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AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FOOTBALL PLAYERS' PERCEPTION
OF THEIR NON-ATHLETIC CAREER READINESS POST-GRADUATION FROM A
DIVISION I FOOTBALL BOWL SUBDIVISION INSTITUTION

by

Ashlesha Lokhande

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Leadership and Policy Studies

The University of Memphis

May 2019

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Malati Lokhande. Thank you for believing that each of your children and grandchildren deserved an equal opportunity to succeed in life. You will be leaving an incredible legacy, and the future generations will thank you for the same.

I also dedicate this dissertation to all the student-athletes who participated in this study. My goal was to give you a voice, and in one of the toughest seasons of my life, I found solace in writing your story. It will always be one of the most beautiful, emotional, and enlightening pieces I will ever write. Thank you for allowing me to share your experience. But just because the spotlight fades, doesn't mean you have to dim your light. You are important, talented and valuable human beings.

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My God, I hope one day I hear you say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." Thank you for choosing me. I promise you- this girl isn't going anywhere without You.

Abstract

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An Analysis of African American Football Players' Perception of their Non-Athletic Career Readiness Post-Graduation from a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision Institution.

Major Professor: Reginald Leon Green, Ph.D.

The NCAA's core values indicate their commitment to the academic success and career development of their student-athletes. They assure the student-athletes' academic and career readiness takes precedence over their athletic competitiveness. However, with the increasing commercialization, the relationship between college athletics and higher education is similar to an uneasy marriage, with student-athletes caught in the middle of this strenuous relationship. This is evident because of the lower graduation rate and career maturity levels of African-American student-athletes. This problem is also magnified as African-American student-athletes are graduating at a lower rate than their White counterparts. This trend has to be reversed, hence, this study analyzes the African American football players' perception of their non-athletic career readiness post-graduation from a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution. The study also assesses the processes and procedures African-American football players use to prepare themselves for a non-athletic career post-graduation and the factors that play a significant role in their career readiness.

Keywords: African-American student-athletes, career readiness, athletic academic services.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) mission is to provide its student-athletes with an opportunity to compete at the highest level in athletics while earning a college degree (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). Although student-athletes have been highly competitive on the field, their low graduation rate has been an issue for the NCAA for decades (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). Hence, in 2013, the NCAA put in place various reforms such as the Academic Progress Rate (APR) and Graduation Success Rate (GSR) to hold institutions accountable for the student-athletes' academic success and ensure an increase in graduation rates amongst its student-athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). Although, in general, the graduation rate of student-athletes has increased since 2013, there is a considerable gap in the graduation rates and academic performance of African American student-athletes compared to their White counterparts (Lapchick, 2011). In 2017, the NCAA's Graduation Success Rate (GSR) of White male student-athletes was 87 percent, while, the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) of African American male student-athletes was only 77 percent (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017). As a result, a large number of African American student-athletes are leaving college after their athletic eligibility is over, unprepared for life after collegiate sports.

The opportunities for collegiate student-athletes to play at the professional level are limited. In 2015, out of 16,175 draft eligible participants, only 256 of

NCAA football players were drafted to play in the National Football League (NFL) (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). Hence, it is important for student-athletes to graduate and prepare for the workforce. NCAA's measures such as APR and GSR do promote graduation but do not necessarily guarantee a high level of career readiness of these student-athletes.

Higher education institutions endorse the student-athlete ideal through intercollegiate athletics. However, due to the time commitment expected from student-athletes, they often struggle to invest adequate time in their career construction. According to Haslerig and Navarro (2016), Division I student-athletes' biggest challenge is balancing their athletic and academic commitments. If they focus more on their athletic obligations, it negatively affects their engagement on campus and the process of degree exploration. This lack of engagement and career exploration eventually influences the student-athletes' long-term career plans (p. 221). Although the gap between the graduation rates of African American student-athletes and their White teammates is narrowing, there is still a gap (Lapchick, 2011). This reflects the possible lack of career readiness of African American student-athletes. For this reason, this study will assess the post-graduation career readiness level of African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution during their final year of athletic eligibility.

Background of the Study

In a study conducted by the American Institutes for Research (1989), 44% of African American student-athletes that participated in the research expected to

play professional football or basketball (Lapchick, 1996). However, every year only 1.6% of the draft-eligible participants get an opportunity to play at the professional level (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). Furthermore, Bailey (2017) indicates, “African American male athletes spend countless hours practicing, exerting a great deal of energy and enduring physical pain and injuries while competing, all for a slim hope of securing a roster spot on a professional sports team” (p.8). Hence, a majority of African American student-athletes have unrealistic expectations of competing in their sport at the professional level.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association, the primary governing body of collegiate athletics, believes that student-athletes participate in athletics as an avocation while balancing their academic and social experiences (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). However, due to the increasing commercialization of collegiate athletics, the student-athletes’ perception of higher education has been redefined (Adler & Adler, 1991). Student-athletes, especially from revenue-generating sports, have been put on a pedestal due to their athletic prowess, while they miss out on a meaningful degree and an opportunity for valuable career development.

Academically, African American male student-athletes have continued to underperform (Lapchick, 2011). While the Graduation Success Rate (GSR), a metric created by the NCAA, states that African American student-athletes graduate at 77%, the federal rate of graduation for African American student-athletes is only 53% (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015). Once calculated, the GSR and APR seem to be inflated in numbers in favor of the

NCAA compared to the federal graduation rates, and hence can often be misleading (Fountain & Finely, 2009). Furthermore, Academic Progress Rate (APR) and Graduation Success Rate (GSR) have continued to put a lot of pressure on institutions of higher education to improve their student-athletes' graduation rates, but the graduation rates of African American student-athletes is still not up to par with their White counterparts. The athletic expectations from these student-athletes have often overshadowed their commitment to academics and career exploration (Haslerig & Navarro, 2016). Also, Bailey (2017) states, "Despite the education reform efforts made by the NCAA, it still fails to report the academic majors in which student-athletes declare or if the preparation outside of competitive play adequately prepares them for a successful life after sports" (p. 36). This means a more significant number of African American student-athletes could be leaving college without a degree by the time they finish their athletic eligibility, and at a disadvantage in the workforce.

Higher education institutions, the labor market as well as the public arena put a lot of emphasis on the career readiness of college graduates (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2017). However, career readiness has been challenging to define, as it differs for each individual and career field. The objective of higher education is to aspire students to be career ready by earning a degree and acquire skills to enter the workforce and become productive members of society (Conley, 2012). Similarly, the aim of higher education institutions, athletic departments, and the NCAA is to provide their student-athletes with a high-quality educational experience, along with opportunities for personal

development and career readiness. Career readiness is defined as possessing the academic and technical skills necessary for a specific career field, along with employability skills such as interpersonal skills, creativity and innovation, a work ethic and personal responsibility, global and social awareness. (Achieve, 2012; Conley, 2012, Nagle, Newman, Shaver, & Marschark, 2016).

Career readiness is the ability of college students to demonstrate essential competencies that prepare them for a successful transition into the workplace (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2017). These essential competencies include but are not limited to the graduates' critical thinking ability, oral and written communication skills, leadership and teamwork skills, and work ethic.

The Conley Readiness Model states that the four keys to career readiness that are necessary for entry into a successful career are cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills and techniques and lastly, transition knowledge and skills. Cognitive strategies include problem formulation and solving strategies, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating findings and issues, and developing ways of thinking that are necessary for the workforce. Content knowledge refers to the key foundational content of the core subject areas that students need to gain insight into for optimal career readiness. This includes the technical knowledge and skills related to the career the student aspires to work in after college. The key learning skills and techniques necessary for career readiness include goal setting, time management, progress monitoring and the motivation to succeed. The key transition knowledge and skills are the ability of

the student to successfully navigate the transition from high school to college and later into the workforce (Conley, 2012). This study mainly focuses on the key transition knowledge and skill because often, one of the biggest hurdles for student-athletes is transitioning into a non-athletic career post-graduation if they do not get an opportunity to compete at the professional level.

Research shows that student-athletes face different challenges than the regular student population. These include internal conflicts such as role conflict, or external conflicts such as time commitments and expectations, academic clustering. (Haslerig & Navarro, 2016). Similarly, African American student-athletes face some unique challenges in higher education compared to their other teammates. A student's academic experience depends on various factors like academic background, family's educational history, high school education, and college readiness. Compared to other groups, a more significant number of African American families put a lot more emphasis on athletics for their children from a young age (Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011). Bailey (2017) states, "With the media using African American male athletes to symbolize the American Dream, it is hard to blame a young African American male with natural athletic ability to want to pursue a career as a professional athlete" (p. 8).

Consequently, many African American students play sports at an earlier age with aspirations of earning an athletic scholarship to college or playing at the professional level. Rhoden (2006) points out that African American athletes, "come out of the most economically disadvantaged communities and used sports to catapult themselves from poverty to wealth" (p.8). Some student-athletes

envision athletics as a way of advancing socio-economically. They believe sports has and will continue to be a way to obtain equality and financial stability in society (Etizen, 2005). However, this often happens at the expense of their overall development as a student-athlete (Donnor, 2006).

In their study, Hodge, Burden, Robinson, and Bennett (2008) state that there is often a significant difference in the academic performance of African American student-athletes. They believe that African American student-athletes are stereotyped as athletes even before they enter an institution of higher education (p. 210). Lee et al. (2011) believe that African American males “view their opportunities as limited in assessing traditional careers but view sports as a viable career opportunity” (p.300). They have often invested in athletics at a very young age and believe that athletics is a way to get out of poverty or improve their economic condition (Benson, 2000). While competing at the collegiate level, they are expected to perform at an optimal level in athletics, often leaving academics on the back burner (Hodge et al., 2008, Donner, 2006). NCAA rules limit the period of athletic scholarship award to one year only, and coaches can terminate athletic scholarships based on the student-athletes’ performance (Hakim, 2000). Hence, the performance and time demands imposed on student-athletes to develop their athletic identity often persuades them to disengage from their academic and social development (Bimper, Harrison & Clark, 2013; Melendez, 2008).

The academic requirements for athletic eligibility for student-athletes are mediocre. As a freshman, a student-athlete has to maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 1.80, followed by 1.90 during his sophomore year and a 2.0 during his

junior and senior year. (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015). Most higher education institutions require a 2.0 cumulative GPA for students to be eligible for graduation; however, individual departments may require a cumulative GPA higher than a 2.0. The ultimate goal for the NCAA, student-athletes and higher education institutions may be graduation; however, a 2.0 cumulative GPA does not guarantee a fulfilling job or career.

On the other hand, unlike other students, student-athletes have limited employment opportunities during the academic year because of their athletic and academic commitments. The NCAA Bylaw 12.4 also states specific guidelines on student-athlete employment (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015). Usually, the athletics department also expect student-athletes to seek prior approval and regular monitoring of student-athlete employment. Hence, with low GPA expectations and very structured and limited employment opportunities, student-athletes may end up graduating without an effective resume for a fulfilling career outside of the field of athletics.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perception of career readiness of senior African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution. The research study will examine the extent to which African American student-athletes perceive themselves as prepared to transition into life after sports, and the processes and procedures that are used by the student-athletes to successfully enter the workforce. The research study will give African American student-athletes an opportunity to share their perception of the

role their family background, their higher education institution, the athletic department, as well as the NCAA plays in their career readiness.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed in the study:

- 1) To what extent do senior African American football players perceive that they are prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation?
- 2) What processes and procedures do African American football players use to prepare themselves for a non-athletic career post-graduation?
- 3) During their college career, what peak experiences do senior African American football players report as having a significant impact on their preparation for a non-athletic career post-graduation?
- 4) What processes and procedures do universities and the athletic departments use to prepare senior African American student-athletes for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

Definition of Terms

The following terms included in this study are defined below:

1. *Student-Athletes*: A current student at a higher education institution who is a member of a varsity athletic team. Student-athletes may not be on a full or partial athletic scholarship.
2. *Senior African American Student-Athletes*: Student-athletes who are actively engaged on the football team of the institution, who are classified as African American and are seniors in classification at their higher education institution, either a semester or an academic year away from graduation.

3. Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS): It is the top level and most competitive subdivision within the Division I. Football Bowl Subdivision teams are allowed 85 full scholarships, play in 12 regular season games and are invited to play in bowl games, depending on their record at the end of the regular season.
4. Athletic Scholarship: It is financial aid offered to student-athletes who participate in varsity athletics. This financial aid is based on the student's athletic ability. Division I Football Bowl Subdivision teams are allowed 85 full scholarships. The athletic department is not allowed to split the amount of a full scholarship amongst two or more football student-athletes.
5. Academic Progress Rate (APR): It is a team-based metric developed by the NCAA that accounts for the eligibility and retention of each student-athlete for each academic term.
6. Graduation Success Rate (GSR): A metric developed by the NCAA to measure the graduation success of student-athletes at Division I institutions. It holds institutions accountable for student-athletes who transfer into their school. However, it does not penalize institutions whose student-athletes transfer in good academic standing.
7. Career Readiness: Career readiness is the ability of college students to demonstrate essential competencies that prepare them for a successful transition into the workplace (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2017). These essential competencies include but are not limited to the graduates' critical thinking ability, oral and written communication skills, leadership and teamwork skills, and work ethic.

8. *Networking*: The process of interacting with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career.

Limitations

The researcher made an effort to have diverse representation in the final participant pool of Division I football student-athletes who were within a semester or an academic year from graduation. However, transfer student-athletes were excluded from the study since they had not experienced their entire higher education and student-athlete experience at the same Division I institution.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters which are included as follows:

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study and contains the background of the study, the purpose of the study, and research questions that will be addressed in this study. Finally, there is a list of definitions of terms used in this study, along with the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a description of the organization of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the literature based on previous studies conducted and related to the academic and career readiness of student-athletes.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology adopted for the study. It explains the methods the researcher will use to conduct the study. The chapter also includes the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide the study.

Chapter 4 focuses on the analysis and the interpretation of the data collected with the help of participant interviews.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the findings, summary, and conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2

A Review of the Literature

Student-Athlete Life

A person's future professional occupation is based on a process that involves various factors including values, interests, and skills. Further, personal, situational and context-related variables along with one's identity and involvement in activities affect a person's career path (Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa & Sousa, 2014). The life of a typical student-athlete is stringent due to his or her athletic and academic commitments, which affects their academic and social life on campus (Comeaux, 2010). Unlike other students on campus, student-athletes have guidelines and restrictions on employment (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015), restricting their opportunities to gain valuable entry-level experience in the workforce. Further, student-athletes typically live and socialize together, study and attend class with their teammates and are often led to pursue similar majors, leaving limited opportunities for them to create an identity outside of a student-athlete and form meaningful networking relationships that will help them with life after college (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Bailey (2017) indicates, "Being isolated from the student body population can negatively affect student-athletes' abilities to discover other interests and skills in order to develop career maturity and career self-efficacy" (p. 10).

Institutions of higher education are benefitting from college athletics; however, there is an increasing concern regarding the academic and personal development of student-athletes (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Unlike other

students, student-athletes' learning, and personal development is often challenged by athletic and academic expectations. This is especially true for African American student-athletes from revenue-generating sports. Although only 4% of Division I student-athletes are African American, 61% of men's basketball players and 46% of football players are African American. Research has shown that amongst all student-athletes, male football and basketball players and African American student-athletes have a lower academic performance level due to poor secondary level education (Etizen, 1988; NCAA, 2009; Sellers, 1992, Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Furthermore, the graduation rate of African American male student-athletes is only around 50.2% (Harper, Williams & Blackmon, 2013), which is considerably lower than their White counterparts (Lapchick, 2011). Considering a substantial number of student-athletes from revenue-generating sports are African American as well as at-risk student-athletes, it is essential to explore the post-graduation career readiness of African American student-athletes (Harper, Williams & Blackmon, 2013).

Family Background

According to Comeaux and Harrison (2011), students' college experiences are directly or indirectly influenced by a host of attributes and lived experiences (p. 239). In the case of student-athletes, family background, athletic and social identity, commitment to academics plays a major role in shaping their academic and career readiness. Student-athletes' parent's socioeconomic status and level of education are often associated with their support for academic excellence, which

then influences the student-athlete's academic commitment (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

In a study conducted on Division I African American male football players by Donnor (2005), participants revealed that their family had a significant impact on their academic motivation and achievement (Harrison, Martin & Fuller, 2015). Such precollege characteristics have an indirect effect on student-athletes' academic success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Therefore, when Harris (1998) boldly states, "Athletics is to the Black community what technology is to the Japanese and what oil is to the Arabs" (p.3), it may sound stereotypical, but it is a representation of a culture where children compete in athletics at young age, academics is put on a back burner (Beamon, 2010; Edwards 1984; Etizen, 2005) and athletics is viewed as an avenue for upward social and financial mobility. Fifty-five percent of Blacks live in single-mother-led-households (Kreider, 2013). Hence, with the absence of a male role model, young African American boys tend to look at African American athletes as their role models. Furthermore, because of the limited assessment of traditional careers (Lee et al., 2011; Parmer, 1994) and the glamorous overrepresentation of African American professional athletes in media, young Black makes perceive athletics as a reliable avenue for upward social mobility (Bailey, 2017). Hence, Harrison and colleagues suggest, a "village" of educated and proactive parents is the key to developing successful African American male scholar-athletes (Harrison, Martin & Fuller, 2015).

Role of Coaches

Similarly, coaches play a meaningful role in the academic, athletic and personal development of student-athletes. However, it has not always been a positive one. Coaches control a significant amount of these student-athletes' times due to practices, travel, team meetings and midweek games, which limits their involvement in academic and personal development. (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Comeaux, 2010). In a qualitative study conducted by Harrison, Martin, and Fuller (2015) on African American male scholar-athletes, the authors revealed that some of their participants were extrinsically motivated by the "false dream" presented by their college coaches (p.86).

Similarly, in a qualitative study on Division I African American male football players, Benson (2000) disclosed that the participants' marginal academic performance was influenced by the stakeholders' (coaches, academic advisors, and faculty) culture of low academic expectations from their student-athletes (Comeaux, 2010). Coaches are driven by wins and losses, often influencing student-athletes' majors and academic disciplines for the sake of athletic eligibility. As a participant mentioned, "When they are recruiting you, they tell you that you can major in anything you want, but when you get to campus, it's all about eligibility. No coach is going to pat you on the back because you are majoring in Business. Remember, it's not about you, it's about them" (Harrison, Martin & Fuller, 2015). Coaches tend to embrace their players while they are doing well athletically and academically but are often unable to keep the promises they made while recruiting their student-athletes. According to Harrison, Martin,

and Fuller (2015), participants in their study often felt like they were “as good as their last performance” (p. 87).

Faculty Influence

Similar to coaches, the faculty’s role influences a student-athlete’s academic and career development as well. African American student-athletes face several challenges on college campuses. These include lack of preparation for college-level courses, isolation, lack of African Americans in leadership roles in athletic departments and college campuses (Beamon, 2014). From the early years of the birth of college athletics and the NCAA, the faculty has had a negative view of athletics in higher education institutions (Crowley, 2006). In a longitudinal study conducted by Shulman and Bowen (2001), they found that faculty members are less supportive of student-athletes and college athletics than they were three decades ago. The authors claim that the “shifting attitudes of faculty” is perhaps a result of an increasing number of international faculty who are not involved in the tradition of athletics as a part of the college culture (p.73). Further, the faculty is also not in favor of institutions are reaping the benefits of college athletics, often at the expense of student-athletes’ academic futures (Comeaux, 2010). Student-athletes, especially from revenue generating sports are often stereotyped as “dumb jocks” on college campuses and the community. According to Comeaux and Harrison (2006), the faculty was significantly more involved in assisting White student-athletes than African American counterparts with professional goals and study skills. Hence, for African American student-

athletes, playing the dual role of student and athlete is more challenging due to the prejudices felt on college campuses (Davis, 1995).

Student-Athletes' Identity

While the stakeholders may have their agendas and perceptions regarding the student-athletes' academic ability and development, the student-athletes' own athletic and academic identity play a huge role in the outcome of their academic success and career development. In a study conducted by Cabrita et al. (2014), student-athletes with high athletic identity showed a higher level of career-decision-making self-efficacy and a higher level of optimism regarding the future. However, they also had the intention to choose a sports-related profession in the future. This is due to the high level of sports involvement where athletes often find it difficult to separate their personal identity from their role as an athlete, thus, limiting their career development to the sports context (Brewer, 1993). This hinders the student-athletes' career maturity and their readiness to make informed, responsible and reasonable career decisions.

Overrepresentation in Media

In recent years, the media, especially social media has played a significant role in overrepresenting the success of a few African American professional athletes (Bailey, 2017). However, Bailey (2017), also specifies that the media disguises the fact that less than 2% of all college student-athletes, regardless of their race make it on a professional roster (p. 22). Davis (1999) expounds,

Pick up most American sports dailies, and along with last night's scores, player transcripts and racing results, are page after page of

the black athlete in pictures, rich, superrich, bald-headed, super bald-headed. The downside of such visceral overflow is that it creates a false sense of equity about the American workplace” (p. 889).

The media has fantasized the lives of successful African American professional athletes, as the “rags-to-riches” stories to a point where African American boys often “cling to athletes as role models because, unlike White children, very few African American lawyers, doctors, engineers, or educators are seen in the media” (Bailey, 2017).

Athletic and Academic Identity

In a study conducted by Adler and Adler (1991), due to their athletic commitments, male revenue-generating student-athletes that participated in their study stated that their academic goals began to devalue within the first two semesters. Such demands and expectations lead male student-athletes to focus on their athletic role at the expense of their academic and career development. As Potuto and O’Hanlon (2007) state, the Division I student-athlete participants in their study viewed themselves more as athletes than as students. This is particularly prominent in African American student-athletes as their campus involvement is grossly diminishing (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). African American male scholar-athlete participants from Harrison, Martin and Fuller’s (2015) study revealed that some of their African American teammates had a “flawed view of success.” A participant stated that these teammates were “winning in football but losing in life.” Some of these participants also blamed the

“system” of college athletics that ignores underachievement for the downfall of their unmotivated teammates. According to some of these African American scholar-athletes, these apathetic teammates were putting a “black eye” on African Americans, worsening the perception of their race (Harrison, Martin & Fuller, 2015).

According to some scholars, African American students’ motivation to succeed academically is limited (Harrison, Martin & Fuller, 2015). Although some scholars have challenged that misconception (Harrison, Martin & Fuller, 2015), others have found that African American males have a lower motivation compared to their female counterparts. Coaches, faculty, peers significantly influence these student-athletes’ academic identity and career development. Hence, it is important for African American student-athletes to associate themselves with people who are positive, ambitious and committed to their excellence (Harrison, Martin & Fuller, 2015). Faculty and peer relationships are important for student-athletes’ academic success. These relationships formally and informally assist student-athletes with their academic and personal goals. As Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah, (2006) state, increased interaction with faculty not only enhance student-athletes’ intellectual development but also helps with academic integration (p. 720). Hence, it is critical for African American student-athletes to increase their involvement on campus and associate themselves with peers whose academic and career goals align with theirs and prepare themselves for a successful post-graduate career.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used in this study. This section includes the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, description of sample selection, research design and data collection, and the data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

The Civil Rights movement fought racism in America through non-violent practices. However, after the Civil Rights era, racism still existed, and Critical Race Theory emerged in the 1970s when activists and scholars saw that the progress made during the Civil Rights movement had stalled (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The theory was mainly produced as a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal perspective (Bell, 1980; Bell, 1976; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). After the Civil Rights Movement, the strategies used to fight racism were not as effective (Ladson-Billings, 1998), and legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and others used Critical Race Theory to study and transform the relationship between race, racism, and power in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Critical Legal Studies studied the legal system and its effect on American society; however, it neglected to address racism in its investigation. Even though racism is a permanent fixture in American society, legal scholars understood that racism is hard to address, thus, rarely acknowledged. Hence, Critical Race

Theory, a form of storytelling and critique of liberalism, was developed to study racism and its effects on society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It is considered as an “outgrowth” of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) which eventually expanded to analyze educational laws and policies (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Racism is not an individual belief, but an ongoing, normal way of thinking in the daily lives of Americans (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argue that it is a “usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (p. 7). The emergence of Critical Race Theory started giving people’s stories a voice of color on various social issues. As Ladson-Billings (1998) quotes, “Stories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling and interpreting” (p. 13). It gives people an opportunity to think, feel and experience in a racist society, and furthermore, the experiential knowledge gives them an opportunity to criticize systematic racism.

