THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE: AN EXAMINATION OF CAREER MATURITY AND TRANSITION AT A DIVISION II INSTITUTION

by

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(Under the Direction of Laura Bierema & Aliki Nicolaides)

ABSTRACT

The busy schedules of student-athletes often prevent them from engaging in career development activities that can impact their career maturity and their transition into the world of work—further making their experiences as both student and athlete complex. The study used the action research methodology to address the complexity of the problem and to create change within a Division II institution. To gain an understanding of student-athletes career maturity, the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) self-assessment was used to measure the levels of student-athletes career maturity. A student-athlete focus group was organized to capture the current experiences of student-athletes. The data collected from the self-assessment and focus group was used as the foundation to build career development interventions for student-athletes that the Student-Athlete Development Office could adopt at a Division II institution. The study aimed to create sustainable change that would lead to increased student-athlete career maturity and aid in the transition from athletics.

INDEX WORDS: Career maturity, transition, career development, self-efficacy, action research

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2022

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December 2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to women who have paved the path so I could achieve my dreams.

To my daughter, Bailee, who inspires me, motivates me and loves me unconditionally. Thank you for always making mommy laugh, for your notes of encouragement, and for reminding me to have fun. I want you to know you can be anything you want to be in life.

To my mother, Marlene, who sacrificed so much. Thank you for your gentle nudges to keep going. You always give me wisdom, strength, and love. Thank you for instilling in me the power of education.

To my sister Leslie you are the best aunt, sister, and best friend. Thank you for always being there for me and being my rock so I could achieve my goals.

To my grandmother Dorothy who is always there for me. Your wisdom, grace, and love mean so much to me.

To my father, who passed during my doctoral journey. I know you're proud. Thank you for being my champion. For teaching me to be confident, always to love myself, and never to give up.

Lastly, I dedicate my dissertation to all the single mothers in the world who have a dream to be better, to do more, and to go further. If I can do it, you can too.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, God, for the strength to preserve. I want to thank my major professor Dr. Laura Bierema, for pushing me and challenging me to become a better writer and for sharing your experiences and leadership. I am grateful for the opportunity to have learned and worked with you directly. To my committee Dr. Aliki Nicolaides, for your encouragement and pushing me to think deeper. Dr. Diann Olszowy Jones for your support and enthusiasm throughout the process, and Dr. Markesha Henderson for always making space for me, uplifting me, and giving me tough love. I am grateful for each one of you.

Thank you to my LLOD Cohort 5 whom I have had the opportunity to learn and build friendships; I will cherish every moment with you all forever. Thank you to Leslie, Janine, Brian, and Wade for words of encouragement and strong shoulders to lean on while navigating the doctoral journey. To Lyndsey for friendship and the bond of sisterhood. You kept me accountable and reminded me of my purpose. Thank you.

Thank you to my work family for providing the space, advice, support, and time for me to reach my goals. For hallway cheers and laughter. To Morris, who consistently checked in to make sure I was progressing. To Corey, for sharing your gift of positivity daily, dreaming big for me and with me, and believing in me we are connected for life. To all of my friends, Krystle, Starema, and Ericka, for cheering me on. A special thank you to my dear friend Cecilia for including me in your daily prayers and making time to send me a word of encouragement. I cherish our friendship, and I love you.

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VIGNETTE

It is the first semester for freshman Mike who was not recruited by any well-known big basketball schools, but he was the top freshman recruit for a Division II school, which is an accomplishment. Being the top freshman recruit made Mike feel good about being recognized for his basketball abilities. The coaches told him they were looking for a player like him to add to the team on his recruiting trip. During pre-season training, his coaches have repeatedly repeated how much they believe he has what it takes to help the team get to a conference playoff game and eventually a national title. Mike thinks his talent and skills will help his college team and finally take him to the next level… the professional level! But something happened this week that made Mike question his future. His professor had a guest speaker from the career center come to his introduction to a college class about different careers, volunteer, and internship opportunities. Mike didn't realize and did not think there were other career options besides basketball. He's still working with his athletic academic advisor on identifying a major by next semester; sure, he was in college to earn a degree, and he had to go to college to play basketball, but he is thinking about career options that align with his major well that never crossed Mike's mind. As the speaker spoke, Mike felt like he might be interested in other career opportunities, but he didn't know where to start. He did not want to admit there were other options basketball had been his focus for so long that he was committed. Mike felt a little overwhelmed. There has never been a different career option, only basketball. He hasn't even thought about plan B if basketball was not an option. Playing on the professional level has been

Mike's dream ever since he could remember, and now in less than 30 minutes, it would be Mike's time to shine. The first home game of the season.

As Mike prepares to go on the court for a warm-up, his nerves are jittering, and his excitement sends tingles throughout his body as he walks out. He can't think about anything else right now, just basketball, but the thought of making another choice still sits in Mike's mind. Maybe basketball is just to get through college; perhaps he can be something else; perhaps he could do both basketball and another career. Mike decides he must shake it off and think about his career later. Right now, is not the time to worry. It's time to focus and play.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Student-athletes are a unique population who experience college differently compared to non-student-athletes. The term student-athlete is part of a shared lexicon for all National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions. Student-athletes are full-time college students and athletes simultaneously (NCAA.org, 2020). Student-athletes enter college between the ages of 17 and 18 years old. As with any young adult entering college, these students face the need to navigate new conflicts and growth areas (Astin,1985; Evans et al., 1998; Lavine, 2010; Rodgers, 1990). These growth areas may include stereotypes, gender inequities, learning disabilities, the prefrontal cortex's development, career maturity, complicated schedules, and decision-making skills. However, student-athletes additionally face the challenge of fulfilling two roles during their time in college. Historically, research suggests that student-athletes' dual roles develop self-concepts regarding how they see themselves (Lu et al., 2018). In doing so, student-athletes will sometimes abandon one role for the other (Lally & Kerr, 2005). This shift in identity salience can be due to stress and pressure to succeed academically and athletically; this includes significant demands for both their time and energy (Adler & Adler, 1987; Gaston-Gayles, 2004). The student-athlete population is complex from their time demands, athletic culture, developing autonomy, career maturity, relationships with their Athletic Academic Support, and how the NCAA rules impact career perceptions. All of which play a role in the life of a student-athlete

Overview

To better understand the complexities of collegiate student-athletes, chapter one introduces the various topics that impact student-athletes, starting with a historical overview of the NCAA, the governing body for most athletic programs in North America. The historic overview covers the NCAA's academic reform and career perspective that directly influences the NCAA member institutions where student-athletes participate. This chapter will break down time demands, environment vs. culture, development of autonomy, and career maturity of student-athletes. Give an overview of the problem, research questions that guide this study, and the significance.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association

NCAA Academic Reform

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was established in 1905, initially overseeing gridiron football and evolving to all sports. Over time college sports culture has been woven into many collegiate experiences. According to the NCAA (2021), nearly half a million college athletes make up the 19,886 teams, with more than 57,661 participants competing each year in 90 championships in 24 sports across three divisions. The NCAA national governing body aims to govern competition safely, fairly, and equitably within higher education. Without question, NCAA attempts to control its member institution by setting rules to prevent unethical behaviors that impact intercollegiate athletics. For example, the NCAA noticed a significant drop in the graduation rates of student-athletes in the 1960s. Upon investigating this phenomenon, the NCAA realized that student-athletes requirement to maintain a 1.6-grade point average was too low and wasn't adequately progressing student-athletes to graduation. In response to the findings, the NCAA created a new mandate that would help improve the national graduation rate

by moving the grade point average requirement from 1.6 to 2.0 to increase the number of student-athletes graduating. (NCAA, 2019). This historical event illustrated that the NCAA was founded under the premise that student-athlete success through successful graduation was a significant function. Since those events, the NCAA has linked student-athlete eligibility and academic performance to graduation rates. In continuing to promote student-athlete success, the NCAA also created a job role to support student-athletes life skills and eligibility. The NCAA realized that student-athletes' requirement to maintain a 1.6-grade point average was too low and wasn't adequately progressing; this role is known as the athletic, academic support professional (NCAA, 2019).

Consistent progress and improvement in addressing student-athletes needs have been made since the adoption of the athletic, academic support role; however, other challenges have not been addressed regarding what an AASP is responsible for and what their role entails when working with student-athletes. This is particularly challenging because every NCAA member institution has different support needs for student-athletes. Practically no research exists that evaluates the role of what an AASP does and the type of training needed. There is a lack of clarity, and the athletic academic support is left to face ambiguity within academics without data-driven support.

The NCAA and Career Perspectives

With a reinforced athletic identity salience, student-athletes may face challenges regarding career development; these challenges occur when the student-athletes athletic identity salience conflicts with their identities, limiting their view of careers outside of athletics. According to Brenner et al. (2014), “Identity salience is defined as the probability that a given identity will be invoked in social interaction (Stryker 1968, [1980] 2003) or, alternatively, as a

substantial propensity to define a situation in a way that provides an opportunity to perform that identity (Stryker and Serpe 1982).” Identity conflict occurs when multiple identities are "constructed so differently in terms of thoughts, feelings, and traits associated with each that they are irreconcilable" (Killeya-Jones, 2005, p. 169). The conflict that student-athletes face when prioritizing their athletic identity is that they often feel they have to choose one identity over the other student or athlete. The arising conflict occurs when the demands of one role supersede the duties of another role (Cooper & Cooper, 2015; Fone, 2000). The tendency to allow such conflict to occur while reinforcing athletic identity superiority is related to athlete culture socialization. Identity conflict ultimately influences student-athletes' career perspectives and consequentially impacts career maturity.

Student-athletes identity salience and, consequently, career perspectives may be influenced by the level of play they compete. The NCAA has 347 Division I institutions with more than 176,000 student-athletes. *Division I* institutions are the highest intercollegiate athletics overseen by the NCAA, with larger budgets and more advanced facilities. These schools have major athletic powers in the college ranks and more athletic scholarships than Divisions II and III (NCAA, 2020). Division I universities promote a strong emphasis on athletics that may impact the student-athletes' athletic salience. The 300 *Division II* institutions provide thousands of student-athletes the opportunity to compete at a high level. Offering athletic scholarships to student-athletes the opportunity to excel academically while fully engaging in campus experiences (NCAA, 2020). Division II institutions are defined as institutions with fewer financial resources to devote to athletics; they offer more partial scholarships than Division I institutions. (NCAA, 2020). This descriptor of Division II illustrates that athletics emphasis is less than a Division I university's emphasis. Lastly, *Division III* institutions are defined as

institutions that consist of athletic programs at colleges and universities that do not offer athletic scholarships to student-athletes (NCAA, 2020). Division III universities do not emphasize athletics as much as Division I and Division II institutions. For this research this study will focus primarily on Division I and Division II institutions.

Table 1.

Divisional Athletic Differences

Division I	Division II	Division III
More full athletic scholarships	Less full athletic scholarships more partial scholarships offered	No athletic scholarships left
Larger financial budgets		No semi-professional athletes
Big championship games/ awards	Lesser financial budget	Academically focused
	Some semi-professional athletes	Athletics optional
Semi-professional athletes the best of the best	More balance between classroom time and competition	
Less balance between classroom time and competition		

Note: Table 1. Shows the differences between *Division I, II, and III* schools as it relates to athletics

Table 2 shows the predictability of student-athletes' chances of making it in the professional arena. Since the likelihood of turning professional is low, developing career readiness programs that support this specific population of athletes would benefit both students and respective institutions. The NCAA (2019) Division I institutions alone generated $15.8 billion in revenue; about $10.2 billion was generated by athletic departments, and $5.6 billion was allocated from institutions, government support, and student fees. These schools include the University of Oregon, Ohio State, Texas, and Michigan, to name a few. Division I athletic departments have the substantial motivation to emphasize athletic performance and, ultimately,

athletic identity salience amongst their student-athletes. Division I institutions with strong athletic programs and winning records increase the idea of playing professional sports for student-athletes. This pursuit of a career as a professional athlete lessens student-athletes' interest in career development outside of sport. According to Tyrance et al. (2013), "the typical athletic life cycle lasts approximately10 to 15 years between the ages of 5 and 22" (p. 23). This life cycle illustrates that most athletes' work careers will surpass the length of their athletic careers. Furthermore, these statistics "indicate this it is crucial for college student-athletes to adequately prepare themselves for life after athletics" (Tyrance et al., 2013, p. 23). With the statistics against them, student-athletes have a slim chance of making it to the professional arena, highlighting the need for athletic, academic support to implement strategic interventions and action research to foster student-athlete career development outside of a professional athlete's realm.

Table 2.

