than 15 workshops and community service events each month. Additionally, Walter and seven other collegiate athletes were involved in a study abroad trip led by the director of collegiate athlete development. He discussed how studying abroad was "a once in a lifetime opportunity."

Many of the collegiate athletes shared that they intend to meet with the director of collegiate athlete development as they get closer to graduation and understand the importance of career preparedness to help them achieve the "bigger picture" goals they

have set. When asked about how they are going to feel in that moment at graduation, each swirling-transfer collegiate athlete stressed they would feel relief, happiness, and pure joy. Jay discussed how he feels graduating will open doors for him and that his relentless pursuit will have paid off. He remarked:

Man, I'm going to feel blessed. From going to three different schools, to changing my major, going through football, it's been a lot. Graduating is going to open a lot of doors for me and I can't wait for it. I think most people in our country graduate to get a job to make money, but for me, I'm happy because I'm controlling my own destiny and really have taken advantage of the opportunities given to me.

Even with the goal of playing professionally, each swirling-transfer collegiate athlete intends to graduate and use their education to better their lives as well as the lives of their families. Graduating will be the end point to the "roller coaster experience" each collegiate athlete has faced, but Tom summarizes how graduating is a means to an end. He discussed:

Graduating is for sure going to be an achievement. To look back at my time and just be blessed to be at the three schools, I knew something good would come out of it and I have learned so much. I have truly found my true self and who I am, so it will be very gratifying to see all that effort and hard work pay off.

Discussion

In this study, the participants discussed their swirling-transfer experience as the "roller coaster experience," where they experienced the "highest of highs" to the "lowest of lows." Throughout their experience, each collegiate athlete felt like they were "thrown into the gauntlet" at their first university, "worked their way out" of their community college, and then completed the swirling-transfer process at Athletic State University by "doing it better this time."

The participants in this study already had achieved tremendous success by becoming part of the 2.2% of all high school baseball players to enroll at a Division I university on scholarship and part of the 4.4% of all high school football students to enroll at a Division I or II university (NCAA, 2018a). However, the participants of this study discussed that

once they arrived at their initial university, they felt like they were "thrown into a gauntlet" and were envious of the traditional college student, namely those who do not participate in college athletics. On their decision to select this university, each participant of this study was congruent with several components of the findings from Klenosky et al. (2001) about the factors collegiate athletes use to select a university, which addressed that athletic opportunity, coaching and athletic staff, feeling comfortable, and playing professionally were key contributing factors to why collegiate athletes select a university. It would not be until they stepped onto campus that they would feel the consequences of selecting their initial college and knew that their recruiting visit was an unrealistic depiction (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Ornstein, 1996).

All the participants in this study met the requirements to be admitted into their initial school and did not require any special admittance. Special admits typically come from academic profiles who are not competitive with the rest of the class and would not be admitted into the university if they were not a collegiate athlete (Laden et al., 1999; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Once they stepped on campus, all participants were enrolled in a summer bridge program to help ease the transition from high school to college. While this program benefited many of the collegiate athletes, Walter and John did not feel it helped prepare them to successfully complete college-level coursework. Three of the collegiate athletes said they lacked the motivation and skills to succeed in college-level coursework, even with the assistance of academic support staff to help with daily planning and prioritizing obligations. This support allowed the collegiate athletes to meet academic standards and develop a sense of belonging, but not excel (Schlossberg, 2011). For the remaining collegiate athletes, the academic experience at the initial university went well, with several achieving honor roll and dean's list accolades. While the academic experience hindered the overall experience for three of the nine swirling-transfer collegiate athletes, each viewed this experience as developmental to their overall academic experience.

As the collegiate athletes progressed further into their athletic seasons at their initial institution, they realized that the expectations and demands expected of them were too much. Even for the collegiate

athletes that red-shirted, they still were responsible for practice, had extended pressure from coaches, and many traveled with the team. Adjusting to college continues to be difficult for freshmen, but these added athletic pressures influenced the students' experience (Gayles, 2009). Furthermore, participants in this study encountered similar feelings of intimidation because of their teammates and the culture of athletics at their initial university, leaving the collegiate athletes feeling fatigued and drained. Each participant discussed how they relied on their inner-self to cope with these comprising situations and started to develop a strategy to leave (Schlossberg, 2008, 2011)

The collegiate athletes in this study optimized their social experience to counter their unexceptional academic and athletic experience. Many were involved in clubs such as StuMo and Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). This theme is similar to findings from Gayles and Hu's (2009) study, which indicated collegiate athletes are engaged and involved in campus just as much as their non-athlete peers. Each collegiate athlete understood that participating in these events would help them adjust to campus and influence their experience for the better, as Gayles et al. (2012) discovered, and this served as a strategy (Schlossberg et al., 1989) to compensate for their miserable athletic experience. Even as the social experience was positive for the collegiate athletes, their integration was not enough to change their commitments of goals, sports, or institution, and they would reverse transfer to a community college.