The NCAA was founded in 1906 as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association (Crowley, 2006). During the early years, due to legal segregation, the NCAA was permitted to exclude African Americans from participating and competing against historically White institutions of higher education (Nwadike, Baker, Brackerbusch, & Hawkins, 2016; Wiggins, 2000). Over a period of time, a few African American student-athletes were given the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics. However, there was a quota for the number of African American participants and only the “exceptionally talented” African American athletes were able to make it on the roster, thus limiting their opportunities (Nwadike et al., 2016). Today, African American athletes have equal

opportunities to compete in college athletics, but years after desegregation, the inequitable NCAA rules continue to affect African American student-athletes.

NCAA academic requirements such as Academic Progress Rates (APR's) and Graduation Success Rates (GSR's) dictate the academic journey of student-athletes while holding institutions accountable for the progress the student-athletes make towards a degree. If student-athletes do not meet the APR requirements, they are ineligible for athletic participation. Furthermore, if the team does not meet the GSR requirement, they are penalized by the NCAA (McCormick, 2014). These requirements give student-athletes limited opportunities to choose as well as change their major throughout their college career, thus impacting their career development process. Since a majority of student-athletes in college football are minorities, especially African American, a full athletic scholarship is no more than a symbolic gesture if their academic journey is tight-leashed by the NCAA and the institutional rules and regulations. Smith (2007) states that African American student-athletes are used "for selfish, explicitly sport purposes by the college and universities that recruit them" (p. 110). In Olsen (1968), Harry Edwards further explains, "African American students aren't given athletic scholarships for the purpose of education. African Americans are brought in to perform. Any education they get is incidental to their main job, which is playing sports. In most cases, their college lives are educational blanks" (p.10).

Intersectionality of race and class plays a role in athletics even today. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explain, "Intersectionality means the examination

of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combination plays out in various settings” (p. 51). Even though race is a permanent crisis in American society, when you add other factors to the equation, the challenges minorities face is beyond just racial injustice (Ladson-Billings, 2013). The intersectionality of race along with other factors like socio-economic condition, family background, and college readiness puts some African American football players at a disadvantage, thus hindering their smooth pathway to success (Figure 1.2). Hence, Bailey (2017) believes that “it is hard to fault a young Black child from a poverty-stricken background with athletic ability, to want to pursue any other avenue for upward social mobility than a professional sports career” (p. 25).

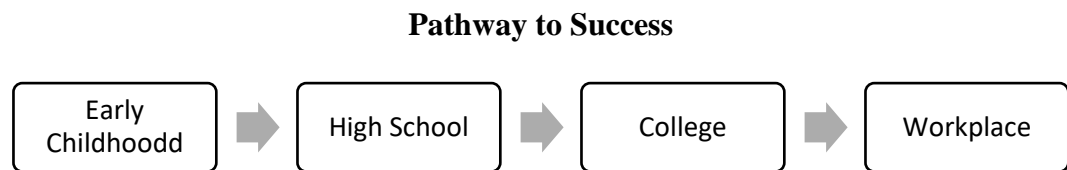


Figure 1.2

Color-Blind Racism

The American system is so constructed that students from poverty are in search of economic independence. Further, the system has identified athletics as a pathway to economic independence. A majority of African American football players in the NCAA are minorities, from a lower socio-economic background who often invest in athletics at a very young age, often relying on using their athletic prowess to get out of poverty or improve their socio-economic condition (Hodge et al, 2008). Often, this pathway excludes academic excellence which is a prerequisite for most career aspirations (Hodge et al., 2008). Studies show the

disparity in the academic preparation of African American and White student-athletes before they enter college (Harrison, Comeaux & Plecha, 2006). Many African American students that are recruited from high schools with insufficient funds are likely to be underprepared for college (Harper, 2018) and when entering college, many African Americans have spent the significant portion of their elementary and high school years preparing themselves to become stellar athletes (Benson, 2000).

Once they are in college, the system perpetuates their desire by preparing them with resources necessary to become stellar athletes at the expense of academic excellence (Comeaux, 2010). This is not to say, that colleges do not provide resources that contribute to academic excellence, but it is proportionately different. Hence, the significant difference in the graduation rates and career readiness of African American and White football players may not only be because of the cultural and social differences, but also inequitable resources from the institutions as well as the NCAA. Further, knowledge and skills required to transition to life beyond high school is often privileged knowledge that is not accessible to students from families and communities who have been historically under-represented in higher education or specific career fields (Conley & Educational Policy Improvement Center, 2012). Therefore, if a professional athletic career is not an option, to sustain themselves, student-athletes must resort to a career choice which they are unprepared for.

One can argue that African American student-athletes face color-blind racism in college in reference to their career readiness. Color-blind racism is an

ideology that is “smooth and seemingly nonracial” in its practice (Bonilla-Silva, 2015) and although the perception is that colorblindness helps people of color and that race does not matter (Tarca, 2005), in reality, it affects the opportunities presented to racial minorities. While the NCAA provides various resources for student-athlete development programming, they are not equitable depending on each student-athlete’s background and needs. Furthermore, the NCAA does not hold the athletic departments accountable to ensure those resources are used at all. The career development programming for student-athletes usually depends on the number of financial resources each athletic department can allot towards student-athlete development.

Abstract Liberalism

According to Bonilla-Silva (2015), abstract liberalism, a core theme within the ideology of color-blind racism “incorporates the notion of liberalism in an abstract and decontextualized manner” (p. 1364). He further states that it gives Whites a “reasonable” and “moral” way to oppose all kinds of interventions to deal with racial inequality. While athletic academic advisors focus on the institutions’ and NCAA’s academic policies and degree completion, often they are formally unequipped to counsel student-athletes on career and employment options (McCalla-Wriggens, 2009). McCormick (2014) points out that high-risk student-athletes, which include students who struggle academically, first-generation college students, or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds need special attention to avoid being career delayed (p. 197). Therefore, if a higher number of African American football student-athletes are high-risk

student-athletes compared to their White counterparts, the White student-athletes' achievements are not solely due to their hard work and merits, but also due to the racial hierarchy.

To avoid white guilt, and white privilege as a reason of inequality, the dominant parties often state that opportunities are equal for all, regardless of the skin color, and the blame for the lack of success needs to be placed on the ability or desire of people of color (Castagno 2008; Feagin 2009; Fine 2004; Gallagher 2003). However, King, Madsen, Braverman, Paterson & Yancey (2008) state that urban, low-income and minority youth lack role models of success to draw upon, and hence they often “utilize media-saturated images of popular culture” to define their career aspirations (p. 37). Consequently, African American student-athletes from low-income families often aspire to play their sport on a professional level, thus, narrowing their view of career options. Therefore, this student-athlete population needs additional career counseling to assist with a substantial non-athletic career plan post-graduation. However, the NCAA and athletic departments, including football coaches use the symbolic gesture of providing career development resources, although inequitable, as a method to justify their attempt to provide equal opportunities for all football players, regardless of their skin color.

Description of Sample Selection

A case study was conducted on nine senior African American football student-athlete at a mid-major Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution. These participants were selected based on three criteria. First, participants must be

in attendance at a Division I institution. Second, each participant must be a current student-athlete on the active roster of the football team within the institution. Third, only student-athletes who are seniors in classification and on full athletic scholarship will be invited to participate in the study.

Research Design and Data Collection

The purpose of this study is to examine the career development experiences of senior African- American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision Institution. A case study was conducted at a southern mid-major Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution for an in-depth analysis of the senior African American football players' perception of career readiness level of the participants and the effectiveness of the processes used by the NCAA and the athletic department. Case studies offer the ability to study a system and all its working parts and purposes and extensively examine a purposive sample (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Additionally, the boundedness of the system and the activity patterns of the population in the case are useful concepts that will assist the researcher in understanding an individual case (Stake, 1998) as well as pursue an external interest of understanding a general phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this specific case study, the research was able to analyze the unique perception of career readiness of each senior African American football player participating in the study. Further, it provided an insight on the support provided to the student-athletes by the athletic department and the NCAA in relation to their career readiness.

A one-hour qualitative open-ended interview was conducted with each participant to gain insight into the experience of senior African- American football players in relation to their career readiness for a non-athletic career post-graduation. An interview gave each of the participants an opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions on their transitions from college athletics to the workforce, and the value of the career development opportunities provided by the athletic department and the NCAA.

The athletic academic services and the athletic compliance departments were contacted to inform them about the study. They were ensured that participants would not gain any personal benefits or receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study. Student-athlete participants were contacted through an initial email, which included a description of the study. The email also served as a formal invitation for the student-athletes to participate in the study. Student-athletes who showed interest in participating in the study by positively responding to the researcher via email received a second email listing potential dates for participating in the interview. The student-athlete participants were given a week to respond to the email and were sent two email reminders. Once they accepted the invitation, they were invited to an interview that lasts approximately 45 minutes. During this interview, the researcher used a pre-planned protocol to ask a series of questions related to their postgraduate career preparedness. In addition, each participant was asked to sign a consent form, which was given to him during the interview. All the information regarding the participants and their participation was held in the strictest of confidence.

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

Research Question 1: To what extent do senior African American football players perceive that they are prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

1. What is your choice of career post-graduation?
2. What is your current major?
 - a. What are the requirements for your current major?
 - b. Does your current major align with your career choice?
3. What were the factors that influenced your selection of your current major?
 - a. Are you pursuing the same major you started off with when you were a freshman?
 - b. If not, what made you change your decision?

Research Questions 2: What processes and procedures do African American football players use to prepare themselves for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

4. What type of internship experience have you had in your career of interest?
5. What type of externship experience have you had in your career of interest?
6. Do you have a resume?
7. Have you considered what job you would want after graduation or after your football career?
8. Do you have a job search plan prior to graduation?
9. Have you researched your career of choice?
10. What careers do you feel equipped to pursue after college?
11. What work experiences have you had in your career area of interest?

12. What process and procedures have you used to prepare yourself for a career after football?

13. Describe the networking opportunities you have engaged within your career area of interest? (Family)

Research Question 3: During their college career, what peak experiences do senior African American football players report as having a significant impact on their preparation for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

14. To what extent, if any, has your family background influenced your career readiness?

15. How would you describe your college experience in sports?

16. How would you describe your college experience in academics?

17. How has your academic and career development experiences been different than those of your teammates?

Research Question 4: What processes and procedures do universities and the athletic departments use to prepare senior African American student-athletes for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

18. What career development activities did you participate in during your time as a student-athlete? Were these opportunities mandatory?

19. What do you think the university/athletic department could have done to enhance your career readiness?

20. If there were one thing you could change about your college career, what would it be?

****Interviewer will ask additional probing questions when needed. ****

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

The low graduation rate of student-athletes has been an issue for the NCAA for decades (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). Academic reforms such as the Academic Progress Rate (APR) and Graduation Success Rate (GSR) have increased graduation rates of all student-athletes, however, there is still a considerable gap in the graduation rates and academic performance of African American student-athletes compared to their White counterparts (Lapchick, 2011). Further, Academic Progress Rate (APR) and Graduation Success Rate (GSR) promote graduation but do not necessarily guarantee a high level of career readiness of these student-athletes. Hence, even today, a large number of African American student-athletes are leaving college after their athletic eligibility is over, unprepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation.