Predictability of student-athletes competing in professional athletics

	NCAA Participants	Approximate # Draft Eligible	# Draft Picks	#NCAA Drafted	% NCAA to Major Pro	% NCAA to Total Pro
Baseball	36,011	8,002	1,217	791	9.90%	--
M Basketball	18,816	4,181	60	52	1.20%	21%
W Basketball	16,509	3,669	36	31	0.80%	6.90%
Football	73,712	16,380	254	254	1.60%	--
M Ice Hockey	4,323	961	217	71	7.40%	--

Note. Estimated Probability of Competing in Professional Athletics Chart last updated April 8, 2021, Courtesy of NCAA.org Accessed on 5/19/22

The Collegiate Student-Athlete

Time Demands for Student-Athletes

The NCAA governs athletic participation on the campuses of its member institutions. For student-athletes to remain eligible to compete, they are required to be enrolled in a minimum of 12 academic credits per semester and maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average; this is in addition to practicing a maximum of 20 hours a week. (NCAA Bylaws 17.02.1.1; NCAA Bylaw 17.02.19). Athletic participation is defined as "at the direction of or supervised by one or more of an institution's coaching staff" (NCAA, 2020, p. 250), which excludes one's personal time invested in training. Although this definition of athletic participation as an NCAA mandate is meant to help student-athletes balance their dual identity salience, some coaches exploit this rule or have found loopholes within the rule extending practice times to upward to 30 hours a week (Ayers et al., 2012). Often, athletic time commitment makes student-athletes' schedules inflexible and demanding. These demands include early morning training, early morning classes, afternoon athletic practices, and late-night homework. The time constraint leaves little to no time for student-athletes to participate in self-reflection to stimulate thoughts about careers or life after athletics. (Watt & Moore III, 2001). To further emphasize student-athletes' time constraints, the time commitment does not include travel to competitions. Considering travel, student-athletes are even further stretched regarding their ability to balance their identities as students and athletes. Athletic trips often create conflict with class assignments, and athletes may miss class sessions due to travel. (Wendling, Kellison, & Sagas, 2018). Student-athletes' requirement to be excused from their academic responsibilities sometimes creates the perception that athletic competition is more valuable than academics.

The imbalance and burden regarding time commitments pose a significant concern regarding student-athlete success. Watt and Moore (2001) suggested improving communication between faculty and coaches to understand the intricate balance between academic and athletic life to address this concern. This strategy is only one of many that could be implemented better to promote student-athlete success both on and off the field. The NCAA has a plan to address student-athletes schedules; however, each member institution has the autonomy to implement its schedule strategies if it is within the NCAA guidelines. Ultimately creating different athletic cultures on each campus.

Environment vs. Culture

The environment for student-athletes' and non-student athletes on a college campus is the same for on-campus living, dining halls, stadiums, tutoring services, and classes. However, athletic culture makes the student-athletes experience and perception uniquely different from non-student athletes. Lewin (1936) asserted that "behavior is a function of the person and their environment" (Watt & Moore III, 2001, p. 9). This formulaic understanding of human behavior provides researchers with insight into evaluating student-athletes identities and subsequent behaviors within athletics as a system. Regardless of the perspective, the person (student-athlete) and the environment (university-college) should be considered when evaluating student-athletes experiences (Watt & Moore III, 2001).

Athletics have unspoken rules that make up athletic culture for some member institutions. One of those unspoken rules is voluntary activities. Voluntary activity is defined as activities (e.g. ['additional practice] initiated by student-athletes where information about the training is not required to be reported to coaches and cannot penalize student-athletes who choose not to partake

in voluntary activities (NCAA, 2020). NCAA legislation governs the activities of all intercollegiate sports participation of its member institutions.

NCAA Bylaw 17.02.19 protects student-athletes from role engulfment by setting boundaries between the student role and athlete role; however, many student-athletes often engage in voluntary activities to improve performance. Adler and Adler (1991) stated that role engulfment is individuals who engage in deviant activities and become increasingly centered around their role through the effects of labeling, leading to changes in their self-concept.

Student-athletes may feel that if they do not participate in voluntary activities, it will give the coach a perception that they are not working hard or not committed to the team. The voluntary activity also may make student-athletes feel like they are not part of the team if they do not participate in voluntary activities with fellow teammates. Although voluntary activity is up to a student-athlete, it does not always prevent coaches or athletic staff from encouraging student-athletes to participate in voluntary activity. The NCAA Bylaw 17.02.19(b) stated:

> The activity must be initiated and requested solely by the student-athlete. Neither the institution nor any athletics department staff member may require the student-athlete to participate in the activity at any time. However, it is permissible for an athletics department staff member to provide information to student-athletes related to available opportunities for participating in voluntary activities. (p. 241)

The bylaw does not prohibit the coach or athletic staff from being informed of voluntary activity. The NCAA conducts two surveys on student-athlete experiences. The first is GOALS (Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Recent Experiences), and the second is SCORES

(Study of College Outcomes and Recent Experiences). According to the GOALS and SCORE study, student-athletes weekly time commitments ranged from 27 to 42 hours per week (NCAA, 2016).

Therefore, voluntary activity may not be perceived as optional and can be seen as part of the athletic culture in which student-athletes are socialized—devaluing the importance of developing a competent career maturity. A robust athletic culture can negatively position students for life outside of sports.

Sociologists Patricia and Peter Adler (1991; 1999) found that academic detachment was a supported athletic culture trait. This longitudinal study found that the socialized groupthink of the research team reinforced behavior, such as cutting class and failing assignments, in a manner that did not support academic success. Student-athletes need more guidance that helps keep their academic success, primarily due to the lack of autonomy.

Developing Autonomy

Going to college is a pilgrimage, often seen as a rite of passage, transitioning into autonomy. "Entering college implies transitioning from being a dependent adolescent to becoming a mature young adult with new responsibilities" (Miller & Daniel, 2009, p. 74). Absent parental influence, student-athletes are faced with "taking care of their own essential needs attending classes, and meeting course requirements" (Lavine, 2010, p. 25). These decisions and responsibilities share the development of autonomy, the understanding of one's identity, the preservation of relationships, and the identification of a future career path (Strange, 2004). While higher education strives to design and implement programs to best foster autonomy, not all higher education institution models have the same focus. Therefore student-athlete still

experience challenges inherently present due to the still-developing prefrontal cortex. Johnson et al. (2009) asserted the following:

> The prefrontal cortex coordinates higher-order cognitive processes and executive functioning. Executive functions are a set of supervisory cognitive skills needed for goal-directed behavior, including planning, response inhibition, working memory, and attention. These skills allow an individual to pause long enough to take stock of a situation, assess their options, plan a course of action, and execute it. Poor executive functioning leads to difficulty with planning, attention, using feedback, and mental inflexibility, all of which could undermine judgment and decision-making. (p. 216)

The prefrontal cortex is significantly essential for the development of autonomy. Because the prefrontal cortex is not considered fully developed until the age of 25, student-athletes younger than 25 may face additional challenges in developing their autonomy and identity salience (Johnson et al., 2009). An example of this can be being in an environment that impedes and does not enhance autonomous development for a student-athlete to withdraw from sports long enough to allow a sense of personal control over time or decisions. The challenges that inhibit student-athlete autonomy and identity salience consequently impact career path decisions. These challenges may additionally result in lower career maturity.

Career Maturity of College Athletes

Career maturity is the primary focus of this research to understand better how student-athletes view the world of work based on their knowledge. According to Savickas (1984), a historical scholar of career research, career maturity has been defined as the readiness to make career decisions and manage the developmental task. Strange (2004) asserted that considering a

career path is a part of the developmental perspective. The notion that career maturity is related to development is a consistent finding among research; however, student-athletes face challenges in obtaining a competent career maturity due to various factors associated with autonomy and identity.

Research consistently shows that student-athletes with strong athletic identities have lower career maturity (Houle & Kluck, 2015; Kornspan, 2014; Murphy et al., 1996). A rich source of research is available regarding student-athletes career maturity and athletic identity. Few studies explore other experiences that may impact student-athletes career maturity outside of competition. This inquiry type is necessary because it considers a holistic understanding of student-athletes development of autonomy and identity as they navigate the higher education experience. It is essential to gain a holistic understanding of career maturity and consider student-athlete career development's unique experiences as they move through various stages. Hansen (1976) stated the following:

> Career Development education is used because it emphasizes the developmental process by which individuals have an opportunity, through a systematic a, sequential set of experiences, to know themselves better, to know their environment (options) better, and to act on that knowledge more purposefully and creative. (p. 42)

The foundational understanding of career development education suggests that steps of both autonomy and identity development are essential. Career development aids student-athletes in maturing their experiences in the world of work while providing freedom of choice to maximize individual development. Action research lends itself well to this problem because it considers the intervention and action research to address student-athletes' challenges.

The Problem

Student-athletes often depend on athletics to support various needs such as financial support, housing, meal plans, books, schedule of courses, practice times, and medical treatment if needed. Depend is defined as "to place reliance or trust; to be dependent especially for financial support" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, 2022). Often student-athletes follow a very disciplined schedule created by athletic academic support and coaches for the duration of their time in college. AASP are academic advisors who work individually with student-athletes to ensure they are eligible to compete in their respective sports (Rubin, 2017). The role of the athletic academic support professional is not inclusive at all NCAA member institutions, except for advising student-athletes on academic progression. Considering the semesterly/ quarterly interactions between the athletic academic support professional and the student-athlete, this can influence career maturity.

The Purpose and Research Questions

This study aims to learn about student-athletes career maturity at the Division II level and explore strategies to support student-athletes career development and transition into the world of work. Two research questions will guide this study.

1. What was learned at the individual, group, and system level that advances theory a practice in an action research project to understand student-athletes career maturity?
2. How does the system support the growth of student-athletes career maturity?

Significance of the Study

Student-athletes dedicate much time and effort to their respective sport but may need to commit more time to their career exploration before their athletic career is exhausted. Houle and

Kluck (2015) found that student-athletes with higher athletic identities had lower career maturity. Students with greater self-efficacy for completing career decision-making had greater self-efficacy (p. 33). The study's focus is to understand the perspectives of current student-athletes and their views on career development and what role athletic academic support fulfills for a student-athlete. The study fills a gap in the literature by examining athletic academic support and their role in student-athletes career maturity using action research. "There are few studies that analyze the effects of an intervention on enhancing the career maturity of student-athletes" (Kornspan, 2014, p. 11). Few studies address the role of athletic academic support and student-athletes career maturity at smaller institutions, such as Division II and Division III schools. Much of the literature is centered around larger institutions, revenue-generating sports such as football and basketball, and career development. The primary job function of athletic academic support is to ensure student-athletes are eligible to compete and are enrolled in the correct courses to matriculate through college within four years. However, there is a gap in research on athletic academic support and their job preparedness, responsibilities, and barriers that impact them (Vaughn & Smith, 2018). This is due to job functions being based on the institution's needs and model for supporting student-athletes. These additional supports can include career coaching, setting up volunteer opportunities, and teaching life skills classes and do not necessarily require AASP to go through any additional training.

Athletic academic support professionals have various experiences, and the field is not monolithic, which makes it challenging to study. This study's findings can benefit both student-athletes and athletic academic support professionals in higher education in supporting career readiness for student-athletes by using action research. This study's findings can serve as a driver for future exploration of understanding the athletic academic support role, career development

approaches, and interventions that support collegiate student-athletes on Division I, II, and III levels.

Chapter one provides an in-depth understanding of other factors, such as the role of the athletic academic advisors and the relationship to student-athletes career readiness is examined by looking at the historical context of the athletic academic advisor's role, and why it exists. The challenges that an athletic academic advisor faces that can indirectly or directly impact a student-athlete. This chapter also examines career development theories and their contribution to the world of work. The examination of theories has aided in identifying the appropriate career development approach(s) that will guide this study and project.

Literature Review

As children, we witness our childhood hero's grandparents, parents, teachers, and neighbors' behavior. We play doctor, teacher, architect, engineer, and artist. Our minds explode with imagination, and we dive deep into our characters as we play with friends and siblings. There is no pressure to choose only one career. We try on various jobs and take on the challenges they bring. We make quick decisions, and then we go for it. Dreaming is the luxury of children… Or is it? We choose careers early on based on our imagination and childhood heroes. As we grow older, choosing one career and succeeding can create panic and stress leaving our dreams to evaporate over time. Our environments, experiences, good or bad, and our family dynamic influence how adults make career choices.

This section reviews relevant literature associated with career development and self-efficacy history. My goal is to identify potential best practices and models that develop student-athletes career maturity and put the phenomenon into context. I extended this review to include literature about the role of athletic academic support better to understand their impact on student-athletes' career development.

The combination of keywords used to conduct this literature review included the *history of career development, theories of career development, student-athletes, career maturity, career readiness, self-efficacy, athletic support professionals' roles, burnout, athletic identity, and academic advising.* Various tools were used, such as The University of Georgia Library GALILEO system, Google Scholar, peer-reviewed journals, books, ProQuest, ERIC, and reference list from other readings, also served as a source for identifying additional literature. The literature search focused on the past 20 years and included foundational work. These

searches produced a lot of work related to professional athletes, career maturity, and athletic identity for Division I student-athletes. Limited literature and empirical studies on athletic academic support's impact on student-athletes Division II level were not discovered.