The collegiate athletes knew reverse transferring to a community college would be their best option to get back to another four-year university. Before enrolling, each collegiate athlete searched within themselves to understand what it was going to take to for them to overcome their prior situations (Schlossberg, 2008). For each collegiate athlete, the decision to enroll and attend a community college was driven by their athletic interests. Tony, like many other participants, understood that if he reverse-transferred and attended a community college, he would be eligible to play immediately, unlike if he lateral-transferred to another four-year school, per NCAA (2018d) policy. Similar to Horton's (2009) study, each collegiate athlete committed to the community college because it provided an opportunity to play their sport at the

collegiate level, and each collegiate athlete felt the smaller campus would be beneficial. During their time at the community college, each participant was able to achieve a higher GPA. Despite the high athletic motivation each collegiate athlete had, each participant was able to meet the requirements each community college and athletic governance had in order to remain eligible and be able to transfer to another four-year university, meeting all the NCAA (2018d) swirling-transfer guidelines and graduating with an associate degree.

All participants experienced increased satisfaction regarding both their academic and athletic experiences at their community college. Each collegiate athlete was able to play for the first time in college and had career-setting statistics. At the community college, each collegiate athlete's team performed better than their initial university, and many of the collegiate athletes achieved individual performance records. However, it was because of the athletic role the collegiate athletes delved into, that each participant felt like more of a professional athlete in training than a college student. In Daniel and Miller's (2007) study, two-thirds of their sample ($n = 103$) believed they would not make it to the professional ranks, but in this study, the community college was the avenue each participant perceived to be their most direct route to becoming a professional athlete. Each collegiate athlete felt like the community college was a gateway to get back to a four-year university and each felt the commitment to athletics would help them get to a four-year university quicker than academics (Pflum et al., 2017). While the participants were not associated or engaged outside of athletics at their community college, they did participate in classes and felt the community college was comfortable and an easier venue to get individual attention from faculty, staff, and classmates. This support system (Schlossberg & Kay, 2010) allowed each collegiate athlete to excel and achieve their goals of playing at another four-year university.

The swirling-transfer collegiate athletes in this study became part of the 19.9% of all baseball players to transfer from a community college back to a four-year university, and 7% of all football players to transfer from a community college back to a four-year university (NCAA, 2018a). On selecting Athletic

State, the participant choices were comparable to the study findings of Letawsky et al. (2003), which discussed program selection, head coach, academic support available, location, and reputation as the primary reasons for choosing their college.

As collegiate athletes enrolled in courses and began their academic responsibilities at Athletic State, they did not report experiencing transfer shock or the declining of one's GPA, and many also did not encounter credit loss, the strongest challenge of swirling-transfer students (de Los Santos & Sutton, 2012). As Athletic State is a transfer-friendly university, enrolling more transfer students in the college's state than any other institution, each collegiate athlete used the resource of the athletic academic center to aid in their transition and to select a major without the fear of not being eligible (Paule-Koba, 2019). If any of the collegiate athletes encountered difficulties, the athletic academic center served as the primary support for the collegiate athletes with the help of the academic mentor (Otto et al., 2019; Paule & Gilson, 2011).

At Athletic State, the academic experience has been fostered with success through the teaching first philosophy of the university and the small class sizes. Borland et al. (2005) posited smaller classrooms aid in the success for students who transfer from community colleges. Participants in this study felt like their professors at Athletic State had a good perception of them and did not feel the need to prove their worth as a collegiate athlete. The collegiate athletes reiterated that the support provided through the athletic academic centers, family, and professors allowed them to develop their sense of belonging, establish strategies to succeed, and provide a gateway for them to address their concerning situations (Flowers et al., 2014). Through this support, each swirling-transfer collegiate athlete continues to succeed and make progress toward graduation and feels self-empowered academically.

The collegiate athletes learned that their experiences being at a prior four-year university helped them adjust more quickly to their sport practices and understand coaches' expectations, travel times, and competitions, unlike athletes who just transfer from a community college to a four-year university (Burgess & Cisneros, 2018). Some of the football collegiate athletes felt they had to prove themselves to the coaches, validate the coaches' selection, and garner

praise from coaches and teammates. Comparably, the baseball collegiate athletes' commitment to their team and coaches remains high and each know their respected role and place on the team. To conclude the athletic experience, each participant discussed that athletic participation is a gateway to pursue their aspirations and that, unlike their initial university, their dedication to responsibilities is not overwhelming (Paule & Gilson, 2010) and athletics is not the only reason they are on campus. This experience has allowed each collegiate athlete to develop a sense of self, where their athletic identity is not at the forefront (Patton et al., 2016).

Social experiences with the collegiate athletes have been positive, with them being involved and engaged on campus more than their initial four-year university and community college experience. Compared to their non-collegiate athlete peers, the swirling-transfer collegiate athletes are not quite as engaged in activities but are similarly engaged compared to their collegiate athlete peers (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Ishitani & McKittrick, 2010). Moreover, at Athletic State the emphasis on the collegiate athlete development program has created opportunities for the swirling-transfer collegiate athletes to become acclimated to the university by providing workshop sessions focused on orientation, building a brand, and career networking. While participation of the swirling-transfer collegiate athletes at the workshop sessions hosted by the athletic academic center was low throughout the Spring 2019 semester, it was similar to the non-swirling transfer collegiate athlete participation. Athletic State also created a new study abroad trip (in which Walter participated) to increase the number of high-impact practices being offered.