The Background of the Study

African American student-athletes often overemphasize participation in sports from a young age with aspirations of playing at the professional level (Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011). They often aspire to use athletics as an avenue for financial stability and to improve their socio-economic status. However, every year only 1.6% of the draft-eligible football players get an opportunity to play at the professional level (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016), creating an unrealistic expectation for African American football players to compete at the professional level. Further, African American

male student-athletes have continued to underperform academically (Lapchick, 2011). Hence, if they lack commitment to academic and career exploration, it provides them with limited employment opportunities post-graduation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the perception of career readiness level of senior African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution. The essential question to be answered is: *To what extent do senior African American football players perceive themselves prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation?* To answer this question the researcher chose to use qualitative assessment. McMillan & Schumacher's (2009) offers seven steps in analyzing qualitative data. They included:

- Collect data
- Organize data
- Transcribe data into segments
- Code data
- Describe Data
- Categorize Data
- Develop Patterns

Following these steps, the researcher conducted interviews with nine participants. After the interviews were conducted, the data was transcribed, organized, processed and coded by the researcher. The researcher then used thematic data analysis for segmentation of data in meaningful parts, which was further categorized, coded and placed in categories to find common and shared

characteristics that described patterns in the career development of the participants. Through analysis of the data obtained via individual interviews, this study revealed contributing factors that have a significant impact on the career readiness level of African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution. Finally, the results of the study were thematically organized and presented in a textual form in the results section of the study.

Research Site

This study was conducted at an urban mid-major, mid-south public higher education institution in the United States which has a total undergraduate student population of over 21,000. The university's athletics program is home to over 400 student-athletes that are a part of the 18 different, NCAA sponsored, intercollegiate sports. Each of the participants in this study was from the university's Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) football program. The researcher chose to focus this study on football student-athletes only since these student-athletes have a different college experience due to their participation in a revenue-generating sport with extensive media coverage and tend to focus on their athletic career in college and beyond.

Overview of Participants

Nine participants were interviewed for the study. All participants were self-identified as African-American males. Each of the participants was in attendance at the Division I institution where the study was conducted. The participants was student-athletes on the current football roster at the time of the interview. Each of the participants were seniors in classification and on full

athletic scholarships as well. Participants were not from the same recruiting class since this data was collected over a period of two academic years. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in this study to protect their identities and to ensure compliance in accordance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Memphis.

Initially, the researcher had eleven participants interested in being a part of this study, however, two participants did not attend the interview sessions on the scheduled as well as the rescheduled dates citing scheduling conflicts with football commitments. The data collected from the nine interviews were transcribed and analyzed. To ensure the participants' voices and perspectives were portrayed accurately, member checking was conducted after each participant's individual interview. Through member checking, participants were able to raise questions about the manner in which the interviews were analyzed, and how the data will be presented.

Through analysis of qualitative data obtained via individual interviews, this study revealed four contributing themes that had a significant impact on the career readiness level of African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution. These themes were:

- Theme 1: The Role of Football in the Selection and Change of Major by Participants
- Theme 2: Limited Career Readiness Opportunities Due to Participation in Football

- Theme 3: Coaches' Influence on Academic Development and Career

Readiness

- Theme 4: Role of the Athletic Department and University in Career

Readiness

These four themes emerged because of the frequency in which they appeared during data analysis. The information informing the themes were used to answer each of the research questions.

Theme 1: The Role of Football in the Selection and Change of Major by Participants

Football played a significant role in the selection and change of major by the participants. The participants in this study did not perceive that they were prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation because of their involvement in football, often choosing their majors to balance with their athletic commitments, regardless of the major's nonalignment with their career plans. Further, the majority of the participants could not separate their athletic identity from their personal identity, thus, affecting their overall development as a student-athlete. This findings in this theme informed Research Question 1, "To what extent do senior African American football players perceive that they are prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation?" To answer this question, participants were asked the following seven protocol questions related to their major and choice of career:

1. What is your choice of career post-graduation?
2. What is your current major?

3. What are the requirements for your current major?
4. Does your current major align with your career choice?
5. What were the factors that influenced your selection of your current major?
6. Are you pursuing the same major you started off with when you were a freshman?
7. If not, what made you change your decision?

Responses to the first question revealed that three participants were interested in health and sports-related careers, one participant wanted to pursue a career in law enforcement or firefighting, one participant was interested in either business or farming and another participant reported that he was on track to pursue a career in teaching. Further, three participants stated that they were unsure of their choice of career post-graduation. Each participant reported their current major which included Marketing Management, Sport and Leisure Management, Biology, Interdisciplinary Studies, Organizational Leadership, Health Studies, and Physical Education Teaching Education. Further, each participant stated that the requirements of their current major mainly included general education courses, core courses, and five participants said their major requirements included a mandatory internship prior to graduation. However, seven of the participants stated that they changed their major during the course of their college career.

Additionally, seven out of the nine participants indicated that their current major did not align with their career of choice. Five participants cited football as a factor influencing their decision to change their major, one participant reported that he was no longer interested in the major he chose as a freshman, and another

participant stated that he didn't know what career he wanted to pursue when he initially chose his major. Based on the analysis of the responses to the seven protocol questions, it was concluded that the career aspirations of a majority of the participants were different than their career path and the majors they had chosen, and football was a critical factor in the selection and change of major of each of the participants, thus affecting the career path.

A Summary Description of Participant Responses

Participants in this study reported that they did not perceive that they were prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation. A majority of the student-athletes stated that their high level of involvement in football affected their choice of major. Participant A was a Marketing Management major who chose this major because of his "ability to speak and network." He believed his ability to "get along with a lot of different people, from a lot of different places, and a lot of different races" was his strength, which he could use to advance in a career in marketing or management. However, Participant A came to college with the hopes of pursuing a career in Engineering. But he claimed that his class schedule conflicted with his football practice schedule and he had to pursue a different major. He stated, "The football staff said it wouldn't work, they said my class schedule wouldn't work with my practice schedule." The participant's second major of interest was Sports and Leisure Management, but a three-hour-long summer course and the entire structure of that program made him eventually pursue Marketing Management as his major in college.

Participant B came to college with an aspiration to major in Biology. Even though it was tough to manage this major with football, he was on track to graduate with a degree in Biology and pursue his career in the medical field.

Similar to Participant A's decision, Participant C also changed his major from Biology to Interdisciplinary Studies since it offered him more flexibility to pursue different interests and focus on football. After graduating with his bachelor's degree, he plans to attend graduate school to get a master's degree in Health Administration to pursue his ultimate goal of working in the healthcare field.

Some of the participants also stated that their majors did not align with their career plans because their majors were chosen either to balance their athletic commitments or because of their lack of knowledge of non-athletic careers post-graduation. Participant E stated that he chose his major as a freshman without having a specific career of interest, and it was too late to change it when he explored different career options at career fairs on campus. He said,

“I mean, by that time I was just kind of already deep into it and I didn't want to set myself back in school. I felt like me changing [majors] will set me back even though it may not have, but I just didn't want to extend and prolong the time I was in college and school. I didn't want to start all over again”.

Similarly, Participant F was interested in agriculture as a career, but started as a Business major and later changed his major to Organizational

Leadership with a minor in Sports Management. When he was asked what made him change his majors in spite of being interested in agriculture, he responded,

“Honestly, because business was a handful and Organizational Leadership was a step under it. It was just too many classes to take at once for me. Maybe it was my ADHD; maybe I wasn’t responsible enough at the time. I was just trying to get back. Half of the time you are in sports. Of, course, me being an athlete affected my selection of major”.

He further revealed that he looked at other options for majors, but he found it hard to balance football and academics. He said,

“You are like ‘Woah! That’s a lot!’ with football or basketball, or whatever sport you play. I used to love math. Business was one of the majors I chose, and it changed immediately when I got to college when I became a student-athlete”.

Some of the participants further described their inability to separate their athletic identity from their personal identity. A majority of the participants reported that they were so focused on their athletic career from a young age, that they had rarely envisioned a career outside of athletics. Participant G elaborated on student-athletes’ inability to balance athletics and academics without giving up the dreams of pursuing a major of their choice. He chose to pursue Healthcare Administration over Nursing because it was an online program and “doable” with his football commitments. Although the Nursing department was willing to work

around his football schedule to get him in the program, he believed his football commitments took precedence. He stated:

“Basically, football [staff] told me I had to choose and either pay for it myself or go. So, the choice was to play football or pay for it myself, so I decided to stick it out with football. When I first started off, I was in nursing because I love helping people out. I love making a difference in people’s lives”.

But time and schedule conflicts played a role in his change of major. He further stated that he considered going back to school after his college football career was over, but having a family made him change his plans. He said,

“Really, I am not trying to be another statistic on African American males who don’t provide and be there for their child. So, I am trying to make the most of what I have left here. I feel like I can go ahead and knock out this degree and knock out my masters since its only 30 hours and go be with my little girl. And that will be the new norm for my family because no one has been to college. So, I trying to pursue nursing after this doesn’t sound right unless I find an accelerated program that will help me through and I can spend time with my girl at the same time.”

Participant H reported that he always wanted to be an elementary school teacher; however, he had to choose the Physical Education Teaching Education major in the same department instead. When he was asked why, he said,

“It was a conflict with football, I was too far in one major, and didn’t take the standardized test that I needed to take in time and take certain classes to be eligible for football, so I had to take a different route, which was PE. It put me in a better position though, because I think I will like teaching PE. It was an eligibility conflict; if I couldn’t take those classes, I wouldn’t be eligible [to play football]”.

Some participants also stated that they perceived themselves as unprepared for a non-athletic career because they lacked the content knowledge in a preferred career field. For instance, Participant I changed his major from Sport and Leisure Management to Organizational Leadership. He stated that he felt like he would have limited opportunities in a career in athletics. He also indicated, “At the time I chose my major, I didn’t know what I wanted to do. So, I chose something that could go with anything”. He believes that his current major gives him an opportunity to work in any field or organization he chooses to pursue. Hence, despite having a chance to attend college on a full scholarship, a majority of student-athletes’ focus was merely on their athletic aspirations.

Theme 2: Limited Career Readiness Opportunities Due to Participation in Football

The participants in this study reported that they had limited career readiness opportunities due to participation in football. They further stated that they lacked time to invest in their career readiness due to their athletic commitments. The findings in this theme informed the answer to Research Question 2, “What

processes and procedures do African American football players use to prepare themselves for a non-athletic career post-graduation?” To answer this question, participants were asked the following ten protocol questions pertaining to their path of career development:

1. What type of internship experience have you had in your career of interest?
2. What type of externship experience have you had in your career of interest?
3. Do you have a resume?
4. Have you considered what job you would want after graduation or after your football career?
5. Do you have a job search plan prior to graduation?
6. Have you researched your career of choice?
7. What careers do you feel equipped to pursue after college?
8. What work experiences have you had in your career area of interest?
9. What process and procedures have you used to prepare yourself for a career after football?
10. Describe the networking opportunities you have engaged within your career area of interest?

Five participants revealed that they had no prior internship experience, whereas, seven of them stated they didn't have any externship experience. Further, five participants reported that they neither had any work experience in their career of interest or considered and researched a job they would like to pursue after graduating from college. Lastly, the researcher inquired of the networking opportunities the participants had engaged in within their career area

of interest. Three participants responded that they networked with family and friends, teammates, or fraternity members, three participants stated they attended career fairs on campus, and three other participants said they had not networked at all during their college career.

Six of the nine of the participants in this study shared that they wanted to pursue a career in professional football; however, all participants believed that college football had a negative impact on their academic and non-athletic career readiness to some extent. The time commitments, expectations from coaches as well as self-expectations of playing at a professional level made a majority of participants focus less on their long-term goals. Lastly, all participants stated that they did not have a job search plan for a non-athletic career post-graduation.

A Summary Description of Participant Responses

Overall, all the participants in this study reported that they used limited processes and procedures for career readiness for a non-athletic career post-graduation. A majority of the participants stated that they had a misconception about the challenges of balancing athletics and academics in college which influenced their selection of major that did not align with their career paths.

Participant A changed his major twice during his college career and believed that being a student-athlete played a significant role in his academic choices. He thought competing in football at the collegiate level is similar to a full-time job. Comparing himself as a football student-athlete to the rest of the student population, Participant A explained,

“It’s completely different. Some students work part-time jobs, and then go full-time to school, and I see it; that’s hard enough, but it’s another thing when you work a full-time job, and you have to study for your job every night, every single day, and you are doing extra stuff for it. You are putting in your eight hours in the morning, and then you are going in at night to watch film and stuff like that, so I feel like the time management piece is the biggest difference”.