Creating an empirical studies map helps organize the existing literature to identify gaps in scholarship. Creswell and Creswell (2018) mention that composing a literature map can be challenging. It is important to know the keywords to identify studies that can build an empirical table search. Part of the challenge is finding and reviewing all the literature on the topic and narrowing it down from a broad topic to a more specific one. "It takes time to develop such as a map and locate literature to put into the map" (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 36). Another challenge in developing an empirical study is identifying studies that are not too outdated to show that the topic is still relevant and that other scholars are contributing to the topic, which makes it essential. The process of developing the empirical table helps figure out how a study adds to the literature. The empirical table provides organization for future readers.

So, to better analyze existing literature around collegiate student-athletes, an empirical table has been created to help give this study direction and highlight the gaps in the research. Table 3. highlights empirical studies around career maturity, career development, student-athletes, athletic identity, and academic support. Few studies focus specifically on athletic academic support and the career maturity of student-athletes. The empirical table shows the types of work that currently exist within the field and reviewed studies that have been used to support this research study.

Table 3

Empirical Table

Author	Title	Findings	Methodology
Vaughn, Aaron & Smith, Jimmy (2018)	Advising student-athletes: Understanding job preparation, roles, and challenges of the athletic, academic advisor	The average age was 37, with 67% of respondents being female. Most held a master's degree (83%), and the most common degrees were education (35%) and sport management (31%). The advisors were most assigned to 101+ athletes (67%) and had been in the profession 0-6 years (61%). The results showed that more than half of advisors (53%) had never researched any advising strategies specifically related to working with SAs. n=115	Quantitative survey
Rubin, Lisa (2017)	Who Are Athletic Advisors? State of the Profession	The purpose of the study is to understand who athletic advisors are by exploring their backgrounds and experiences. Advisors listed 28 different job titles and duties. Such as tutoring, recruiter, community outreach, event planner, class instructor, orientation organizer, and study hall monitor. n=277	Quantitative survey
Houle, James & Kluck, Annette (2015)	An Examination of the Relationship Between Athletic Identity and Career Maturity in Student-Athletes	Explored the extent to which athletic identity, a belief of financial sustainability through participation at the professional level, scholarship status, and career decision-making self-efficacy predicted career maturity in college athletes. Higher scores of athletic identities associated with holding an athletic scholarship and believing that one could sustain oneself financially through a career as a professional athlete. High score relationship between career-decision making and year in college. n=221	Quantitative survey's *Athletic Identity Measurement Scale* *Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy.* *Career Decision Scale.*
Tyrance , Shaun, Harris, Henry, & Post, Phyllis (2013)	Predicting Positive Career Planning Attitudes Among NCAA Division I College Student-Athletes	The study examined the relationship between athletic identity, race, gender, sport, and expectations to play professional and career planning attitudes (career knowledge, career adaptability, and career optimism) Athletes who had higher athletic identity also had lower levels of career optimism; students who participated in revenue-generating sports also had lower career optimism. n=538	Qualitative study
Lally, Patricia, & Kerr, Gretchen (2005)	The Career Planning, Athletic Identity, and Student Role Identity of Intercollegiate Student-Athletes	The purpose of this study was to examine the career planning of university student-athletes and relationships between their career planning, athletics, and student role identities. The participants reported that their career plans, athletic identities, and student role identities changed appreciably throughout their university studies. n=8	Qualitative
Gaston-Gayles, Joy (2003)	Advising Student-Athletes: An Examination of Academic Support Programs with High Graduation Rates	An examination of academic support professionals that are perceived to contribute to student-athlete success within programs that have graduation rates above the national average graduation rates were higher due to various factors (reporting lines, institutional support, athletic department support, and intentional advising). n=7	Qualitative and Quantitative

The History of Career Development

Historically, career development is a process of assisting individuals with acquiring knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to succeed in the world of work. Career development is a "complex and multifaceted phenomena that recognize the inseparability of work and life as reflected in this description proposed almost half a century ago that continues to resonate well with contemporary thinking" (Arthur & McMahon, 2019, p. 4). Busacca & Rehfuss (2019) described career development as a sequence of transitions and career-related choices individuals make over a life span. Career development is complex due to various phenomenon that acknowledges work and life together. Wolfe & Kolb (1980) emphasized:

> Career development involves one's whole life, not just occupation. As such, it concerns the whole person… More than that, it concerns him or her in the ever-changing contexts of his or her life. The environmental pressures and constraints, the bond that ties him or her to significant others, responsibilities to children and aging parents, the total structure of one's circumstances are also factors that must be understood and reckoned with. (pp. 1-2)

The characteristics of career development emerged during an economic and societal change in the mid to late 1800's the rise of the industrial revolution. "The first documented efforts to provide career guidance were committed to achieving socially just employment outcomes for individuals who may have been disenfranchised as a result of such change" (Arthur & McMahon, 2019, p. 3). Some of these changes included machine development within factories that replaced people, forcing layoffs, and increasing unemployment. These individuals were young, poor people. During this time, career development focused on unemployed individuals providing guidance and primarily assisting with placement. Eventually, career development transitioned into “vocational

guidance," a phrase coined by Frank Parsons, helping clients develop a sense of self, abilities, and interest in the world of work.

Career Development Theories and Models

Frank Parsons

Frank Parsons (1909) started his career as a social worker, became a civil engineer, and later ran for Mayor of Boston and taught political economics at Kansas State University. Vocational guidance is influenced by the work of Frank Parsons, who founded the Vocation Bureau in Boston and wrote the theoretical works on vocational guidance describing vocational guidance as a "civic force," a "moral force," and an "agent of culture" (p. 4). The idea to open a school came after a lecture Parsons gave to an Economic Club; he stressed the need to assist youth with their career decision-making. Parson aided the poor and disadvantaged by developing a model that provides a clear understanding of self, interest, abilities, knowledge, conditions of success, and true reasoning. He encouraged a matching of self-knowledge with the world of work knowledge to help individuals successfully make career decisions. "The matching process underpins the trait-and-factor, and more recent person-environment fit approaches which have made a lasting impact on career development" (p. 6). Parsons's approach to career development was the trait and factor theory.

Parsons Trait and Factor Theory

Parsons created a three-step conceptional framework to help individuals choose a career. Trait refers to a person's characteristics that can be measured using assessments and tests. Factor refers to work or the environmental characteristics required to be successful in a career. When traits and factors are combined, the results are that the theory assesses and matches the person's characteristics and the characteristics of a career (Busacca & Rehfuss, 2019). However, trait and

factor theory comprise several career theories and follows these assumptions. (1) "Individuals have unique characteristics related to interested, abilities, needs, values, and personality traits" (2) "Occupations have unique characteristics related to work task, skills, demands, and rewards" (3) "The characteristics of both individuals and occupations can be measured" (4) “Workers and employers are most satisfied when there is a good match or 'fit' between the characteristics of the worker and the occupation/job" (Busacca &Rehfuss, 2019 p. 44). Trait and factor theory is still used in career guidance today.

Since the time of Parsons, the world of work has evolved in economics and society. Many psychological career theories have been proposed that influence career development, specifically invocation and organization. Such ideas also include personality traits, career decision-making, stages of career development, and the learning process to reflect the complexity of the ever-changing world of work. Parsons work is still significant and has contributed to how career development is understood and how practice is enacted (Arthur & McMahon, 2019). However, there are some critiques of Parsons’s work.

Critique of Parsons

Although Frank Parsons’s career development foundation continues to impact the world of work, the world has evolved. Parsons theory came out of a need to help those who left school early for the workforce and for the poor who had lost their jobs due to the industrial revolution. During this time, there was a big divide between the rich and the poor. Parsons had a commitment to people achieving their potential and social activism that may be required to achieve their career goals. Parsons’ (1909) three elements helped match people to jobs based on the labor market. A challenge with Parsons’ theory is that it is assumed that people who are matched with a job are a good fit. It is assumed that the labor market is stable. The reality of the

labor market is that it is constantly changing, and people will have to adjust and change with the labor market (https://www.careers.govt.nz/, 2022). Some may argue that Parsons' theory is a reactive approach (Mcmahon et al., 2008) to serve people and not a proactive approach because Parsons theory came out of an immediate need to serve the unemployed and align unemployed people to jobs it does not address the career development of others who are employed and looking to grow in their respective careers. Career development is not viewed as holistic or ongoing form of professional development. To this day, career services are not offered publicly to all people and remain focused on the unemployed (Arthur & McMahon, 2019). "The issue of providing accessible and affordable services to all citizens remains a challenge for career development and requires engagement at the level of public policy" (Mcmahon et al., 2008, p. 26). Though Parsons' theory has some critique in today's society, it still influenced other career development theorists.

By the 1950s, the trait-and-factor accounts of career development faded, and the process of career development was theorized as a series of stages. Ginzberg, Ginsberg, AxeIrad, and Herma (1951) proposed three career development stages which began in childhood and ended in adulthood. Anne Roe (1956) theorized that personality development and career choice focused on relationships between personality and occupation behavior. Roe primarily focused on parent-child relationships and career choice. She was one of the first to develop a classification for occupations and acknowledge broad ranges and variables on career development such as gender, family background, the economy, impairments, and physical attributes, later influencing another career development theorist John Holland (Arthur & McMahon, 2019).

John Holland

John Holland (1959) had a more significant influence on career counseling and Holland's vocational personality and work environments. He believed that vocational interest was an expression of individual personality. "Holland's theory suggests that people try to find work in occupations that have environments compatible with their personalities" (Busacca &Rehfuss, 2019, p. 45). John Holland's vocational choice theory remains the most influential career development theory around trait-and-factor/ person-environment fit (Nauta, 2013). His goal was to develop a simple and practical theory (Nauta, 2013) that showed people and environments' parallel classification according to six types.

Holland's RIASAC Model

Holland believed that most individuals, by late adolescence /come to resemble a combination of six vocational interest/ personality types. Personality types are "a group of traits that describe the similar characteristics of groups of people and are used to help describe a person" (Busacca & Rehfuss, 2019, p. 45). He also assigned the same labels to work environments that he used for personality types. "He developed a typology comprising of six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional, which is referred to as the RIASAC model" (Arthur & McMahon, 2019, p. 9). Holland then developed the Self-Directed Search (SDS) career assessment instrument. This instrument gives individuals a score on their six personality types, focusing on the top three highest three-letter codes and matching them to occupations. Holland contended that individuals seek out careers that are compatible with their type. The higher the degree of compatibility, the more satisfied an individual will be in their career choice. Holland's code is still used today and is currently being supported by O*NET

online, which is supported by the US Department of Labor/Employment. But there are some critiques of John Holland's theory.

Critique of Holland

John Holland's theory has continued to be evident in literature, but there are limitations to Holland's theory. "Holland argues that an individual will be most satisfied if working in an environment which is congruent with his or her personality type" (McIlveen, 2009, p. 6). Another study critiqued the congruence between person and environment. Congruence is defined as "a good match between person and environment" (Arnold, 2004, p. 96). The environment is defined as the occupation the person is pursuing (Arnold, 2004). This is also problematic when the culture and the organization's context aren't taken into consideration. Some argue that people can change themselves in the workplace, still perform well, stay in those careers long-term, and be satisfied (http://career.iresearchnet.com/, 2022). The challenge with Holland's theory today is that his ideas and beliefs were developed when the value of individualism and independent decision-making was not the norm (Stead and Watson, 1998). In today's society, this is still a challenge and has been brought back to the forefront of the minds of employers and employees when the world stopped, and millions of people lost loved ones during the pandemic (2020) people were forced to stay in and work from home. This awakening resulted in the great resignation (2021). People left careers because of pay, no advancement, and lack of flexibility, especially when people were allowed to return to work (Parker, K., Horowitz, J. 2022).

During the time of Holland, the labor force was bouncing back from a recession, and the steel strike of (1959) began. For individuals looking for work, the available options for employment may have made it easier to align an individual's personality type to a specific career

helping to create long-term satisfaction in working. People were also loyal to employers because of pension programs and decent wages.

