STUDENT-ATHLETE OR ATHLETE-STUDENT?: THE IMPACT OF IDENTITY ON ACADEMIC MOTIVATION AND SUCCESS OF DIVISION I REVENUE-GENERATING STUDENT-ATHLETES

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INTRODUCTION
Student-athletes have complex identities as they have to balance the responsibilities and demands of their two prominent roles: student and athlete. Student-athletes have to deal with the challenge of proving that they deserve a spot in the classroom and on their teams, which can increase student-athlete role conflict and decrease motivation (Creswell, 2001; Marx et al., 2008). The pressure to successfully balance their dual identity may lead to student-athletes that primarily identify as “student-athletes,” or as athletes who are pursuing an academic degree (athlete-student)” (Yukhymenko–Lescroart, 2014, p. 89), rather than strongly identifying as both.

Gaining knowledge and understanding of student-athletes’ motivation about their abilities to succeed in college could prove beneficial in finding ways to effectively engage student-athletes (Gayles, 2015). The purpose of this study is to explore how student-athletes navigate their dual roles and responsibilities, as students and athletes, identify challenges, and develop strategies to facilitate student growth and learning and contribute to creating a supportive community.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. How does a student-athlete’s academic and athletic identity impact their motivation to succeed in academics?
2. How do student athletes experience their academic and athletic identity?
3. How do student athletes deal with the role conflict of athletic and academic identity?

METHODS
- Site: National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) affiliated and ranked private research institution
- Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory and Tinto’s (1975) departure theory were used as the theoretical framework for this study and informed the research design and data analysis.
- Participants were asked nine interview questions focused on classroom and team contribution, academic identity, and athletic identity. Interviews were transcribed and coded to identify common themes (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2015).

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FINDINGS
ACADEMIC SUCCESS & MOTIVATION
Personal goals informed student-athletes’ motivation to succeed in academics.
Football student-athletes made academics a top priority and focused on navigating future career paths with the understanding that football would come to an end.
“Definitely if I can secure a professional NFL job, but it’s not really my top priority. [My goals are to] mostly just grab my degree and make sure I have...a good set of connections that I can work through or a good network that I could work through.” - Martin
Basketball student-athletes focused on academics with the sole goal of becoming a professional athlete.
“Basketball is just what I’ve been dreaming about since I was four. But I haven’t been dreaming of being in the classroom all my life, so it’s just different levels of being determined and inspired by what I’m doing.” - Anthony
Coaches encouraged both football and basketball student-athletes to put academics first through the introduction of academic resources during the recruiting process and consistent check-ins.
 “[Coaches] do a solid job. They know it’s student-athlete and student comes first, so in terms of practices and stuff I need to miss for school, then they are totally okay with it, and they make sure we get to class.” - Martin

STUDENT IDENTITY: CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS
Student-athletes supported one another in the classroom and had positive relationships. Student-athletes understood that student-athletes had athletic responsibilities beyond the classroom. Coaches encouraged both football and basketball student-athletes to focus on academics and treated student-athletes negatively as they believed student-athletes were lazy or not smart. Student-athletes tried to dismantle negative stereotypes by staying engaged and showing an interest in the material.
“Normally, the student-athletes are a little more like energetic in class...and we will usually that be proactive student.” - Russell
“Teachers are willing, if you as a student-athlete, are willing to cooperate with them...if you need extra time, they are willing to cater to that, cause they know you do work hard. In a few cases, they treat you a little different, or they might expect you to do a little more work.” - Anthony
Football and basketball student-athletes experienced their athletic identity differently. Football student-athletes showed commitment to their team and stayed focused on doing what was necessary to support the team.
“I try not to be selfish...I just try to be as productive as possible, do what my teammates need, or ask for...I see myself doing my own part, just being responsible and staying around the right crowd, balancing out my social life, not just hanging out with my teammates but with regular people.” - Martin
Basketball student-athletes focused on their individual role on the team.
“I am just thinking of just doing my role and trying to do the best I can, and whatever outcome is whatever outcome.” - Brandon

ROLE CONFLICT
Student-athletes understood that their role conflict was based on their academic identity because of the amount of time and energy put into their athletic identity. Some student-athletes tried to find ways to step away from their athletic identity by focusing on their social identity, focusing on their personal identity, or focusing on academics and those who do not care about their “status.”
“I would say I put probably a little more into sport just because it’s more...I feel like more important to me personally.” - Martin
“I think the biggest takeaway for me is just to be with people who appreciate...who I am as a regular person. Just like not all people who want to talk about football all the time, just want to talk about the football part of my life. So I think learning around the right crowd, balancing out my social life, not just hanging out with players on the team, but with regular people who are not athletes as well.” - Martin

REFERENCES