Regarding his college career, Participant A revealed that he wished he had the opportunity to pursue the career he had chosen for himself before coming to college. He also stated that he wished he would have got more playing time in football. Participant A declared,

“Sports...it was just different than what I expected when I first got here. Coming out of high school, they never explained that it was a business. You think you are playing a game, and it is still the same game you have been playing, so you know, you don’t look at it any different than how you looked at it in high school, but it was just more of a business”.

Moreover, Participant A never had an internship or a job during his college career. Furthermore, he had not considered a particular career because he has different areas of interests. Participant A revealed that he was not pursuing a professional career in football and has had a “lot of opportunities and jobs presented” to him outside of athletics since he was a sophomore in college and

may pursue one of those opportunities post-graduation. However, when asked if he has a solidified job search plan, Participant A responded, “None, whatsoever. I am going to wait until after graduation”.

Participant B said he was “fortunate” to have an opportunity to be a student-athlete. He stated,

“Not a lot of people can say they have had a career in sports in college. So, I feel blessed to be able to say that. And I am kind of glad about the relationships I have built and the people I have met through it”.

On the contrary, Participant B also described his college experience as “rough.” On the one hand, he affirmed it as “a great experience meeting people with similar goals.” On the other hand, he stated that balancing football commitments and Biology was a big task. “A lot of other classmates would pull all-nighters, and I have to be up early, so I was not able to do that. So, my study time was cut drastically”. When asked if he would change anything about his academic career in college, he responded:

“I would go back to freshman year, and actually stay up in classes. I would probably study earlier in my career. And not take the general education classes so lightly. In high school, I would get done with my work so fast, and grades below it, that when I would get through it, I would get bored and would go to sleep to keep from getting in trouble. But in college, I would get done with an assignment, and I would just go to sleep after I got the work done”.

Participant B wants to pursue a career in medicine as a sports physician. He mentioned that he never had an internship experience but had worked a summer job during his senior year to “have a step in the door” and network with future employers. He explained, “I am universal. Yes, with my personality, I believe I can succeed in a business environment, sales environments. Pretty much, I am ready to adapt to whatever needs to be done”. However, he did not have a formal career plan following his graduation and planned to use his gap semester to gain work experience and prepare for medical school.

Participant C indicated that football played a significant role in his choice of major and career. He stated that his expectations from college football were different than his experience. He explained, “Coming out of high school, I didn’t think it was going to be this much, so I kind of had to adjust to it at first”. Unable to balance his academic and football commitments, he changed his major. He justified,

“Football was a lot, and I wanted something that could work around my schedule because we travel and miss class and stuff like that. I had a hard time keeping up with it”.

He also indicated that football did not necessarily prepare him for the job force, but he could also use some aspects of his college football career such as a “strong mentality and accountability” in the professional world. He further identified professional football as a career option, but he stated, “I don’t want to put my eggs in one basket” and revealed that if professional football or a career in healthcare does not work out, he would like to be a football coach.

Similarly, Participant C also acknowledged that he had a hard time managing his academic commitments along with football, especially during his freshman year.

He explained:

“Football kind of affects your social life, you have to prepare your mind for it. In the spring, you have to wake up at four in the morning for practice and then you got to go to class. And then you are like ‘I don’t want to go to class today, I have been up since four [in the morning], dog tired, I may not go to class today, I don’t want to hang out, I just want to go back to sleep’.

Participant C further revealed that he did have an internship opportunity that included coaching, leading and mentoring high school student-athletes. But he is unsure if coaching would be one of his options as a career. He further implied his desire to pursue a master’s degree in Health Administration but indicated that he did not have any formal work experience or internships in the healthcare field.

Participant D mentioned that his overall football career was “great,” as well as hard at times. He said that he knew from the beginning that it was not supposed to be easy and he would have to manage his time well to be successful in college. When he was asked about his experience as a football student-athlete, he stated, “I possibly missed out on some career opportunities that other students had, but the school tried to offer athletes the most they can and give an idea on what they should or could do after college.”

Participant D believes that his academic career was reasonably smooth due to the assistance from the athletic advisors and mentors. However, he did disclose that he has seen a few teammates struggle academically because of their aspirations of being a professional athlete.

“I feel like most athletes don’t take that part as serious as they should. And they kind of miss out on some opportunities but it depends on how dedicated and serious you are about doing well in school”.

Participant D further revealed that he had no “solid career plan” post-graduation but knew that he would like to pursue a full-time job in college athletics. He said he had explored careers in athletics through a few internships and part-time jobs he had during the football off-season and summers which have helped him get a foot in the door. He further stated that he relied on LinkedIn to make connections and network with individuals in his field. However, when asked if he would change anything about his career development throughout college, he said:

“That’s a tough question; maybe I would go back and network with more people. But I feel like I am still doing that now. But if I had an opportunity, I would start it earlier, and actually use their contact information rather than just getting it [business cards] for no reason. I would communicate with them”.

Participant E reported that his academic career in college has been full of “ups and downs” since it is difficult to balance “one’s schedule as a football student-

athlete,” especially during the football season. Additionally, he mentioned that he focused on academics to remain eligible:

“There were times when I didn’t really take it seriously as I should have. But one thing about football, it always kept me, it gave me the drive to actually do well academically because I knew if I didn’t do well in academics I could not play. That was part of the reason why I was able to do fairly decent in academics”.

He also acknowledged that teammates impact a student-athlete’s motivation to pursue their academic goals as well. He professed,

“You could definitely tell who takes academics seriously and who doesn’t. I mean, it shows being around certain people that could either influence you to not take it seriously or not do so well or they can motivate you or push you to actually perform well in the classroom”.

Participant E considered his football career to be full of ups and downs. He believed his attitude and confidence played a significant role in that, and it was significantly determined by the coaching changes during his football career. He said, “Originally, I wanted to get into coaching right out of college, but due to a coaching change, I couldn’t do that, so I kind of put it on a back burner.” After the coaching staff pursued job opportunities at a different higher education institution, Participant E believed the changes affected him athletically and academically. He had helped the coaching staff with recruiting, mentoring younger players, breaking down film with hopes of eventually joining the

coaching staff, but with the coaching changes, he said he lost some confidence in his career as a football coach. In the end, he confirmed, “It [football] had its ups and downs. I mean it’s wasn’t the ideal, or what I had planned originally, but it wasn’t bad though”.

Most student-athletes in this study stated that they lacked time to invest in an internship and externship experiences, engaging in networking and a concrete job search plan. For instance, Participant E shared that during his college career, he had neither had any internship or externship experience nor does he have one specific job or career in sight. However, he was hopeful that he would have job offers where he can “be a role model and make a difference”. He is considering joining the police force or be a firefighter, or even become a high school teacher and coach. When asked if he had a job search plan, he replied, “No, I have not been in the process of that whole job search thing, but as far as a plan, I don’t think I do really have one, or sure if I really needed a plan.”

Participant F referred to his college football days as a stressful experience. He revealed, “It is a make or break experience in college. If you don’t make it, you go home”. He described his college experience as “humpy” because of football and his motivation to succeed athletically more than academically.

“Football can be, I am not going to say the main reason, but it is partially the reason, and me, not being 100% focused on the task at hand. Football and school are the only things going on, but at times I wasn’t very focused. I feel like we spend more time working out and practicing rather focusing on school work. So, I came to

college, started off as a business major, even though I wanted to do sports medicine”.

In spite of his experience in college, he indicated his desire to pursue a career in professional football after he graduated. He said,

“All hopes are really up for NFL or CFL, anyone that will pick me up, and after that start looking [for a job]. It shouldn’t be like that though. Anyone that is playing sports is looking to play at the next level and not really think about ‘what if you don’t go pro?’ And when that happens, you got to be ready [for a non-athletic career]”.

However, he did not have a concrete career plan in any non-athletic career fields and is hoping to rely on the connections he made through football to seek employment in the future. Participant F indicated that his plans included going back to school to get a degree in the sports medicine field. He said,

“Yes, I would like to be around the game still, the game of football. With that being said, I would love to be a chiropractor or trainer, an athletic trainer. I would like to go back to school for my undergrad for that”.

When probed about his choice of going back to college for another degree, he mentioned that he would also consider getting a master’s in Engineering and repair cars or open up a car detailing business. He said, “I can go into business by myself. Be my own boss. I could start my own mobile detail shop. I could get a big truck and go around washing cars”. The researcher and the participant further discussed the requirements for a master’s degree in Engineering which included a

bachelor's degree in the same field, to which the participant smiled and responded, "I have not researched a career of choice."

Participant G had a unique experience as a football student-athlete since he was married and parent of a young child at the time. First, he stated that football affected his academic decisions. Furthermore, he claimed that football also disturbed his family and social life. As his schedule got hectic with his football commitments, he had no time to spend with his family, which took a toll on his marriage and parenting responsibilities. He elaborated, "We didn't have time to communicate, go over things, and it just didn't work out. So, football was a big factor in my social life, my family life."

When Participant G was posed with the question of what he would change about his academic experience in college, he responded,

"Focus more on my academics, to be able to....instead of doing the work to just get it done, to actually, study the work. And understand why I am doing it. Some of it is busy work, and some is like "I am never going to use this in life" and still try to understand it and relate to it."

He further revealed that he would take more ownership of his academics than letting the academic counselors or football coaches dictate it. He commented,

"They are setting up your life, without any input from you.

Selecting your major, choosing my classes, choosing a career.

They give you a scholarship, but you sign your life over. Your

social life, your family life, your selection of a major, your life

after football. You either make it in football or not make it in life".

Furthermore, he indicated that he did put forth a lot of effort in his academic development. However, he did suggest that not all his teammates focus on their academic or career development. He reported,

“Really, a lot of them don’t think about life outside of football until it comes to the last semester and then they are like ‘Oh, snap! What if I don’t get that call from the NFL’. And I am like, ‘I have been thinking about that for 2-3 years now’. Because I mean, it was always something that had been on my mind. It feels like I had not actually lived in the moment of college, of football and everything. I have been pushing it along, pushing it along so I can get done with it. So, the difference with them is they have had a chance to live in the moment and have a lot of fun, and everything. Not really me. I wanted to be stable and be happy, take care of family”.

Participant G did believe his transition into a non-athletic career post-graduation would be relatively smooth since he was hardworking because of his athletic background. “I mean, football is like doing two-three jobs at once. Because you are always doing something. You always have meetings; you have to be on call at all times of the day”. He further stated that football is not necessarily his primary choice of career post-graduation and that he would like to keep his options open to careers in health-related fields.

“With me getting over another concussion, it is scary and yes, I try to be selfish and say, ‘You know, I am just going to do it and try to

play football', but still I got to think of my family at the end, and I am trying not to hurt myself any more than I already have been. If I get a shot to go, I will take it, and give my all, but I am not going to go chase it'.

Participant G said that although he did not have a job search plan, he had worked extensively to gain internship experience in the healthcare field during his college career and network with people in his field. He said that he had also started looking for internships or graduate assistantship positions as well as job opportunities to pursue after graduation. Furthermore, he had also been to job fairs and networked with people who worked in Healthcare Administration. Participant G believed he needed to work on building his "brand." Regarding his plan in the health administration, he said he was,

"Trying to build something, and basically just build your personal brand, to actually get out there- it is pretty difficult. And it is about who you know, a lot of the times, and not what you know, but it's good to have something that you are specializing in, and you can just hit back to back knowledge about that to people, and it makes you sound a lot better, and people like that and want that. And so, it will be fun if I can find something in that area, but it takes so long to build that".