In the 21st century, various jobs and new jobs are being created to match demand. People want the ability to make decisions. People express their desires for value in the workplace, fighting against inequities. People are not loyal to employers because pension programs are not offered as much, and they desire better wages—a different workplace than the time of Holland. On average, people stay in the same job for 4.1 years, according to the Economic News Release from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020). People align their personalities with careers and demand that companies and careers adjust to make the work environment better for the person. For example, suppose an accountant doesn't like certain aspects of their job. In that case, they will find ways to change some of the elements of their career without changing their title, environment, or personality. This does not necessarily mean the personality or environment is not congruent. The accountant may have other work desires within the current job role. The point is that personality and environment are not the only factors contributing to why a person decides to leave, stay, or find satisfaction in a job. Other factors such as pay, professional development, promotions, flexibility in work schedule are essential, and the need to feel valued are why people stay or leave jobs in the 21st century. "If the Holland theory (and therefore measures) do not reflect reality very well, then measures of congruence based upon them will not do so either" (Arnold, 2004, p. 98). Looking beyond personality and environment, the ideas that a person can change over time was introduced by Donald Super.

Donald Super

Developmental theory is concerned with career issues over the entire life span, and since they cover extended periods, developmental theories are complex. A theorist who has written

about career development extensively and has influenced the field's study with his advanced thinking is Donald Super (1957). Donald Super moved from a differential psychology perspective and took a broader view of the career development process across lifespan, refining his theory throughout his career. Super's approach to career development integrates both personal and environmental factors. Putting together the notion that career development is an ongoing process is ever-changing and occurs over a lifetime. Super's career approach consisted of three segments: self-concept, life span, and life space.

Self-Concepts

Self-concept "consists of the individual's view of self and their view of the situation or condition in which he or she lives" (Busacca & Rehfuss, 2019, p. 51). Self-concept is a blend of how we see ourselves and how we want others to see us. Super (1957) argued that people seek to implement their self-concepts into careers to express themselves.

Lifespan

Lifespan is a series of developmental tasks that people encounter in life. Super (1957) advocated that career development starts as a child and then evolves into adulthood. He defined five life stages of vocational development that happen during a person's life. "Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement" (Busacca & Rehfuss, 2019, p. 51). (1) The Growth stage (birth-14 years old) starts in childhood and goes through adolescence. During this stage, there is an introduction to various occupations that a child will witness or learn from parents, coaches, or teachers. It is considered the first exposure to occupation. (2) Exploration (15-24 years old) is when individuals engage in experiences that aid in developing their vocational identity by investigating careers. This can be during the college experience examples would be selecting a major, experiential learning, or part-time employment. (3)

Establishment (25-44 years old) is described as an individual who's interested in establishing stability in a chosen career and looking for career advancement. An example is career management, moving up within a career of choice or within an industry. (4) Maintenance (45-64 years old) is characterized by focusing on staying in a position at work. An example of this would be reaching a director or executive level within the company or organization and staying in the position for years. (5) Lastly, decline happens when people start to disengage at work and lean toward retirement (Super, 1957).

According to Super (1980), a career is multi-dimensional and happens in a sequence over a human's lifetime. Each stage is related to learning and planning and is motivated by the developmental task. Super's original theory was that people enter these stages between certain ages in life and only experience these stages once. Still, he later realized that people could cycle back into a previous stage throughout their lifetime as people reassess their careers. He called this process recycling.

Life Space

Life Space "life-span segment is a variety of roles individuals take on at various ages in their life space" (Busacca & Rehfuss, 2019, p. 52). This concept is known as the rainbow model and in nine major life roles: "child, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, spouse, homemaker, parent, and pensioner" (Busacca & Rehfuss, 2019, p. 52). According to Super, each role overlaps and impacts the other and can simultaneously occur and be successful and satisfying to an individual in their career. "People play a variety of roles as they mature, some of these roles beginning early in life, e.g., that of a child, and others beginning late in life, e.g., that of pensioner" (Super, 1980, p. 283).

Connecting Career Theories to Collegiate Athlete's Experiences

Supers Model and Student-Athletes

Suppose student-athletes career development is compared with Super's model of the five life and career development stages. In that case, many student-athletes find themselves between the first stage, growth, and second stage exploration of Super's model because of the age range. Many student-athletes are growing and exploring during the ages of 1-24 years old. Most student-athletes collegiate experience is, on average, between the ages of 17-23 years old, so they fall mostly in the exploratory stage. When looking at Super's growth and exploration stages for a student-athlete, there is not much time for career growth to happen before stage three establishment occurs because it demands student-athletes experience while participating in athletics. In today's economy and society, 25 years of age may not be the age when the establishment starts. It may take longer, especially for student-athletes who have not dedicated the time to explore career options.

Although the career development stages are associated with age, the stage in which a person finds themselves may not be accurate for all student-athletes. This model may or may not align with age; individuals can cycle through each stage at any age when experiencing a career transition, which is no different for a student-athlete. However, student-athletes who focus more on athletics and less on life after athletics may struggle with career development due to the lack of time invested outside of sports.

While developing his theory, Super suggested that career development was linked to career maturity (Super, 1957). According to Savickas (1984), career maturity has been defined as the readiness to make career decisions and manage the developmental task. Career maturity is the critical construct for this research because understanding student-athletes career maturity

helps build a foundation for assisting student-athletes with career development. If there is no understanding of student-athletes career maturity, this becomes a barrier for a student-athlete and creates role conflict. "It might be hypothesized that playing a number of roles simultaneously (i.e., during the same life stage) would result in role conflict, commitment to one role making it difficult to do justice to another" (Super, 1980, p. 287). Student-athletes have a lot to balance, such as managing time, maintaining academic eligibility, upholding NCAA rules while working hard to improve in conferences, or winning a championship to maintain their athletic scholarship. There is very little time to think about another role outside of athletics.

Student-athletes' expectations to perform well academically determine if they will perform in competition and only increases expectations from coaches, peers, and outside observers. Student-athletes experience a lot of stress and pressure to do well both academically and athletically. There is not enough time for a student-athlete to properly think about their abilities, interests, and other experiences outside of sport.

Super's theory focuses on the life span and the idea that if a person learns to focus on developing self-concepts, which are personality, ability, interests, experiences, and values, these self-concepts will change over time lead to invaluable experiences. The career development process is unique to the individual. It is important to emphasize that career development is a lifelong process and is not the process of arriving at a career endpoint; it is a process of moving through each stage (Kosine & Lewis, 2008).

College students are expected to reach a career decision before graduating from college. Nonstudent-athletes have more time to dedicate to their career development process. For student-athletes who are not traditional students, this creates a challenge and is a barrier because they are both full-time students and athletes simultaneously. Every minute of their day is accounted for

and time to reflect on careers outside of sports, time to reflect on who they are, and time to reflect on what they value is limited—ultimately impacting their career maturity and self-efficacy.

Albert Bandura Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura (1977), a psychologist, developed social cognitive theory, explicitly researching self-efficacy in the 1970s, which is crucial to this theory. "Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). More specifically, Bandura (1995) focused on perceived self-efficacy and one's capabilities to organize and execute to manage potential situations. Perceived self-efficacy influences how people feel think, act, and how they motivate themselves. For student-athletes, if they have played sports most of their lives and are good enough to earn a college scholarship and thrive in college athletics, their perception of themselves is "I am a great athlete." Student-athletes will continue to stay motivated. However, another example would be if a student-athlete has a lousy game, suffers an injury, or has a bad season. They may perceive themselves as "bad," feel "not good enough," and feel less motivated. Self-efficacy then goes down.

Each period of development brings new challenges and requirements. As an adolescent begins to transition into adulthood, it is essential to consider the type of challenges an adolescent might face, such as poverty, abuse, violent activities, and even fractured family life (Bandura, 1997). All of which impact efficacy. Bandura stated, "Beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the critical factor of human agency. If people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). According to Bandura (1997),

there are four self-efficacy sources: mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional and psychological states.

Mastery is also called task or learning goals. "Represent a person's concern with mastering material and concepts, challenge-seeking, and viewing learning as an end in itself. Mastery goal orientation has motivational and learning benefits" (Pajares & Urdan, 2005, p. 360). For example, a student-athlete will master gameplay during practice. Mastering gameplay then helps build self-belief.

Vicarious experiences "are forms of persuasion and psychological reactions" (Pajares & Urdan, 2005, p. 73). For example, if a student-athlete observes someone like themselves succeed in athletics, this helps raise individual belief. Verbal persuasion or "verbal encouragement from others can raise self-efficacy" (Pajares & Urdan, 2005, p. 73). Praise from a coach or words of encouragement from a parent or teacher can influence how student-athletes see themselves. Emotional and physiological states, "such as anxiety and stress, along with one's mood, provide information about efficacy beliefs" (Pajares & Urdan, 2005, p. 351). The mental state of a student-athlete can determine the level of self-efficacy. Student-athletes may experience peaks of stress or moments where they are overwhelmed, impacting their confidence.

All four sources of self-efficacy align with how individuals make choices and how these choices impact individual lives. Thus, Bandura (1977) explains the strengths of all four sources. He claimed that the first stage of self-efficacy, mastery of experiences is the most influential and vital source of efficacy because it is centered on a personal learning goal or task. If an individual achieves a goal, they believe they can achieve the same goal in future attempts, which leads to higher self-efficacy.

Bandura stated that successful performance is not always focused on personal goals or accomplishments but through repeated success experiences. He theorized, "after strong efficacy expectations are developed through repeated success, the negative impact of occasional failures is likely to be reduced" (Bandura, 1977, p. 195). Expanding on this notion that independent performance can enhance efficacy and expectations, Bandura (1977) argued, "The positive relationship between the strength of self-efficacy and probability of successful performance is virtually identical" (Bandura, 1977, p. 207).

Schlossberg Transition Theory

Schlossberg (1984) developed transition theory, a conceptual framework to understanding adult development through transitions, specifically around work. “Work transitions are particularly complex because individuals will change jobs and careers many times, and the structure of the work itself is always changing” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 159). Schlossberg’s work focuses on the understanding of transition. These transitions can include unexpected life events, expected life events, or events that fail to occur (Schlossberg, 1981). Additionally, Schlossberg (2011) explained that transition has more to do with the impact on an individual’s routines, relationships, and assumptions because change takes time and individuals react differently to change for better or worse. Schlossberg describes the transition process as “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” (Flowers et al., 2014, p. 106). The transition process model is continuous and can occur as adults continue to navigate changes in careers, life, and relationships over time. For example, student-athletes can experience the *moving in* transition process through first you in college, learning to navigate campus, and meeting new teammates. Student-athletes start to *move through* the transition process when they must balance classwork, practice, and competition or focus on keeping their grades up to be eligible to

compete. Lastly, student-athletes *move out* of the transition process when they start looking for a job, decide if they will return home or if they go to graduate school. Transition can be anticipated or unanticipated; events can occur in someone's life and alter an individual's daily life. As student-athletes experience the transition process, they also learn to cope with the transition.

Schlossberg (1995) believed that no matter the type of transition, expected or unexpected, there are common features that can be clustered into four major categories called the 4 S system of coping with the transition. The first category is *situation, "*which refers to the person-situation at the time of transition" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). An example of this can be when a senior student-athlete (track and field) graduates in May and competes at nationals, usually in June, and has to find a job immediately following the last competition. This type of situation can create stress for the student-athletes but also impact how they transition from student-athlete to world of work; with little preparation or time, this situation can feel rushed. The second is *self,* and this category is about the person's inner strength to cope with the situation" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). An example student-athlete's athletic career ends after competing for so many years. The student-athlete must figure out who they are outside of athletics, cope with the fact that competing is over, and figure out the next steps. This can impact their sense of self and how they handle the transition. The third is *support, "*the type of support available during the time of transition is critical for an individual's wellbeing" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160). For example, if a student-athlete graduate and is still unsure of who they are outside of athletics or just unsure of their next steps, they will need support and guidance that will help with the transition from college to career. It will be important to identify who or what type of support is required. The fourth 4-S step, strategies*, "*coping strategies that aim to change or help the situation" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 161). For example, student-athletes will have to identify the best strategies

to help them move forward after competing; such strategies might include brainstorming career interests or ideas, continuing education, meditation to manage stress, or relocating for new career opportunities. Nonetheless, student-athletes will experience various transitions; though not all occurrences will be the same for every student-athlete, the one occurrence that all student-athletes will share is that the collegiate athletic experience does come to an end.

Developmental career theory has evolved from a method of helping people find the right jobs and identifying specific skills to a form of professional development that considers all job experiences and all skills that ultimately form an individual's life work. Combing both Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy (1977) and Nancy Schlossberg's Transition (1984) theories will allow this study to examine student-athletes' career maturity and transition into the world of work. Both theories are applicable to the student-athlete population for this research because self-efficacy theory provides an opportunity to examine how student-athletes feel about their career abilities. Transition theory identifies factors that influence transitions for student-athletes.

Athletic Academic Support Professional

During the 1970s, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) mandated that higher education institutions provide academic support for student-athletes. This mandate came out of a need to improve student-athlete grade point averages from 1.6 to 2.0. (Rubin, 2017). The grade point average was changed when the NCAA realized the graduation rate for student-athletes was too low. Thus, the athletic academic support professional (AASP) position was born to help increase student-athlete graduation rates. "Athletic academic support are academic advisors who work individually with student-athletes. They provide several facets of support to students: academics, athletics, and life" (Rubin, 2017.p. 37). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2006) strongly embraces the idea that academic advising is teaching

and can cover career educational planning, social relationships, the campus community, and lifelong learning strategies. This role's goals were to focus specifically on three areas, class scheduling, academic tutoring, and time management. Since then, the profession has evolved.