Overall, the engagement of the swirling-transfer collegiate athletes has increased at Athletic State. Through reflecting, each participant shared that they felt their engagement in athletics and extracurricular activities has been beneficial and has aided in their overall swirling-transfer collegiate athlete experience. While each participants' top career choice is to be a professional athlete, only Buzz was drafted by his respected league. Upon analysis, Buzz was one of 31 swirling-transfer collegiate athletes to be drafted out of 1,217 picks, equating to .03% (MLB, 2019). No football collegiate athlete participants of this study were drafted, but nine swirling-transfer collegiate ath-

letes were selected out of 254 picks in the 2019 NFL draft, equating to .04% (NFL, 2019). Though Buzz demonstrated it is possible to get drafted, career alignment to a major is of the upmost importance for each collegiate athlete, and each collegiate athlete in this study ensured they are taking their education seriously and anticipate having other careers upon graduation to improve their social mobility if they are not selected in their professional league's draft.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, there are several positive steps that can be considered to better serve swirling-transfer collegiate athletes. First, as scholarship is limited about swirling-transfer students and collegiate athletes, intercollegiate governing associations such as the NCAA, NJCAA, and CCCAA can assist filling in the gaps of literature by monitoring the swirling-transfer population. This would allow scholars, administrators, and governing associations to know the graduation rate of this subpopulation of collegiate athletes who are more at risk to not meet progress toward degree (PTD) requirements for their desired major (de Los Santos & Sutton, 2012; NCAA, 2018c). Moreover, governing associations should provide presentations surrounding the guidelines and the experiences of swirling-transfer collegiate athletes at national conferences such as Regional Rules, the NCAA Convention, and the National Association of Academic and Student Athlete Development Professionals (N4A).

For institutions, Athletic State University is a leader in serving transfer students. Athletic State has its own transfer center where an advisor guides each transfer student to map out their remaining coursework and discuss which credits will be accepted and how they will be counted for the student's intended degree program. The transfer center also holds online and in-person orientation sessions and has a checklist for each transfer student to complete before they step onto campus. Athletic State has strong articulation agreements with surrounding state community colleges and transfer equivalencies for common courses. Athletic State University also provides advisor professional development certification to ensure advisors are up to date on trends, resources,

and best practices known to enhance a student's experience.

Practical recommendations for stakeholders would include creating a one-time transfer exception rule for all NCAA sports. This new policy would significantly reduce the amount of swirling-transfer collegiate athletes (Swingle & Salinas, 2020) and would ensure collegiate athletes are not held to an unequal standard. Additionally, each college and university need to accurately portray what attending their institution would look like and not focus on the glitz and glamour of facilities or the life of a star player. Upon admittance, all universities also should establish a transfer orientation program where each collegiate athlete is introduced to the resources needed to succeed at their university. Finally, athletic departments need to further support collegiate athlete development programs to further prepare collegiate athletes for life after sport (Navarro & Mavaso, 2016; Paule-Koba, 2019; Tyrance et al., 2013). Even though Buzz got drafted for baseball, the other collegiate athletes did not receive any professional league attention, indicating they will be going pro in something other than sports (NCAA, 2018a).

Future Research Directions

Finally, as this is the first study that focuses solely on swirling-transfer collegiate athletes, there is an abundance of future research possibilities. First, this study was conducted at one Division I FCS university and could be replicated at Division I FBS, Division II, or Division III universities. Furthermore, this study only had male swirling-transfer collegiate athlete participants, but females also could be engaged in the swirling-transfer process. Another recommended study would be to diversify the ethnicities of the participants. This study consisted of only Black and White collegiate athletes but examining other races and ethnicities could provide essential inputs as the traditional minoritized groups become a more populist part of colleges and universities. Finally, additional areas of study include transfer articulation agreements and school selection during the swirling-transfer collegiate athlete experience, as well as utilizing Tinto's (1988) theory of student departure or the transfer capital framework of Laanan et al. (2010) to analyze this topic.

Conclusion

This study found that the academic, athletic, and social experiences of the swirling-transfer collegiate athletes at Athletic State University has been a “roller coaster experience.” Collegiate athletes were “thrown into the gauntlet” at their initial four-year university by being underprepared for college-level coursework, experiencing hardship in athletics, or having too much fun in their social life. Once they decided to transfer, they understood that the community college route would be the best path, because they would be eligible to play immediately. When the collegiate athletes were enrolled at the community college, they self-sacrificed their social life in order to “work their way out” by performing well in their academic and athletic roles. Finally, the collegiate athletes graduated with their associate degree and ultimately selected Athletic State University as their final university in the swirling-transfer pathway. At Athletic State, the collegiate athletes tried to “do everything better” this time. Through a better understanding of their selves, overcoming a multitude of situations with personalized strategies and access to support, each participant made it through the swirling-transfer experience. While the swirling-transfer is a new research topic, continuing to understand and support these collegiate athletes will be pivotal as the population continues to grow (Swingle & Salinas, 2020).

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