Participant H declared that he had grown a lot academically throughout his college career. And although he had a lot of resources from the athletic academic

services department, he felt stereotyped because of his academic background from high school. He revealed,

“Knowing where I came from, knowing what I had to go through, it started off rough, because I was pretty much targeted and stereotyped because of my low ACT scores. I had to go to class, go to study hall, make good grades, which was my way of challenging myself. Because everyone looked at me like ‘he may not make it’”

However, he did well throughout his college career and said that he spent considerable time networking with people that could help him advance in his career. He said, “The biggest thing is knowing you can’t go to people knowing that you are not going to do anything on your end. That’s the biggest thing people need to know”. Participant H admitted that he still had hopes of playing professional football but has always been aware that not everyone gets an opportunity to pursue football as a profession. In the meantime, he was willing to pursue other lucrative offers in non-athletic careers as well. He said,

“I did have one job offer during my senior year, but I want to pursue football. So, it passed it off me. But now I am reaching out to my high school coach, people I knew, looking online who needs a PE teacher, and reaching out to those principals”.

Lastly, Participant I stated that he believed he was prepared to pursue a lucrative career in Healthcare Administration if professional football was not an option after graduation. Participant I also recounted his academic experience in

college as challenging. If he had an opportunity to do it all over again, he said he would be more focused on his academic commitments. He revealed,

“In college, you have a lot of distractions and a lot of commitments, and you have to focus more on yourself. I would focus more on preparing myself for the future. I feel like as college athletes; it’s hard. As athletes, you focus more on furthering the sport they are playing. But in reality, everybody is not going to make it into the next level. But your mind is still focused on sports, so you just have focus more on what you are going to do after football. That’s what I would do”.

Participant I stated that he did not have a lot of work experience due to football commitments and that he was unsure of what he would like to do. He also revealed that he had an internship that he was unable to complete because his football commitments took precedence. He also did not have a concrete job search plan. He stated,

“My job search plan is really to try it and see if I like it or try to find something else. I don’t do any surveys to see what your major best suits a career. If it sounds interesting, I give it a shot, if not I will just look for something else”.

Participant I believed playing football helped him network and get some part-time summer jobs working at the football office, hosting football camps that gave him some experience on how to organize events. However, overall, he

believed he was less focused on his academics and career development due to his football commitments.

Theme 3: Coaches' Influence on Academic Development and Career

Readiness

According to the participants in this study, their coaches had a considerable influence and impact on their academic and career development. The student-athletes believed that their college experience was directed by their relationship with their coaches, both positively and negatively. The findings in this theme addressed Research Question 3, "During their college career, what peak experiences do senior African American football players report as having a significant impact on their preparation for a non-athletic career post-graduation?" To answer this question, participants were asked the following four protocol questions pertaining to their path of career development:

1. To what extent, if any, has your family background influenced your career readiness?
2. How would you describe your college experience in sports?
3. How would you describe your college experience in academics?
4. How has your academic and career development experiences been different than those of your teammates?

All the participants in the study stated that their family had an impact on their motivation to attend college. A majority of the participants came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and a few of them had parents with college degrees. Further, they started playing football at a young age with hopes of playing at the

collegiate and professional level. While some participants believed their family helped them stay focused on their academics, others indicated that their family background motivated them to graduate and enter the workforce to improve their socio-economic status. However, a majority of participants relied heavily on other sources such as coaches, mentors, friends, and teammates to explore their career opportunities.

Similar to family members, coaches played a significant role in the participants' academic and career aspirations. While some participants believed that their coaches had a positive impact on their college career and beyond, others felt that the coaches hindered their career readiness by overemphasizing football over academics and career development.

A Summary Description of Participant Responses

Participants in this study reported that the relationship between the coach and athlete directed the student-athlete's academic and career development. While some participants believed the relationship with their coach was positive and helped their overall development, others stated that their coaches helped them athletically, but had little influence off the field. Participant A maintained that coaches had played a significant role in his college career. Interestingly, he has had four position coaches in four and half years, but he claimed his last coach had been the most influential in "the way he carries himself, the way he makes us carry ourselves is big". However, he said that coaches often had a dialogue with the team on being ready for life after college but did not talk about what they need to do for career development post-graduation.

Conversely, Participant B disclosed that not all his college coaches influenced on his academics and professional development. Having experienced coaching changes during his college career, he said the previous coaches taught him “to adapt and change his mentality based on a situation,” but they did not have much influence on his professional development.

Several of the participants shared that coaching turnover has a significant impact on their college experience. Each of the participants in this study had experienced coaching turnover and had played under two different head coaches and at least two position coaches. Like Participant B, Participant C revealed that his family influenced his academic goals, but coaches taught him accountability and teamwork. He states, “They taught me how they handle certain situations, and not be argumentative” and “get the job done, and basically be ready for whatever the job throws at you”. Participant C also revealed that his experience with two different coaching staffs was distinct. He mentioned that the previous coaches taught him to be adaptable to different situations and other characteristics like “being accountable, being on time” and “being ready and basically, for whatever the job throws at you.”

Participant D didn’t consider the coaches had much of an influence on his career development in college. However, Participant E had a unique perspective. He believed that although his teammates’ backgrounds influenced their academic and career development, the coaches’ attitudes towards each of their players also had an impact on the same. He claimed,

“You know some people probably didn’t work hard in high school. They didn’t have to either work hard to receive grades because they either were great athletes or knew somebody or they were good with some teachers or something like that. I feel like certain athletes didn’t have so much to worry about anything because they were needed by the coaching staff or the program to perform. So, a lot of things were taken care of them when it comes to stuff like that”.

He further revealed that coaches provided student-athletes with assistance with networking based on their athletic ability. He stated, “As long as you were able to perform, the coaching staff or anybody thought they needed you, they would do what they can to help.” He further stated that the coaches chose who they chose to assist with networking for jobs after graduation. He claimed,

“I feel like the coaches choose who they will help after college based off of the status of their performance on the field. So, I feel like a lot of people didn’t get the same opportunities after graduation or weren’t presented the same opportunities as far as helping find a career or helping reach out and network just to try to help us”.

When he was asked if the coaching staff influenced his preparation for life after football, he replied,

“They tried to put an emphasis on being prepared for life, and how to handle certain life situations, but as far as influencing career, no,

if you compared football to an actual job, they taught how to be on time, and do certain things, stuff like that, but that's it".

Participant F said that football helped him prepare for life in a "get up and go get it" way. On the one hand, he stated that the coaches often asked the student-athletes about their plans and taught the players how "to work and go get it on your own." He said, "Every speech that comes out of the coaches' mouth is "what are you going to do after football?" On the other hand, he also revealed that the coaches provided limited career development opportunities to the team because of the lack of time due to football commitments.

Similar to Participant E, Participant G indicated that coaches' influence on each student-athlete was different, based on their athletic ability, influence on the team, and at times, their race. He revealed how some teammates came late to football practice due to their class schedule; however, he was not allowed to do the same, which resulted in him changing his major. He believed that several teammates had "an upper hand" because they were good at football, while certain other teammates had a stronger family background that influenced their academic decisions, unlike some first-generation student-athletes which made a difference in their academic and career development.

Moreover, Participant G stated that a student-athletes' status on the team, and often their racial background also had an impact on how coaches disciplined the student-athletes. He claimed that an African American student-athlete was dismissed from the team for having a weapon in possession. He further detailed,

“You got all these White country boys with their gun racks in the windows of their pickup trucks or whatever. And nothing happened to them, they took them down after an incident, but you know, no one paid attention to that kind of stuff, no one said nothing.”

He said, “But then, being black is rough.” When he was asked if being an African American student-athlete rough as well, he responded,

“It is. At times, because you have that target on your back of someone who is up there, and everybody knows who you are and everything. I think being a regular student is easier because you can hide from social media and all that stuff”.

Furthermore, he stated that some of his White teammates had less severe punishments for violating team rules. He then said,

“But if it was me, I would lose my scholarship and had to go work at McDonald’s or something that. And it’s not like we, [African American student-athletes] like these kids [White student-athletes] have a backup plan, they always have a backup plan. Usually, their family is pretty wealthy or better off than most black families”.

On the contrary, Participant G stated that his coaches have “always been the pushers” and made sure he was “on the right track”. He said he looked at them like “father figures”. However, there was a difference between high school and college coaches. He referred to college football as “business more than anything.” Then he stated, “But my high school coach, he knew I could get out of the city

with football. He knew I was smart enough to do academics” and that he pursued college football because his high school coach had faith in him.

Participant H and Participant I both stated that their coaches had more influence on their overall life skills and instilled attributes such as time management, teamwork, being prepared. However, they both also indicated that their football commitments took precedence over their career development, which was mainly dictated by the football coaches. Similarly, as mentioned in Theme I, some of the participants also shared that their coaches steered them towards a major that did not conflict with their athletic commitments, thus, affecting their career plans post-graduation.

Theme 4: Role of the Athletic Department and University in Career

Readiness

Lastly, the participants shared that the role of the athletic department and university had an impact on their career readiness as well. According to the student-athletes, the majority of the career development opportunities provided for the student-athletes were not mandatory, and student-athletes dictated their career preparedness. Further, they stated that athletic departments did not offer any career development programs specifically geared towards African American student-athletes to help them navigate through their unique challenges. The findings in this theme in addressed the final research question of the study, “What processes and procedures do universities and the athletic departments use to prepare senior African American student-athletes for a non-athletic career post-graduation?” Each of the participant interviews ended with three interview

protocol questions regarding the role of the university and the athletic department in the career readiness of the student-athletes to address the fourth research question:

1. What career development activities did you participate in during your time as a student-athlete? Were these opportunities mandatory?
2. What do you think the university/athletic department could have done to enhance your career readiness?
3. If there were one thing you could change about your college career, what would it be?

All of the participants reported that the athletic department did offer career development activities but not all the events and opportunities were mandatory. Therefore, they took advantage of very few of these activities due to time constraints because of football-related activities.

A Summary Description of Participant Responses

A majority of the participants in this study reported that the university and the athletic department provided limited career development opportunities for their student-athletes. Further, Participant A said that the athletic department did “a pretty good job for what they are working with. I got enough opportunities through them”. However, Participant A also pointed out that his college experience was not what he expected it to be. He stated:

“I have been in college for four and a half years, I have only opened maybe five books. If that kind of sums it up. I know it’s

kind of broad, but I mean I don't want to say it's a joke, but I don't feel like everyone should be forced to go to college. I think it should be a choice".

Participant B said that he was offered a summer job through the athletic department that helped him network with professionals in the field of science and medicine. However, similar to Participant A, he did not feel challenged in his general education courses. He stated that if he could change anything about his college career, he would "go back to freshman year, and actually stay up in classes. I would probably study earlier in my career. And not take the general education classes so lightly".

Participant C hoped to have more hands-on assistance in his career planning from the athletic department and the university. He stated:

"I probably think coming in a freshman, we [academic counselors and him] could have probably sat down and talked about career plans. If I would have talked about that earlier, instead of into my junior-senior year, I would have had a head start. I kind of had an idea, but as a freshman, you are 18-19, I really wasn't thinking about it, thinking ahead, too much in advance. The university could have come earlier and talked about career readiness and resume and stuff like that, different jobs you can get with this degree, just lay it out there".

Participant D said that he learned about different careers in his field through his classes, but he only participated in a few career development

opportunities presented by the university. He stated, “I went to one career fair. I don’t think it really helped me as much as I wanted it to”. He said,

“We did a few things through the athletic department but it’s all kind of a blur. People would come to the [football] complex and talk to us about different careers. But only a few of the things were mandatory through the team”.

Lastly, he mentioned that he didn’t have a mentor through the athletic department, but he knew if he asked for help, people will help him find a job.

The participants further shared that the career development and networking opportunities presented by the athletic department were not mandatory, thus, leaving it up to the student-athlete to dictate their career preparedness. Participant E stated that his career development through the university was different than some of his teammates and that each student-athlete had a different experience based on their status on the team. He stated that opportunities were presented often, but they were not equitable to all student-athletes. He mentioned that he did an internship although it wasn’t pertaining to his career and he also took part in community service events, so he could give back as well as network with people in the community.

Lastly, the participants also reported that there were no career development programs specifically geared towards African American student-athletes to help them navigate through their unique challenges.