In 1986 and again in 1989, the NCAA instituted new academic regulations. By 1990 these new regulations were starting to impact student-athletes' academic performance, the result increased graduation rates. NCAA mandated that higher education institutions provide academic support for student-athletes (Meyer, 2005). The athletic academic support office's role is to provide proper guidance to student-athletes through programming and academic assistance while helping student-athletes balance their roles as both student and athlete (Gaston-Gayles, 2003). Although these job duties are the most significant scope of what is required from the student-athlete development office, there is no direct guidance on how to provide that guidance to Athletic Academic Support. When new bylaws and mandates come from the NCAA, there is no formal training that tells higher education institutions how to mandate these new requirements except to protect student information such as academic records and health records. Higher education professionals are bound to protect already by law, which leads to member institutions of the NCAA developing their job roles and responsibilities for athletic academic support professionals.

Experiences of the Athletic Academics Support Professional

Rubin (2017) conducted a 37-item survey given to 277 athletic academic support to explore their backgrounds and experiences. The results showed that AASP listed 28 different job titles or duties in their current role. Eighty-seven percent had a master's degree in counseling, higher education, or student affairs, an 8% doctoral degree, and a 5% bachelor's degree. When asked about their training and experiences working with student-athletes before obtaining the

role, most respondents were former student-athletes or advisors somewhere else on campus and had very little training outside of webinars and advising workshops. Most revealed they learned their craft through various professional development opportunities, not just one. Rubin & Moreno-Pardo (2018) stated:

> Professionals serving students at higher education institutions focus more on student development than their personal development. Student-athlete services professionals include academic counselors, tutor coordinators, life skills program coordinators, and learning specialists, among other titles and roles. (p. 1).

This can be a result of funding for staff. Each NCAA member institution looks different as it pertains to staff. Some athletic programs can have multiple staff that can serve in one specific area compared to other institutions that have smaller staff. Those individuals find they perform duties outside their primary responsibilities or take on various roles out of a need to support student-athletes; as a result, relationships between AASP and student-athletes are strengthened.

Athletic Academic Support and the Student-Athlete Relationship

Student-athletes are often closer to the AASP because they do so much for the student-athlete and are typically available after-hours during study hall to help with homework, tutoring, or have conversations around career or transition. Student-athletes become comfortable with their AASP because trust has been established over time, and they consistently assist in student-athletes academic needs. Sometimes the relationship is more comfortable to build if the athletic academic support is a former student-athlete. Although the relationship can be valuable for both parties, the workload of athletic academic support can be overwhelming.

Athletic Academic Support Workload

Athletic academic support feels pressure to ensure that student-athletes are eligible to compete and receive additional services if needed, such as tutoring, study hall, and scheduling classes. "These professionals serve a unique student population and have one of the most challenging jobs in higher education" (Meyer, 2005, p. 15). Athletic academic support plays a vital role; often, teams are assigned to a specific Athletic Academic Support. They work with each player individually from the day they enter college until they leave.

Due to the amount of responsibility focused on ensuring athletes' eligibility, athletic academic support cannot always incorporate career development into their meeting times with student-athletes. Further, the athletic academic support staff is not equipped with career readiness knowledge to support athletes. "Many professionals fulfill several different roles, and they are relatively unprepared for this type of work, a situation compounded by little training or educational background in advising" (Rubin, 2017, p. 42). Career development is not a focus point of the athletic support staff's job responsibilities; however, the topic of transition is a developmental need of student-athlete, still comes up, and student-athletes turn to their AASP for answers. In some cases, the career topic arises when athletic academic support reviews courses or when the student-athlete is asked when they need to choose a major. Most school student-athletes have two advisors, one from their major, department, or college, whose academic advisor ensures student-athletes are meeting the college and major requirements. The other athletic academic support assists with selecting courses that are scheduled around practice or competition time and ensures student-athletes are eligible to participate in athletics. Usually, if one advisor creates the schedule, the other advisor will sign a form indicating they agree with the

selected courses. Advisors must ensure they choose the correct course for student-athletes and align their credits per semester to eligibility left to compete.

All student-athletes have four years to compete. The athletic scholarship only covers four years and sometimes the fifth year if there is a medical issue. Still, suppose a student-athlete changes majors multiple times, fails courses, or do not take classes when offered. In that case, it can delay graduation. Ultimately, student-athletes might spend an extra year in college that may not be covered by the scholarship, which means the student-athlete will have to cover the cost of their education. Athletic academic support to be mindful of the number of credits to eligibility a student-athlete has; this is only one challenge they face.

Athletic Academic Support Challenges

McDowell, Cunningham, and Singer (2008) explained that many athletic advisors are matched based on the athletic team's ethnicity. They argue that racial minorities are growing in the athletic advising field because they can relate to athletes due to their shared race. Shared race can present a challenge because it pigeon-holes professionals into positions based on race and not skills or abilities and does not allow the Athletic Academics Support Professional the opportunity to choose the sport they want to advise.

Another challenge advisors face is coaches blaming athletic academic support for ineligible student-athletes; coaches expect the athletic academic support to get ineligible student-athletes admitted to the institution (Rubin, 2017). Attempting to admit ineligible student-athletes can be difficult when potential entering first-year students or transfer students are scouted for their talent but may not meet the minimum academic requirements to compete on the college level. Ultimately, it can promote unethical practices and put the advisor in a compromising position. Due to the amount of pressure coaches place on Athletic Academic Support, they

sometimes will hide their knowledge about issues that happen within sports or about best practices that better support student-athletes because some coaches are only concerned about eligibility and winning (Rubin, 2017). The relationships with coaches and athletic academic support can sometimes be complicated because some coaches care about wins and eligibility.

In contrast, athletic academic support manages more about student-athletes matriculation through college and eligibility. The pressure to make sure student-athletes can compete and focus less on their grades or academic success is placed on the AASP. It creates a culture that clashes with academic goals.

Yet, no matter how much pressure coaches put on the AASP, they must communicate complete control and confidence that they can do their job in any given situation and accomplish the task. As the Athletic Academic Support's role continues to evolve, so does the need for education-related expertise and cross-campus collaboration. Unfortunately, there is little research on what the athletic academic support professional does in their job role. There is a gap in research on their job preparedness, responsibilities, and barriers that impact them (Vaughn & Smith, 2018). Each NCAA member institution has the autonomy to practice differently and where value is placed on the athletic, academic support role. Every NCAA member institution has different challenges and barriers which impact the AASP role. More research is needed to understand the role of the AASP better.

Understanding the NCAA, student-athletes, and athletic academic support roles is essential because each role is complex and has its challenges. Athletics has many moving parts that sometimes seem separate, but every role adds value to the student-athletes college experience; every role in athletics is connected and impacts each other if not done

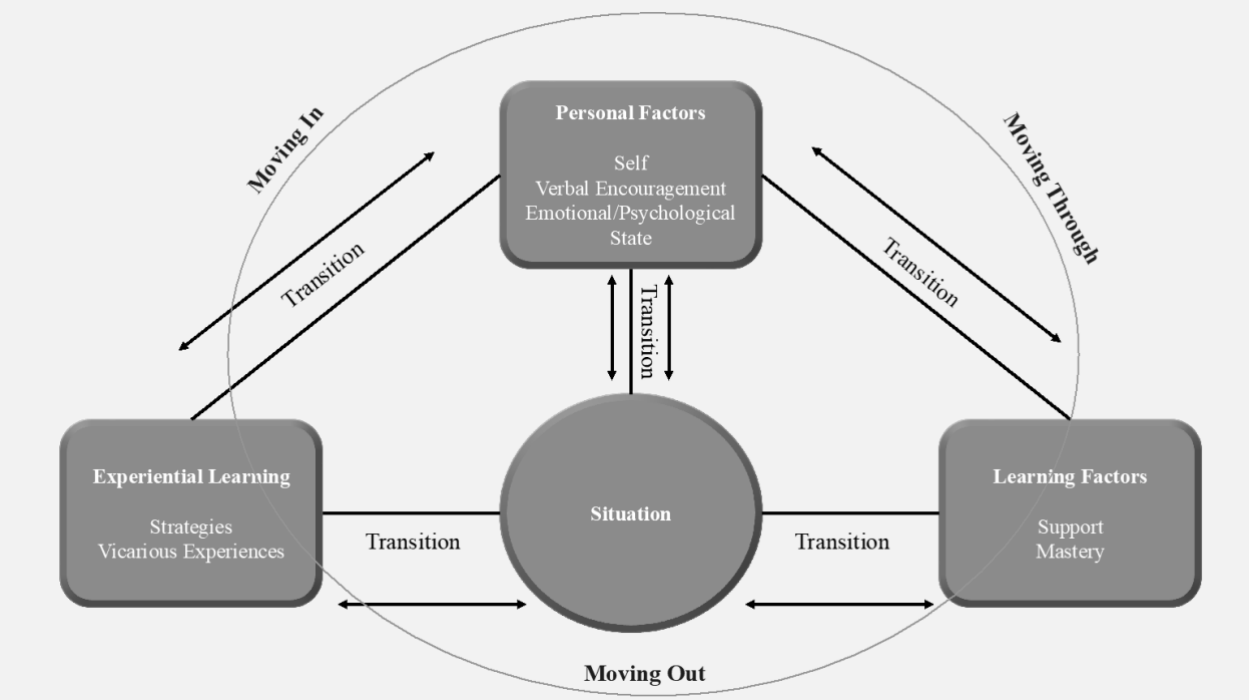
correctly. The challenge is that there is a limited amount of research on athletics and job roles.

The literature is currently saturated with research on Division I levels of student-athletes' career maturity and athletic identity. Kornspan (2014) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on career maturity and college student-athletes. Over the last 30 years, he found thirty-six studies on career maturity and student-athletes, primarily quantitative or qualitative studies. There are no action research studies around athletic, academic support, student-athlete career maturity, or student-athlete transition.

I combined Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy and Schlossberg's (1984) transition theories, and I developed a theoretical foundation for this study that works to understand student-athlete transitions through career development. Both theories are best used if combined because of the way each theory works together. Combining both approaches highlights how self-efficacy and transition theory complement each other related to life changes, how an individual feels, behaviors, and the learning that comes with development and transition. Tying the theories together creates a better understanding of how to support student-athletes career development and career transition. Combing both theories better highlight the developmental and transitional challenges student-athletes may be experiencing all at once. Adding Schlossberg moving in, moving out, and moving through the model to this theoretical framework shows that transition is always occurring.

Figure 2.

Self-Efficacy and Transition Model



Note. This model was created by L. Johnson (2022). Adapted from Albert Bandura Self-Efficacy (1977), Nancy Schlossberg Transition Theory (1984).

Figure 2 is a combination of my theoretical foundation of Bandura and Schlossberg's theories. The *Personal Factors* include self, verbal encouragement, and emotional and psychological states. These factors are the internal factors that impact how a person feels during a transition and how a person thinks about their selves during the transition. An example of a personal factor is when a student-athlete transitions from athletics into a career being an athlete comes naturally to them so they have higher confidence and may not need as much verbal encouragement. However, working in a position that is new to a student-athlete will cause them to question if they can do the job and may require more verbal encouragement.

The *Experiential Factors* include strategies and vicarious experiences; these factors are how a person approaches and experiences change. Experiential factors have a lot to do with behaviors and how a person responds to change. An example of experiential factors is when a student-athlete in an environment that is new they attempt to develop a strategy that helps them cope with the new environment or job by observing others who may be doing a task well especially if there is someone who they feel is similar this influences a student-athlete to perform better. The last factor is the *Learning Factors* which are support and mastery of how a person learns from the transition and or how to handle the transition. An example of learning factor is how a student-athlete learns to succeed in a new environment over time, by identifying support this can include people, or trainings that lead to the mastery of the individuals job performance.

The three factors are all impacted by the situation, the center of all factors is transition which causes a person to go in and out of each factors each time a transition occurs. Student-athletes can continue to experience multiple transitions throughout their college experience as they progress in college but may experience the most impact transition when they leave college and transition to the professional world.

Summary

There are hundreds of articles written, and these theories are still prevalent in looking at student-athletes career decision-making. However, neither Bandura's Self-Efficacy nor Schlossberg Transition theories have been used together in research around student-athletes. Bandura's self-efficacy helps develop what student-athletes believe about their career decision-making. Understanding the system and the athletic sub-areas and the needs of student-athletes will help develop interventions to improve how the athletic system impacts student-athletes career maturity and transition. Schlossberg's transition theory provides a clear understanding of

the transition process student-athletes may go through once their collegiate career concludes. "Together, both self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations constitute the major motivational beliefs leading to action, performance, and outcomes" (Erlich & Russ- Eft, 2011, p. 7). Based on the initial literature review, several studies focus on career development and career maturity for student-athletes, primarily at Division I schools. However, there are zero action research studies on student-athlete career development needs, self-efficacy, or transition at the Division II level.

Therefore, the gap in this study will highlight how the athletic system impacts student-athletes career maturity and transition. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge focused on student-athletes, career development., and action research. Action research will be used as the methodology to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 2

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Action research (AR) has been determined to be the appropriate methodology for this study. Athletics is a complex system, and AR offers participative collaboration that helps to identify creative solutions (Gapp & Fisher, 2006). AR will help to determine the best way to answer the research questions by using various methods that include both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This study aims to learn about student-athletes career maturity at the Division II level and explore strategies to support student-athletes career development and transition into the world of work. Two research questions will guide this study.

1. What was learned at the individual, group, and system level that advances theory a practice in an action research project to understand student-athletes career maturity?
2. How does the system support the growth of student-athletes career maturity?

Research on student-athlete career development at a Division II institution will impact the future of how athletic departments address the career needs of student-athletes. Using action research to solve the problem around student-athlete career development allows for a group of individuals to come together who have shared concerns to develop solutions that help to impact change, especially within the athletic department. “Unlike traditional experimental/scientific research that looks for generalizable explanations that might be applied to all contexts, action research focuses on specific situations and localized solutions” (Stringer, 2007, p. 1). Specifically, AR also allows the researcher to address the challenges within the system. The

chapter describes the approach used to generate data for this action research study and how AR was implemented. The chapter includes the methodology, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and subjectivity statement.

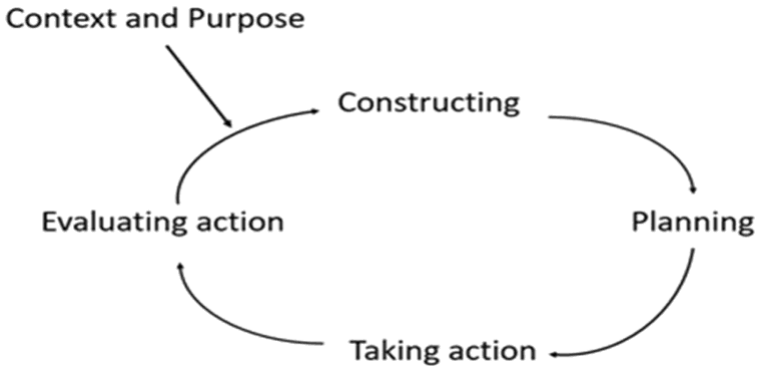
Action Research

"Action research has been traditionally defined as an approach to research which is based on a collaborative problem-solving relationship between researcher and client which aims at both solving a problem and generating new knowledge" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 35). AR "is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (Stringer, 2014, p. 1). Action research was chosen for this study because it is an integrative approach to problem-solving and fact-finding to improve a complex system such as collegiate athletics and its approach to developing student-athletes. According to Stringer (2014), such a collaborative approach helps practitioners, client groups, and stakeholders understand the problems and issues as they reflect on their situation together. The collaborative approach allows participants and stakeholders to create solutions to their problems and improve their community's quality, such as breaking down silos and re-envisioning the department's structure that better supports student-athletes. Athletics was operating in a silo, partly due to the department's location, which is two miles from any building on campus. This made it difficult for student-athletes to know what services were offered on campus when most of their time spent is two miles ways from the main parts of campus where student services are housed. The other reasons are the lack of cross-campus collaboration or information sharing. The AR approach help creates a stimulating collaborative environment for this research study to try to make a significant change.

Working through AR cycles effectively identified solutions to address collegiate athletics' complexity using these four steps, which include (1) *planning for action*, which involves understanding the purpose of the project constructing the issue; in this case, the problem is student-athletes career maturity, and how it is impacted by Athletic academic support; (2) *Taking action*, implementing the AR team plan that attempts to address the problem; (3) *Evaluating the action*, examining to see if the action that was implemented by the AR team was appropriate and what needed to come next and (4) *future planning based on outcomes of action, identified* the next steps what came out of the cycle and reflecting on if there needed to be another cycle to help find the solution to the problem (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 6). AR is an order of events, change, and problem-solving approach. The AR process is cyclical to explore the details of a particular phenomenon, and action through observation and reflection (Thathong et. al, 2009).

Figure 2.1

The Action Research Cycle



Note. The action research cycle (Source: Coghlan, David, and Teresa Brannick, Doing action research in your own organization, 4th ed., © Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p. 8, London: Sage.

Lastly, using AR for this study will cultivate learning based on the problem's outcomes with hopes of sustainable change. Action research has not been used empirically to understand

the factors that influence student-athletes career maturity. Much of the current scholarship around athletics has been a qualitative or quantitative approach with little resolution on improving the student-athletes career development. Using AR generates new knowledge that helps Athletics better support student-athletes career maturity and provides the athletic department with a better understanding of student-athletes' needs.

Voices of Action Research

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2014), AR incorporates three voices and three audiences. *First-person* addresses the individual's approach to their own life to act out of awareness. An example of this is self-reflection, understanding of intentions, behaviors, and strategies. The first-person perspective is my responsibility as a researcher to ensure I practice reflective journaling to unpack the experiences, learning, feelings, challenges, and general thoughts I have during the AR journey. Mortari (2015) mentions, "Learning the practice of reflection is fundamental because it allows people to engage into a thoughtful relationship with the world-life and thus gains an awake stance about one's lived experience" (p. 1).

Reflection during the AR journey benefits the AR team, and they were encouraged to unpack their own learning through reflection to foster mindfulness. The second person refers to the "we" working with others to inquire about or addresses a shared concern through dialogue. An example of this is meeting with the chosen AR team and engaging in conversations that allow the group to apply action, planning, and reflection cycles to the process (Hynes, 2013). My goal was to ensure that the AR team worked together, rotating roles and responsibilities, which included notetaking, creating agendas, and leading meetings that created a team dynamic. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) *The third person* refers to the "they" people who have never come together but may be affected by athletic culture.

An example of this would be other students, staff, faculty, and the external community who were not directly involved in the project but may have been impacted. The third person is impersonal and is actualized through disseminating by reporting and publishing results (p. 7). By actively participating and engaging in the voices of AR the team stayed present and continuously reflected in the first and second person and brought their full being to the process. The goal was to enact sustainable change that improved student-athletes career development. Herr and Anderson (2005) offer five validity criteria to ensure the quality of an action research study. These key aspects are (1) the *generation of new knowledge,* (2) *the achievement of action-oriented outcomes,* (3) *the education of both researcher and participants,* (4) *results that are relevant to the local setting,* and (5) *a sound and appropriate research methodology* (p. 54-55).

College athletics is a complex system within a more extensive system. There are multiple departments, rules, strategies, and people that work together to make up an athletic program within a higher education system. Ideally, this research study took the collaborative exploration approach; by using the action research goals, the AR team was best suited to inform and shape the direction of change. Traditional research focuses on the third person and is not community-centered; instead, it focuses on the research results and would not address the needs of college athletics for this research study. Using all voices of AR benefitted this study.

I investigated the individual, group, and organizational inferences of student-athlete career maturity. Individually I reflected on my growth and challenges and the growth and challenges of the AR team and student-athlete participants. On the group level, I studied how working with the AR team, and implementing an intervention collaboratively, impacted student-athletes career maturity. On the organizational level, I reviewed how the implementation of the AR team's intervention impacted the way Athletics supported the career development needs of

current student-athletes. Since AR is a cyclical pattern of problem identification, planning, taking action, and reflecting. The AR team continued to reevaluate, reflect, and recreate a new solution that further made AR beneficial to the study.

Benefits of Action Research

AR improved the organization through interventions to meet student-athletes' needs presently. The AR team learned together while developing interventions for a common goal. "Action research works on the assumption that all people who affect or are affected by the issue investigated should be included in the process of inquiry" (Stringer, 2014, p. 6). Inquiring as a team helped us understand the current situation and helped resolve the problems that confronted the group. AR takes a learn-by-doing approach toward a specific problem identifying new and innovative ways that can help find new meaning in how a system approaches challenges and the possibility of making valuable and sustainable change. The AR process allowed the AR team to work through conflict, solutions, and implementation as a team because of the guidance AR provided through a repeatable process that supported learning and understanding.

Limitations of Action Research

There are limitations to AR as a methodology. AR is focused on a systemic approach that is designed to bring about change, and there are unforeseen circumstances that arise during the study, which can lead the center of interest or original hypotheses to be altered (Greene, 2017). Action research isn't always a favorable method in institutions because it is a close examination of problems. "Argyris's work is important for action researchers because it suggests why many institutions may not be thrilled at the idea of close examination" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 14). Another limitation to AR is that the length of time necessary to enact change effectively can lead to the AR team losing interest in the study, moving on to other career opportunities, and

disrupting communication as a group. Unfortunately, these challenges cannot be forecasted in an AR study. To address the limitations of AR, the team developed a strategic plan for effective communication, which included pre-planned scheduled meeting times that everyone agreed on. Recorded meetings for AR team members who could not make the meetings. The recording was shared, and everyone still knew what was going on. It was also critical that the AR team knew from day one the level of commitment necessary to enact action research. Lastly, establishing well-defined roles throughout the process helped keep the AR team engaged.

Additionally, a limitation of AR is that to enact change, a team of people with a shared interest in the problem should engage and work together to help address the problem. Without action research team members, it is hard to impact or penetrate a system. Due to the complexity of the problem and the system resistance, the study quickly pivoted from action research as a methodology to do a quantitative and qualitative study.

Furthermore, the knowledge gained from this study's results contributed to scholarship around athletics, student-athletes, athletic academic support, and career maturity. Using AR filled a gap in research and helped guide future studies focusing on interventions to help identify new solutions that can benefit another organization experiencing similar challenges. To achieve the goal, participants were chosen.

Participants

The AR team was made up of three individuals. Everyone worked with student-athletes in some capacity. The first AR team member was a former collegiate student-athlete who worked as the Advisor for a student-athlete leadership group and taught student-athletes with literacy challenges. The second AR team member was a faculty member who taught in the Sport Management program working with student-athletes in the major and assisting student-athletes

with experiential learning opportunities for rising seniors. The third AR team member was also a Sport Management faculty who taught student-athletes in the major as freshmen and sophomores. Each AR team member wanted to help student-athletes and provide career development opportunities that allowed student-athletes to succeed outside the classroom.

Table 2.2

Action Research Team Profiles

Individual	Department	Role
AR Team Member 1	Literacy and Special Education	Faculty
AR Team Member 2	Sport Management	Faculty
AR Team Member 3	Sport Management	Faculty

Note. The table highlights the AR team members, departments, and roles.

The AR team worked collaboratively to learn how to affect systemic change that impacted student-athletes career maturity. The participant group for this study was collegiate student-athletes, male and female, who were participating in athletics and were 18 years and older. Choosing current student-athletes as participants allowed them to share their current experiences and aided the study in understanding student-athletes 'current career development needs. In return, current experiences gave the AR team more insight by examining factors that influenced student-athletes career maturity. Additionally, the student-athletes were important for this study providing timely experiences that would help with future studies and continue to add to research and give current insight on the student-athlete experiences at a Division II institution.

Methods

A combination of quantitative and qualitative tools was used to understand the research problem. Although AR is not a traditional mixed methods approach, it is necessary to use the best methods to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014). In doing so, surveys and interviews were used. Examining each method separately helped to best explain the research design. Table 2.2 shows the methods used to answer the two research questions. The first method was the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Survey.

Table 2.3

The Research Plan

Method	Sample	Anticipated Data to Collect	Proposed Timeline
CDMSE Survey	All currently active student-athletes	Self-efficacy, career confidence	Pre-Intervention
Focus Group (current student-athletes)	8-10 participants from various sports	Career development experiences and needs	Pre-Intervention Post-Intervention
Focus Group (follow-up)	8-10 participants in various sports	Career transition experiences	Post Intervention

Note. The Research Plan Table 2.2 highlights the methods used to explain the research design.