Participant E and Participant F both believed that the university could have offered more mandatory and non-mandatory career development opportunities and well as an internship to enhance their career readiness. They both stated that it was difficult to gain internship experiences because of their football commitments. Participant F said that the football staff promoted academic excellence and career development by inviting Fortune 500 companies' leaders as guest speakers, but even those opportunities are limited. "They get the ball rolling. But you have to be smart enough to go and say, 'Hey, how about I try to reach out to this person to ask for a time to meet'". Meanwhile, Participant G had a unique perspective on what African American student-athletes needed to prepare for a career post-graduation. He believed that the athletic department needed to involve more African American community members in their career readiness. He stated,

"Get more African American men that that haven't been fed from the silver spoon. Get more guys that have been brought up from the dirt and didn't choose the football way, but chose academics or their career, something like that".

He further indicated that the university needed to offer a specific program to prepare African American student-athletes. He said,

"Put a name on it, 'African American Male Development.' You know, most guys will be intimidated by things like that, but it

actually puts it out there like, ‘hey, they are trying to do something for us’”.

He also declared that some of his White teammates might get offended that specific opportunities for career development were offered explicitly to African American student-athletes only. But he stated, “But they need to open their eyes and see that “hey, we are just trying to help, and do this and that” make it equitable.” He further explained,

“My White teammates are blind to the fact that they have the brand, their life, and everything, to be honest, they are privileged. Regardless, they came out of the womb, and they were White. You were privileged. White males are over it all. And they run the country”.

Hence, he believed he needed African American non-athletic males to be role models and “show what life looks like with a suit and tie, instead of a uniform.” He further informed that the career development events that the athletic department organizes are not usually mandatory; however, the ones that the football program arranges have to be attended by everyone on the team. He also stated,

“And sometimes I am like ‘I don’t want to do this,’ but then I take advantage of it anyways. Someone came and talked to us about building our brand. So, I have been taking that hard, actually trying to build my brand, what image people have of me, when they see my name, what do they think?”

Lastly, he declared that he found it hard to focus on his future even with all the events the athletic department organized for the student-athletes.

“You are always so tired. You don’t have the energy to put forth the effort into focusing on your future. You are at these events, only so you don’t get punishment”.

Similarly, Participant H indicated that career development programs were presented to his team, but it depended on each of the student-athletes how much they wanted to invest in their own career readiness. He said,

“No, it wasn’t mandatory, but if you wanted to get yourself out there, there was an opportunity, and you could take advantage of it. They won’t force you, but they will offer it to you. We had a guy [Student-Athlete Development Coordinator] we could go to, but it’s up to you, how bad you want it”.

Participant I’s perspective on career development for student-athletes was similar to the majority of the other participants. He said,

“Did it differ? Of course! Everyone has their own choice of career path, but we were all given the same opportunities. We had the same help, the same coaches, and the same plan every day. But everybody has different career paths. The career path they chose- it differed”.

When asked what made it different, he stated,

“Growing up, this person might want to do something different than me, work harder or not work harder based on how they grew

up. I think the cultural background, how they grew up and where they came from, the things that they had to go through. Socio-economic- it's like if they came from lower, they might not care, or have a bad attitude because they came from nothing or don't care much, but then some other person came from nothing, and that will make the work harder- it depends on the person".

Four themes emerged from the data analysis. Each of the themes confirms the experiences of the participants related to their career readiness. It further analyzes the perception of their career readiness in relation to each of the research questions of this study.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perception of career readiness level of senior African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution. After conducting interviews with participants, four themes emerged that answered the research questions because these themes appeared consistently during data analysis. These themes were:

- Theme 1: The Role of Football in the Selection and Change of Major by Participants
- Theme 2: Limited Career Readiness Opportunities Due to Participation in Football
- Theme 3: Coaches' Influence on Academic Development and Career Readiness
- Theme 4: Role of the Athletic Department and University in Career Readiness

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the findings of the study, draws conclusions and offers recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: To what extent do senior African American football players perceive that they are prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

An analysis of the data revealed that participants in this study did not perceive that they were prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation. The influencing factors for not being prepared were that their majors did not align with their career plans, their high level of involvement in football, inability to separate their athletic identity from their personal identity, and lack of content knowledge in a preferred career field.

One of the first steps towards planning a career is choosing a major towards your career goals. In this study, a majority of the participants reported that they changed their major during their college career. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 80 percent of college students in the United States change their major at least once. Furthermore, college students change their major at least three times over throughout their college career on an average (Ramos, 2013). But, in this study, a majority of participants let their athletic commitments impact their selection of major. The athletic expectations from these student-athletes overshadowed their commitment to academics, and career exploration and their majors were chosen based on self-assessment, rather than their career interests.

Student-athletes' own athletic and academic identity plays a role in athletic and academic success. If student-athletes have a high level of sports

involvement, they often find it difficult to separate their personal identity from their role as an athlete, thus, limiting their academic and career development (Brewer, 1993). Similarly, some of the participants in this study could not separate their athletic identity from their personal identity. Some of the participants changed their major and thus, their career path so they could balance their athletic and academic commitments, while others stated that they had to change their major to meet the NCAA's 'percentage towards degree' rules and remain eligible to participate in athletics.

One of the keys to career readiness that the Conley Readiness Model states are necessary for entry into a successful career is content knowledge. Content knowledge refers to the key foundational content of the core subject areas that students need to gain insight into for optimal career readiness including the technical knowledge and skills related to the career the student aspires to work in after college (Conley, 2012). However, if the participants are pursuing a major to compete in college athletics, they may not have enough core knowledge of the career they are interested in pursuing.

All the participants in this study were on track to graduate within a semester, or an academic year, however, a majority of participants reported that their majors did not align with their career plans. Only one participant stated that he came to college with an idea with what he wanted to study, and although football was time-consuming, his initial interest in major and career prevailed the athletic expectations. Hence, similar to what Hodge et al. (2008) reported in their study, the data of this study revealed that while competing at the collegiate level,

the participants are expected to perform at an optimal level in athletics, often leaving academics on the back burner and leaving college fairly unprepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation.

Research Question 2: What processes and procedures do African American football players use to prepare themselves for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

An analysis of the data revealed that the participants used limited processes and procedures. The participants also had a misconception about college athletics and academics, thus, influencing their selection of major which did not align with their career paths. Due to the emphasis on athletics, the participants lacked time to invest in internship and externship experiences, engaging in networking and a concrete job search plan.

The intrinsic desire to be the best one can be and take advantage of the opportunities determines the future success of students. “Current research has shown that the need for career planning and placement assistance among college students has become extremely comprehensive and intense” (Orndorff & Herr, 1996, p. 632). However, the participants in this study indicated a misconception about college academics and athletics, one that elevates them above the norm, and gives them a peak experience in athletics. A majority of the participants wanted to pursue a career in professional football and came to college with a misconception that football was a primary commitment over academics.

College students need have various career needs including selecting a major that aligns with their career path, entry-level work experience in their field,

preparing for the workforce, as well as networking with people in their field of choice (McBride & Muffo, 1994; Weissberg, Berentsen, Cote, Carvey & Health, 1982). The Conley Readiness Model defines the key ‘Transition Knowledge and Skills’ as the ability of the student to successfully navigate the transition from high school to college and later into the workforce (Conley, 2012). Unfortunately, none of the participants in this study reported in-depth involvement in any professional development opportunities during their college career. Each of the participants consistently revealed that their participation in football and the time commitments impacted their academic and career development opportunities. They also stated that they had experienced their teammates struggle to balance their life as a student-athletes, thus affecting their plans post-graduation. Majority of the participants had varied career interests; however, they had not extensively researched careers in those fields. Furthermore, very few participants had internship and externship experience, a job search plan or had engaged in significant networking opportunities to get lucrative job offers after graduation.

The Conley Readiness Model also states that the information on transition knowledge and skills is often privileged knowledge and is not equally accessible to all students. Families and communities that are underrepresented in higher education or certain career fields are least likely to have access to this knowledge (Conley, 2012). Studies have reported that African American families are more likely to put a lot more emphasis on athletics for their children from a young age (Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011). In this study, all the participants stated that their family had an impact on their motivation to attend college.

However, student-athletes' parent's socioeconomic status and level of education are significant factors in their support for academic excellence, which then influences the student-athlete's academic commitment (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). A majority of the participants in this study came from lower socio-economic backgrounds and were first-generation college students. The study revealed that few of the family members of the participants helped them with their academic and career development, while other participants indicated that their family background motivated them to graduate and enter the workforce to improve their socio-economic status.

Due to the athletic and academic commitments, the life of a typical student-athlete is very stringent, which eventually affects their academic and social life on campus (Comeaux, 2010). The participants from this study showed a similar pattern with lack of time to engage in career readiness opportunities and activities, limited work experience, and no formal job search plan prior to graduation. Although the participants were uncertain of football being a future occupation, there was a degree of uncertainty about what they wanted to do after college. Furthermore, their lack of involvement in internships and externship opportunities prevented them from gaining valuable experience and skill set for a fulfilling career after graduation.

Research Questions 3: During their college career, what peak experiences do senior African American football players report as having a significant impact on their preparation for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

Analysis of the data revealed that the relationship between the coach and athlete directed the student-athlete's academic and career development. Further, the findings also showed that coaching turnover has a significant impact on the student-athletes' college experience as well.

Coaches have a significant influence on their student-athletes' development, as a player and as a person, on and off the field (Solomon, 2016). As Solomon (2016) states, "The context and quality of the relationship between coach and athlete is likely to facilitate or inhibit the development of the athlete." They control a significant amount of the student-athletes' times for athletic commitments, which often limits the amount of time student-athletes can engage in their academic and career development (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Comeaux, 2010). Findings of this study revealed similar patterns of experiences shared by the participants. The participants in this study stated that their experience with their coaches played a significant positive and negative role in their academic choices and their career development.

Coaches wear multiple hats which not only allow them to help their student-athletes academically but also foster their proficiency with life skills (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017). However, coaches are often focused on wins and losses, even at the expense of their student-athletes' academic and career

development. In the study conducted by Harrison, Martin, and Fuller (2015), participants revealed that during recruiting, coaches might encourage their players to pursue a major of choice, but once the student-athletes are on campus, the focus is mainly on athletic eligibility (p. 87). Similarly, two participants in this study revealed that the coaching staff steered them towards a major that did not conflict with practice times and other football commitments, in spite of their interests in the field of their major. Participants in Harrison, Martin and Fuller's (2015) study also stated that they often felt like they were "as good as their last performance" (p. 87). A participant in this study also said that the coaches treated football "as a business." Another participant revealed that coaches tend to embrace their players while they are doing well athletically and are invested in their academic and career development depending on their status on the field, thus providing inequitable opportunities for student-athletes on their team.

Coaches spend a considerable amount of time with their student-athletes which puts them in a unique position to strengthen their student-athletes' academic and career development (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017). However, coach turnover has an effect on student-athletes on and off the field. Studies have shown that coaching turnover can have a negative impact student-athletes academic experience in college (Johnson, Wessel & Pierce, 2012; Johnson, Blom, Judge, Lee, Pierce & Ridley, 2013). Similarly, in this study, some of the participants stated that the coaching turnover affected their academic and career path. Two participants indicated that they had two head coaches and four position coaches in four years, with each coach having a different perspective and investment towards

their academic and career development. Another participant shared that he was working towards earning a graduate assistantship with his coaches after graduation, but with the coaching changes, the new coaching staff could not guarantee him a spot on their coaching staff, thus, changing the course of his career path.

Overall, the majority of the participants indicated that their coaches had a positive influence on their college career, but treated football as a business, often at the expense at the student-athletes' academic and career development. While some participants believed the experiences were similar for all their teammates, others indicated that one's experience with their coaches depended on their athletic ability and significance on the team or even their racial and socio-economic background.

Research Question 4: What processes and procedures do universities and the athletic departments use to prepare senior African American student-athletes for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

The data analysis revealed that the university and the athletic department provided limited career development opportunities for their student-athletes. Also, the career development and networking opportunities presented by the athletic department were not mandatory, thus, leaving it up to the student-athlete to dictate their career preparedness.