Quantitative

Quantitative research is used "to test hypotheses stemming from theories" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 49). Numerous quantitative studies utilized Crites and Savickas' (1996) Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy. The CDMSE "measures an individual's degree of belief that he/she can successfully complete tasks necessary to making career decisions" (Betz & Luzzo, 1996, p. 415). The CDMSE has five-factor structures measuring (1) *self-appraisal*, (2) *occupational information*, (3) *goal selection*, (4) *planning*, and (5) *problem-solving*. CDMSE (Appendix B) is a 50-item questionnaire most often used in a group setting, but the shorter 25-

item version was used individually for this study and still retains the same five-factor structure. Betz & Luzzo (1996) “CDMSE short form is to be considered useful, it should be shown to be nearly as reliable and related in the same ways to important criterion variables as the longer form” (p. 48). The CDMSE survey was revised in 1995 (Busacca & Taber, 2002) to create a shorter version. As originally cited by Crites (1978) recommended: “using the Attitude Scale for studying career development, screening for career immaturity, evaluating career education, assessing guidance needs, and testing in career counseling” (Busacca &Taber, 2002, p. 442). The survey is used to measure attitudes of career maturity that cannot be observed. The CDMSE survey has been used in various studies to measure self-efficacy around career decision-making, but more specifically, the survey was designed for college students. The survey has been useful in vocational and career counseling, especially for students who lack self-efficacy and decision-making abilities. Using the CDMSE survey instrument is credible and both valid and reliable. “Validity is defined as the extent to which a concept is accurately measured in a quantitative study” (Heale & Twycross, 2015, p. 66). The CDMSE is credible. It uses a scale to measure how adolescents and adults approach career development and how an individual sees themselves in their career. Reliability “refers to the consistency or repeatability of an instrument” (Creswell &Creswell, 2018, p. 154). The CDMSE has been used in various studies and continues to be the most widely used tool when measuring self-efficacy and career decisions among young adults. However, this study is not explicitly focused on the measurement or the levels of career maturity in student-athletes. Instead, it is concerned with understanding how student-athletes view their confidence in making career decisions. The benefit of using the CDMSE instrument was to gather numerical data that supported the research questions and provided data on student-athletes' beliefs, attitudes, and trends.

Quantitative Data Collection and Procedure

The AR team used random sampling to administer the CDMSE survey to all current collegiate student-athletes 18 years and older. Random sampling is defined as "a quantitative research procedure for selecting participants. It means that everyone has an equal probability of being selected from the population, ensuring that the sample will be representative of the population" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 250). All members of the AR team were responsible for distributing the CDMSE survey to all 239 student-athlete participants by dividing them up by sport. For example, one member of the AR team contacted football and baseball coaches and asked that they share the survey link, while another AR team member contacted track and field, cheer, and volleyball coaches.

The purpose for contacting coaches directly was because student-athletes are more prone to respond to their coaches and student-athletes usually have a rapport built with their coaches that they respect any request the coach may ask of them, in comparison to someone on the outside of athletics. The CDMSE was re-created in Qualtrics, web-based software that generates surveys and helps with graphing information. The consent form was built in Qualtrics before the participant could start the survey. The Qualtrics link was then shared with the coaches of all 17 athletic teams and the Athletic Director. The survey was open for three weeks. Only one member of the AR team had access to the Qualtrics survey and was responsible for pulling the results once the survey closed. Upon the study's conclusion, the data was exported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet from Qualtrics that was password encrypted and locked the document within 1-minute of inactivity, which then required the password to be re-entered to maintain participant confidentiality. One AR team member had the password and access to the Qualtrics data to ensure the data was in a safe place. However, the survey results were shared with all AR team

members during meetings to discuss demographic information, individual ratings, themes, and participant responses. The survey asked for demographic information such as academic classification (i.e., freshman, sophomore), gender, sport, and ethnicity. Other identifiable information, such as name, was not tracked. Members of the AR team reviewed the survey data and scored the results collectively to discuss themes further and identify where student-athletes may have scored the lowest or highest based on the 25-item survey. The survey was low risk and did not impact the student-athletes ability to participate in their respective sport, but instead, the survey (Appendix B) is used as a tool to help gauge how student-athletes see themselves in career development.

Data Analysis for Quantitative

Quantitative research collects numerical data that is analyzed to help draw a conclusion about the study (Albers, 2017). Using the CDMSE assessment tool helped analyze how high or low student-athletes score on career maturity. The scoring sheet ensured that we correctly captured the data. Each sub-section of the CDMSE survey was scored overall and then scored based on each section of the survey (1) *self-appraisal,* (2) *occupational information,* (3) *goal setting,* (4) *planning, and* (5) problem-solving. *The* results provided the mean, standard deviation, and coefficient. Since the CDMSE survey was straightforward, one team member scored the data. Then the group looked at the results to identify specific areas student-athletes have scored higher or lower on their self-efficacy. The AR team analyzed who scored higher from a general overview and then from the demographic information provided by participants, such as gender, year in school, and race to understand better how student-athletes career maturity demographically. Analyzing the overall data and then breaking the data down into the respective sub-areas helped the AR team with planning an intervention, analyzing how specific demographics responded, and, most importantly, the demographic information was used to assist

with the replication of future studies (Connelly, 2013, p. 269). There is a qualitative portion to the study to further learn about student-athletes' career maturity.

Qualitative

Qualitative research uses various methods, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. Qualitative research is that "it lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals interpreting with their world" (Merriam, 2019, p. 3). For this study, a focus group was a method used. Focus groups are defined as a “demographically diverse group of people assembled to participate in a guided discussion about a particular product before it is launched” (Merriam-webster dictionary.com, 2022). Qualitative research allows exploration, involves emerging questions, and focuses on personal meaning. Qualitative research is defined as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). This study's qualitative data collection method focused on gathering diverse perspectives and a broad view of behaviors and attitudes.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were the qualitative method of choice. The goal of using semi-structured interviews was to gain richer responses from participants. Semi-structured interviews have produced stories that capture descriptive data (Merriam, 2009). Interviewing current collegiate student-athletes provided timely data and best captured the story of current problems based on current perspectives. Before the interviews took place, all participants were sent a consent form via Zoho Sign which automatically allowed individuals to sign documents directly and quickly, which allowed both the researcher and participants to have a copy of the consent form immediately. Once the consent forms were signed, the focus group interviews were conducted virtually.

The interviews were recorded using Zoom. All recordings were password protected. The screen automatically locks out after 15-minutes of inactivity to protect participant confidentiality. The recording was transcribed using REV.com, a transcription tool. The transcription collected was kept on a hard drive that was securely locked away and kept on the cloud storage that is password encrypted. Member check was conducted by sharing the transcription with participants to ensure the creditability of the discussion. The transcription was uploaded in ATLAS.ti, a qualitative analysis tool used for large bodies of textual or audio data to help arrange transcription and identify themes, keywords, and phrases that assisted in telling the story of participants in a creative way. To maintain confidentiality, the research study used a coding key to protect the names of the focus group participants, and only the codes were used to identify participants. The AR team took part in the semi-structured interviews. One member facilitated and asks questions, another took notes, and the last member made sure to record the session and write down any observations that helped the team identify themes.

Qualitative Data Collection and Procedure

Creswell & Creswell (2018) define purposeful sampling as "qualitative researchers select individuals who will best help them understand the research problem or research questions" (p.249). The qualitative method that was used for this study was focus groups. Student-athlete data came from Lantern University Athletic Department to identify current student-athletes. The AR team obtained information on current and active student-athletes competing in sports. This data provided the AR team with accurate, up-to-date information on current student-athletes enrolled to gain a clear picture of potential career maturity impact. This information helped the AR team develop interventions that impacted all student-athletes. To do this, the AR team identified current 8-10 collegiate student-athletes, male and female student-athletes who were 18

years or older, to learn current specific career development needs and individual experiences of student-athletes who had the desire to share, which help provide a better understanding of student-athletes' current career development needs. The AR team revisited coaches and asked them to recommend at least two students willing to participate in the focus group. It was essential to identify student-athletes who wanted to share and not force any participants for the study. We wanted an authentic response that would strengthen the study. It was essential to work collectively as an AR team and follow the four-step action research process. Co-creating as a team was critical to the action research project. The AR team developed a script and a strategy to gain informed consent before any method could occur. The informed consent shared with student-athlete participants was the approved consent from IRB student-athlete initials that were required to proceed in the study. No names were shared for the protection of the participants. It was recommended that participants keep a copy of the informed consent form for their reference.

The goal of the focus group was to learn from the perspectives of current student-athletes confidence in their ability to transition into the world of work. Gaining detailed feedback on student-athletes experiences and understanding of career readiness focused on the group. The focus groups helped the AR team gain knowledge of current student-athletes experiences by asking semi-structured interview questions (Appendix C).

Data Analysis for Qualitative

Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process throughout the data collection journey and can be difficult due to the amount of data collected. To analyze the study, it was first necessary to review the purpose of the study and then read and reread transcriptions and field notes to begin organizing data (Merriam, 2009). As a team, we reviewed transcriptions of the focus groups and break our findings into relevant sections highlighting specific aspects of the data.

From here, we developed categories and then coded data. Implementing this process kept the data and the team organized and helped us move through the data analysis structure. According to Stringer (2014), an analysis procedure could include reviewing the data collected, unitizing the data, categorizing, coding, identifying themes, and organizing a category system. “The analysis aims to identify and analyze data (information) pertinent to the problem. As data analysis continues, considerable amounts of data may be either irrelevant or peripherally relevant; the choice about which data to incorporate into the analysis process will need to be determined by the AR team” (Stringer, 2014, p. 141).

The analysis identified diverse perspectives, especially since the participants' views and experiences differed, and some similarities were based on sports and shared experiences. While qualitative data analysis works simultaneously with data collection, the idea is that we assess data throughout each cycle and not leave it to the end. Merriam (2019) stated, “to wait until all data are collected to lose the opportunity to gather more reliable and valid data; to wait until the end is also to court disaster. Many qualitative researchers have found themselves facing hundreds of pages of transcripts or field notes without a clue where to begin” (p. 15). As a team, we wanted to make sense of the data, and by doing so, we needed to consolidate, reduce, and interpret what had been said in the focus group interviews and what we observed.

Using inductive reasoning is defined as making predictions about novel situations based on existing knowledge” (Hayes et al., 2010, p. 278). Inductive reasoning starts with a specific observation and forms general conclusions allowing the AR team to see the general signs first before moving into deductive reasoning. The AR team could go deeper and identify specific conclusions on what had been found in the data. Deductive reasoning refers to “progressing from general ideas to specific conclusions” (scribbr.com, 2022). Using inductive reasoning and

deductive reasoning in the qualitative analysis further helped answer the research questions. At first, the AR team may struggle to identify key findings within the data. The qualitative analysis involved moving forward and moving backward to try and make sense of the results, which was beneficial to the analysis process.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in Quantitative Research

Creswell & Creswell (2018) says that to ensure validity in quantitative research, you must draw meaning and valid inferences from scores on the instrument. There are three forms of quantitative validity. The first is content validity, "which refers to the ability of the instrument to measure or evaluate all aspects of the construct it intends to assess. Concurrent validity indicates the amount of agreement between two different assessments", and construct validity "occurs when the investigator uses adequate definitions and measures of variables" (p. 153).

The AR team will follow the instructions for scoring the CDMSE, which according to Kornspan (2014), has been used in thirty-six studies making the CDMSE a valid instrument.

Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

The action research team acts as co-researchers throughout the research process, and practicing ethical practice is vital. Merriam (2009) mentions that ensuring "validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner." (p. 209). The AR will follow the four aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research to ensure trustworthiness. According to Elo et al. (2014) (1), *credibility* ensures that we participate in the study and is identified and described accurately. To ensure credibility, we used member checking by following up with participants on data such as quotes for accuracy and resonance with their experiences to make sure we correct errors. (2) *dependability* refers to data stability over time.

The AR team demonstrated dependability by evaluating findings, interpreting the findings, and reviewing our data analysis and research process. (3) *confirmability* refers to objectivity, that is, the potential for the similarity between two or more independent people regarding the data's accuracy, relevance, and meaning. As a team, we identified single themes from participant data and then cluster the themes together, providing descriptors on how we determined the themes and then organized the themes for our analysis. (4) *transferability* refers to the reasoning that findings can be generalized or transferred to other groups. I provided research evidence by describing in-depth the study's findings that will be useful for future researchers (p. 2).

Subjectivity Statement

As a researcher, I had a duality as an insider and an outsider. Insider status refers to the researcher being immersed in a setting where they are also working, which is common in work-integrated research (Smyth & Holian, 2008). Being an insider allowed me to understand the experiences and culture student-athletes experience. I understood the issues that occurred within the organization as an employee. I also understood the difficulties athletes face because I am a former student-athlete. As a former Associate Director of Career Development, I worked directly with the student-athlete population and had first-hand insight into the challenges and opportunities student-athletes experienced. Insider status means I have knowledge on whom to connect to within the organization, and I worked with other insiders who could share knowledge about this study's topic. However, the downside of insider status is that I did not understand the sub-culture or experiences of student-athletes day to day or what it was like to be an athlete in the present day. As an insider, my work relationships sometimes did not work to my advantage. Not everyone was eager to help or do more than their job role, and in return, there was no urgency or desire to support my research as they would if I was a private consultant.