The objective of higher education is to prepare their students for the workforce with a meaningful degree and become productive members of society (Conley, 2012). Similarly, the aim of higher education institutions and its athletic

departments, and the NCAA should be to provide their student-athletes a high-quality educational experience, along with opportunities for personal development and career readiness. However, the experiences of the participants in this study did not align with the mission of higher education or the NCAA. Freeman (2018) states, “The ability to transition successfully into the university environment represents an important first step to fulfilling both the NCAA core values and the overall mission of higher education” (p.4). But a majority of the participants reported that they changed their major, which did not align with their career paths. With either a semester or an academic year from graduating, a majority of these student-athletes neither had an internship or work experience, nor a job search plan.

Student-athletes are graduating at a record number since the academic initiatives such as Academic Progress Rate (APR) and Graduation Success Rate (GSR) were put in place by the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2016). However, graduation from college does not necessarily guarantee a high level of career readiness. The NCAA provides an extensive amount of resources on their website, through leadership development conferences, and programming. But the NCAA does not mandate member institutions to incorporate any of their career development programs for their student-athletes. Hence, the amount of career development opportunities that student-athletes are offered often depends on the institution’s athletic department’s financial and personnel resources.

Participants in this study reported that their athletic department provided limited networking and career development opportunities. Further, the athletic

department offered limited mandatory career preparation, so participants were likely to not take advantage of it because of their overwhelming athletic commitments. Hence, the only process they used to prepare for a career was a conversation with individuals, talking to friends and family members. As stated earlier, the key transition knowledge and skills are often privileged knowledge and are not equally accessible to all students, especially students from families and communities that are underrepresented in higher education or certain career fields (Conley, 2012). If students don't have prior knowledge, they may not understand the importance of career development. A majority of student-athletes who participated in this study were first-generation students. With limited prior knowledge of college and career readiness, these students needed equitable career development opportunities in college to be prepared for the workforce.

A great number of African American student-athletes compete in athletics from a young age with hopes of being professional athletes (Harrison, Sailes, Rotich, & Bimper, 2011). Further, the media emphasizes the "rags to riches" stories of professional athletes which tempt student-athletes to focus on their athletic careers to improve their socio-economic status (Bailey, 2017). As African American first-generation student-athletes, a majority of these participants also faced similar unique challenges in college. As one of the participants stated, it is important for institutions and athletic department to provide leadership and career development opportunities specifically geared towards African American student-athletes to better prepare them for the workforce post-graduation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that several stakeholders like family and friends, coaches, the higher education institutions as well as the NCAA have an impact on a student-athlete's career readiness. Although the findings in this study cannot be generalized to all institutional types or even all Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institutions, all athletic academic counselors and student-athlete development coordinators who work with African American male student-athletes should consider the following implications and recommendations for policy and practice.

First, parents of African American children need to emphasize education rather than athletics from a young age. This gives the student an opportunity to be ready for college even if they are athletically gifted and offered an opportunity to play at the collegiate level. Since only a small percentage of student-athletes have an opportunity to play at the professional level, it is essential for parents to motivate their children to explore other career paths along with athletics. It is pertinent for parents of African American male student-athletes to not limit the potential of their children to play professional sports only.

Second, it is important for higher education institutions and their athletic departments to begin the career readiness process with their African American student-athletes from their freshman year. Although African American student-athletes have equal opportunities to compete in college athletics while getting a college degree, the inequitable NCAA rules, as well as resources, continue to affect African American student-athletes. A majority of the student-athletes in this

study were either high-risk students, which included students who struggled academically, were first-generation college students or students from a lower socio-economic background. Therefore, a lack of career readiness cannot be placed on the ability or desire of these student-athletes only, but also on the inequitable resources provided for them to succeed post-graduation. Hence, the athletic department or the institution does not need to provide equal, but equitable career development opportunities for all their student-athletes.

Similar to the literature, a majority of the participants in this study reported that they competed in athletics at a young age, with an aspiration to compete at the professional level. With such a narrow view of career options, these student-athletes needed additional career counseling to assist with a substantial non-athletic career plan post-graduation. Hence, the higher education institutions need to provide leadership and career development opportunities specifically for African American student-athletes in relation to the unique challenges they face preparing themselves for the workforce. Additionally, athletic departments need to provide positive African American male role models from non-athletic career fields who can influence African American male student-athletes and their self-efficacy to secure non-athletic careers post-graduation. Student-athlete development programming can be highly beneficial for student-athletes. Hence, athletic departments need to make it a priority to invest in individual African American student-athletes' career development and provide equitable opportunities to assist them in attaining their career goals.

Lastly, the athletic advisors or student-athletes development coordinators in collaboration with the higher education institutions' Career Services department, need to assist African American student-athletes to explore internship and externship opportunities related to their career fields. Also, the athletic department should encourage their student-athletes to engage in internships and externships during the summer or off-season semesters for valuable work experience.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perception of career readiness of senior African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution. This study does not attempt to discourage African American male student-athletes from aspiring to play sports at a professional level. However, it does encourage them to invest in their non-athletic career post-graduation as well since the findings of this study reveal that athletic participation has consistently played a negative role in the career readiness of African American football players. Although African American football student-athletes are still graduating at a lower rate than their White counterparts, the ones who graduate do not necessarily show a commitment to career development. Their academic decisions are influenced by the commitment to football, which may not be a choice of vocation in the near future. Also, as reported by the participants in this study, student-athletes tend to rely on their inner circle for networking, rather than using the career exploration opportunities provided by the institution or athletic department. Hence, it is important for athletic departments to restructure

the academic and career counseling for African American football student-athletes to ensure graduation as well as career readiness.

Recommendation for Further Study

There is a growing amount of research on African American male student-athletes' graduation and academic experiences at Division I institutions; however, there is still a limited amount of research on the career readiness of these student-athletes. As stated earlier, graduation from college does not guarantee a high level of career readiness. Hence, further research on the African American male student-athletes' experiences and aspirations as well as the support provided by various stakeholders could prove to be beneficial for future African American male student-athletes. Future studies should also include the perception of parents, coaches, athletic academic counselors and administrators of their role in the career readiness of African American student-athletes to prepare them for life after sports. Researchers could review academic records of the participants and align them with the responses of the participants to questions related to their career readiness. Lastly, researchers could conduct a longitudinal study that follows the career path of student-athletes after graduation.

This study will assist higher education institutions and their athletic department enhancing their student-athlete development programs. Additionally, the National Collegiate Athletic Association can use this study to emphasize career readiness along with the graduation rates of student-athletes

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Appendix A

Individual Interview Guide

The researcher will ask the following questions to the participants:

Research Question 1: To what extent do senior African American football players perceive that they are prepared for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

1. What is your choice of career post-graduation?
2. What is your current major?
 - a. What are the requirements for your current major?
 - b. Does your current major align with your career choice?
3. What were the factors that influenced your selection of your current major?
 - a. Are you pursuing the same major you started off with when you were a freshman?
 - b. If not, what made you change your decision?

Research Questions 2: What processes and procedures do African American football players use to prepare themselves for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

4. What type of internship experience have you had in your career of interest?
5. What type of externship experience have you had in your career of interest?
6. Do you have a resume?
7. Have you considered what job you would want after graduation or after your football career?
8. Do you have a job search plan prior to graduation?
9. Have you researched your career of choice?
10. What careers do you feel equipped to pursue after college?
11. What work experiences have you had in your career area of interest?
12. What process and procedures have you used to prepare yourself for a career after football?

13. Describe the networking opportunities you have engaged within your career area of interest?

Research Question 3: During their college career, what peak experiences do senior African American football players report as having a significant impact on their preparation for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

14. To what extent, if any, has your family background influenced your career readiness?
15. How would you describe your college experience in sports?
16. How would you describe your college experience in academics?
17. How has your academic and career development experiences been different than those of your teammates?

Research Question 4: What processes and procedures do universities and the athletic departments use to prepare senior African American student-athletes for a non-athletic career post-graduation?

18. What career development activities did you participate in during your time as a student-athlete? Were these opportunities mandatory?
19. What do you think the university/athletic department could have done to enhance your career readiness?
20. If there were one thing you could change about your college career, what would it be?

Appendix B
Recruitment Email

Hello [student name],

My name is Ashlesha Lokhande and I am a doctoral student at the University of Memphis. One of the requirements for my program is to complete my dissertation. I have selected the topic “An Analysis of African American Football Players’ Perception of Their Non-Athletic Career Readiness Post-Graduation from a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision Institution”. Because you are a senior student-athlete at the University of Memphis, I would like to invite you to this study. If you agree to participate, you will be invited to an interview that will last approximately 45 minutes. During this interview, you will be asked a series of question related to your postgraduate career readiness. All the information regarding you and your participation will be held in the strictest of confidence. In no way will you be identified as a participant.

If you consent to participate, please respond positively to this email. It will be necessary for you to sign a consent form, which will be given to you during the interview. You will be allowed seven days from the day of the email to respond to this email. As the responses are received, they will be downloaded and placed in a box. At the end of the time frame, I will blindly pull seven names from the box. If after ten days, I do not have at least seven responses, I will repeat the process.

Please note that you will not receive any financial compensation for your participation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Ashlesha Lokhande

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FOOTBALL PLAYERS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR NON-ATHLETIC CAREER READINESS POST-GRADUATION FROM A DIVISION I FOOTBALL BOWL SUBDIVISION INSTITUTION

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the career readiness level of African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision Institution. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a senior African American football player. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about ten people to do so at the University of Memphis.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Ashlesha Lokhande of University of Memphis Department of Leadership. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Reginald Green. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn the career readiness level of senior African American football players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision institution.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You should not take part in this study if you are under 18 years of age.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at the University of Memphis. You will need to come to the Department of Leadership located in Ball Hall. Interviews will be conducted in Room 123J (Conference Room). Participants will be asked to have a one-time interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately an hour over the next 3 months.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

During this interview, you will be asked a series of questions over one 45-minute period that will assess your postgraduate career preparedness. The interviewer will ask you questions related to your major and career of choice, work experience, and post-graduation career preparation. All interviews will be recorded for further analysis. All audio recordings and other electronic data will be stored in a document on a PC computer in the researcher's office that has password protection. Upon completion of the study, all data will be destructed within 10 days.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

You may find some questions we ask you to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can tell you about some people who may be able to help you with these feelings.

In addition to the risks listed above, you may experience a previously unknown risk or side effect.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

We will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

This study is anonymous. That means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons.

ARE YOU PARTICIPATING, OR CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN ANOTHER RESEARCH STUDY AT THE SAME TIME AS PARTICIPATING IN THIS ONE?

You may take part in this study if you are currently involved in another research study. It is important to let the investigator/your doctor know if you are in another research study. You should also discuss with the investigator before you agree to participate in another research study while you are enrolled in this study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact

the investigator, Ashlesha Lokhande at slkhande@memphis.edu or the faculty advisor, Reginald Green at rlgreen1@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

What happens to my privacy if I am interviewed?

All the information regarding you and your participation will be held in the strictest of confidence. In no way will you be identified as a participant. Pseudonyms will be used.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study
Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent
Date

Appendix D IRB Approval Email

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

PI: Ashlesha Lokhande
Co-Investigator:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Reginald Green
Department: Leadership
Study Title: An Analysis of the Post-Graduation Career Readiness Level of African-American Football Players at a Division I Football Bowl Subdivision Institution
IRB ID: PRO-FY2018-51
Submission Type: Renewal
Level of Review:

IRB Meeting Date:
Decision: Approved
Approval Date: September 28, 2018
Expiration Date: September 28, 2019

Research Notes:
Findings:

The IRB has reviewed the renewal request.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

- 1. If this IRB approval has an expiration date, an approved renewal must be in effect to continue the project prior to that date. If approval is not obtained, the human subjects consent form(s) and recruiting material(s) are no longer valid and any research activities involving human subjects must stop.**
- 2. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be completed and sent to the board.**
- 3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval, whether the approved protocol was reviewed at the Exempt, Expedited or Full Board level.**
- 4. Exempt approval are considered to have no expiration date and no further review is necessary unless the protocol needs modification.**

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis

Note: Review outcomes will be communicated to the email address on file. This email should be considered an official communication from the UM IRB.