As an outsider, the benefit of doing research in my organization was that I can also approach student-athletes as a stranger. The outsider takes advantage of observing and being detached (Griffin, 1998). In my current role, I was not connected to Athletics or familiar with all student-athletes, so I can observe student-athlete behaviors and learn without emotional attachment. So, I could learn about new programs or activities in athletics without personal feelings. The downside to outsider status also means student-athletes, coaches, or athletic administrators do not trust me and were not willing to participate in this study.

Upon completing this dissertation, approximately 14 years would have elapsed since my experience as a student-athlete concluded. Choosing to do surveys and focus groups challenged my desire to share my experiences with participants, especially when there was a shared experience. To minimize my biases, I asked questions unfamiliar to the audience but were not persuading participants one way or the other to ensure they could be reflective and authentic in their responses, precisely when it came to the focus group.

As a researcher, I am aware of my position and the biases I have, and how it impacted the study. I am a black woman, educator, change agent, former student-athlete, and first-generation college graduate. I have experienced inequities, such as being passed over for promotions. I have experienced stereotypical comments and exclusion from meetings. As a black person, I understand the mistreatment because of others' hatred for your race. As a woman, I understand not being seen as equal, especially in sports or athletics, where it is predominately male, so you are not taken seriously.

As an educator, the processes I chose were challenged, and my level of effectiveness will be challenged. As a change agent, I struggle to navigate through a resistant environment. As a former student-athlete, the desire to relate, as a first-generation college graduate, and an

unwavering desire to serve and guide are all biases that I was confronted with, so I remained subjective and practice neutral behavior. I carried a small notebook and writing utensil to jot down my thoughts, feelings, questions, and concerns to keep these biases in check. I was careful not to make this study about me, mainly when I became aware of a shared experience. Managing my feelings and thoughts was challenging, especially when unconscious biases affecting my opinion about processes and procedures were at the forefront of discussion because I have worked closely with senior leadership in past and present work roles. As a researcher, I needed to be mindful of making quick judgments and assessments of situations and people based on my personal or professional experiences. I had biases that senior leadership would not deliver on what they said they would do. I had experienced firsthand senior leadership not following through and not taking accountability. I wanted to be aware of my boundaries and how I showed up as a researcher, careful not to share my personal feelings with participants and not to feel a need to protect participants by taking on student-athlete grievances. I wanted to be mindful of not showing favoritism to one group over the other because of commonalities.

This was also true as an action research team member. I have developed a rapport with the AR team. I did not want to be blinded by their opinions because of my emotions. Instead, I remained focused on the facts and processes needed to conduct the study successfully and ethically. My personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts could have been a barrier because they could impact my decision-making abilities and behaviors in approaching this study. I planned to actively listen and take my time in responding to thoughts, concerns, or questions and not respond in a quick way that would hinder the study. I focused on being present and listening to themes. I focused on facts and not my personal feeling on the topic. I did not make assumptions about participants' experiences because there are some generational differences, and student-

athletes experiences are different and unique. I wanted to make sure data was accurately reflected. I was committed to working with my AR team and agreed on ethical boundaries to keep us all accountable throughout this study and took pauses when or if members of the AR team started to project their biases onto participants or in the research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, implementing both the CDMSE survey and using focus groups contributed to the study and provided insight, and systematically resolved the research problem (Patel & Patel, 2019). The methodology generated conversation and started to engage the AR team in a meaningful way. The idea of moving through various action research stages and moving from thinking about the problem to engaging with participants and learning from student-athletes' perspectives and what they were experiencing and doing so systematically is what makes methodology important to this study. To further move this research along, this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Georgia and was approved on November 9, 2021 (Appendix A). The study was determined to be an exempt study. IRB asks that modifications are needed for this study and notifies the IRB office. IRB requires closing the study once completed or submitting a progress report by November 9, 2026, whichever comes first.

CHAPTER 3

THE ACTION RESEARCH STORY

The AR process was a journey less traveled through a never-ending forest, a long walk-through unfamiliar territory. It was filled with ascents and descents. A journey of hard left turns and easy right turns, a journey of climbing up and falling, a journey of easy passages, and moments of being stuck in the mud.

The Lantern Institution is a rural southeastern university with a student population of 12,718; of those, there are 364 student-athletes, 214 men and 150 women. These student-athletes are directly impacted by the Athletic Department, which consists of 91 staff members. Still, more specifically, these students work closely with their athletic academic support professional (AASP), which is comprised of three full-time staff and 2 Graduate Assistants under the Student-Athlete Development Office, which is the sub-area of the Athletic Department. The AASP guide student-athletes regarding major selection and class schedules, oversee study hall, and check grade-point averages and eligibility. One of the most important offices for student-athletes to visit, and often visit multiple times a day over the year for advisement, study hall, and class schedules. The action research study focuses on the sub-area of the Student-Athlete Development Office due to the daily interaction with student-athletes and the role the office plays in the student-athlete collegiate experiences. However, this office is also tasked with other duties that would support student-athletes needs outside of the office's primary responsibilities creating challenges. At the start of this action research study, Lantern University experienced major leadership changes and a great deal of employee turnover.

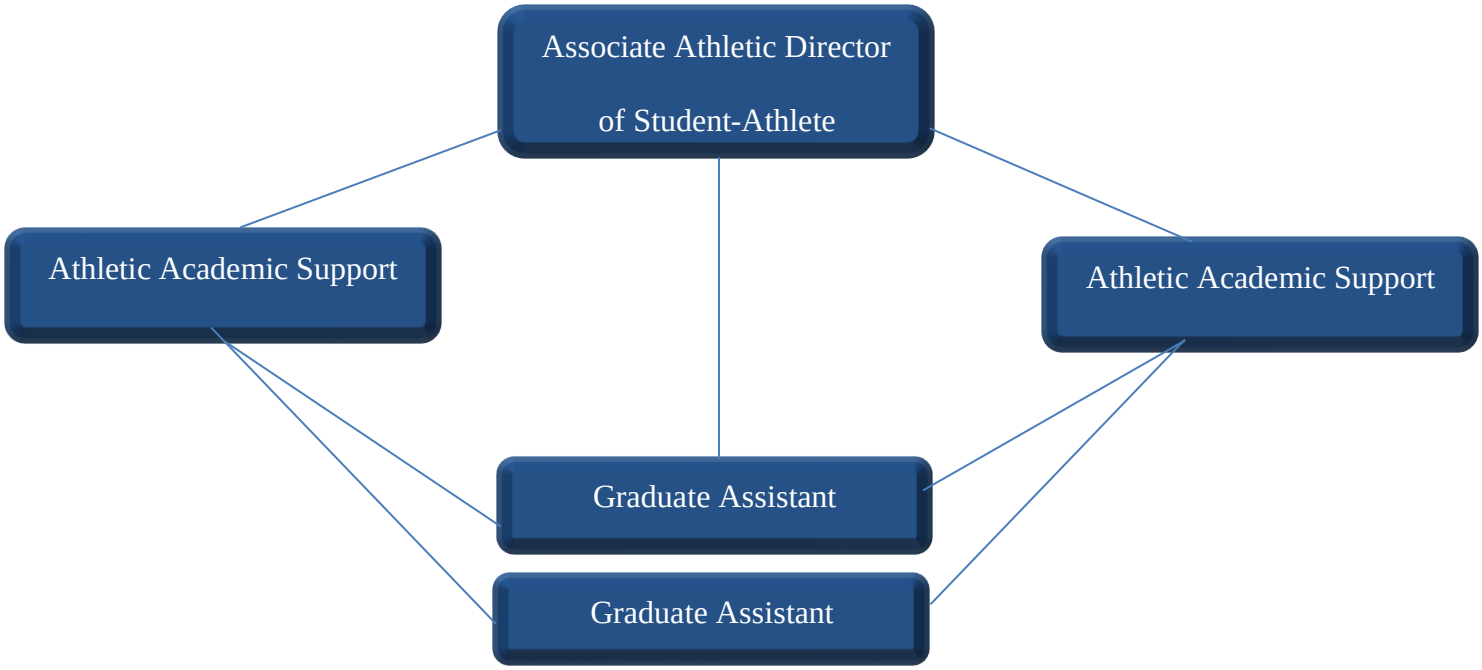
The Problem Framing

The Student-Athlete Development Office is often tasked with assisting in identifying solutions to improving the student-athlete experience, especially as it relates to career readiness from senior leadership. These tasks can include covering specific career-ready or life skills topics that coaches feel their teams need. Although this office works to collaborate with the Office of Career Services, the workshops are done during the evenings or weekends when student-athletes have better availability, typically outside the traditional university business hours of 8 am-5 pm. Therefore, much of the work falls on the Student-Athlete Development Office, which does not follow a traditional 8 am-5 pm schedule. Trying to meet the demand of assisting student-athletes outside of the office's primary duties presented a challenge due to the lack of professional staff.

Before the newly appointed University President, there was a strategic initiative under the former University President to increase volunteer and internship opportunities across campus for all students. Under the former Athletic Director, there wasn't much emphasis on implementing this strategic initiative in athletics. However, the Student-Athlete Development Office, which works with student-athletes daily, understood the importance of the initiative and has made attempts to implement and meet the demands of student-athletes in need of career development but has not demonstrated sustainability. The new University President rolled out a similar strategic initiative, with the additional requirement of increasing employability for all students and requiring departments across campus to show steps taken to ensure a strategy in place that would yield results.

Figure 3.1

The Student-Athlete Development Office Organization Chart



Note. The current organization chart. The office is responsible for assisting student-athletes with eligibility, academic advising, and life skills.

I have been employed at Lantern University for over eight years and have served in various roles. More specifically my former role as Associate Director of Career Development, I specifically worked one-on-one with athletics and student-athletes, assisting with tailored career development workshops and career coaching. In my current role as an Assistant Professor, I work directly with student-athletes who are enrolled in the Sport Management academic program. My responsibilities include teaching classes and overseeing experiential learning opportunities aligned with graduation requirements as part of the Sport Management academic program. These responsibilities also include communicating with coaches and AASP to identify

solutions related to class schedules and internships that support student-athletes who are sport management majors.

Over the years, I have worked cross-collaboratively with all levels of leadership, serving on various committees, speaking engagements, and developing relationships with all. Most importantly, I have closely collaborated with the Associate Athletic Director of Student-Athlete Development (AAD), working on programs and events tailored specifically for student-athletes. As a result, the purpose of my role was to help the AAD find a sustainable solution that the Student-Athlete Development Office could adopt that would help support student-athletes career development. Additionally, give the AAD leverage to advocate for a new position that would specifically support student-athletes' career needs and address the university's strategic initiative.

The major stakeholders in the client system were the AAD and the Athletic Director (AD), who were critical in moving the action research study along. The stakeholder's daily interaction and access to student-athletes ensured that the process to engage and implement change would be reliable, with limited barriers. As stated in chapter one, student-athletes have a lot to balance, such as academics and sports leaving little time for career development activities such as internships, part-time jobs, workshops, and volunteer opportunities. Turick et al. (2019) expand on this notion.

> "Ensuring that student-athletes develop the competencies and skills needed to get jobs, not just degrees after graduation, is a responsibility that college athletic departments are trying to achieve through student-athlete support services. Past research has revealed concerns that student-athletes may lack practical work experiences given the time invested in their sports" (p. 71).

The AAD and AD as stakeholders were an indicator of a need for career development preparedness for all student-athletes and a need for student-athletes to develop skills and practical work experience post-athletic experience.

The Beginning

The purpose of this action research project was to learn about student-athletes career maturity at the Division II level and explore strategies to support student-athletes career development and transition into the world of work. Specifically, the study is rooted in the belief that implementing career development strategies in the Student-Athlete Development Office would help the Athletic Department thrive. Ultimately creating an environment that holistically nurtures the student-athletes growth on and off the field. The following describes the action research cycles, their respective phases, and how each cycle attempted to organize a path that would bring about change and transition in support of student-athletes career development needs. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is learned at the individual, group, and system level that advances theory a practice in an action research project to understand student-athlete career maturity?
2. How does the system support the growth of student-athlete career maturity?

The study followed Coghlan & Brannick's (2014) cycles for conducting action research. Each cycle has four phases: *constructing*, planning, *taking action, and evaluating action*. The chapter first describes the four action research cycles used for the study, individual, group, and system learning, the work of the action research team, and the challenges. The subsequent sections of this chapter present the outcomes of the four action research cycles as described here:

Cycle 1: Formation of the AR team, conducted first team meeting, learned about AR and phases, learned about career maturity. Recreated the CDMSE in Qualtrics and learned how to score the results. Sent the CDMSE survey link to all student-athletes. Scored the CDMSE results and analyzed the findings

Cycle 2: Strategized approach to getting student-athletes to participate, attempted to add team members, and evaluated cycle one. Developed semi-structured interview questions for the focus group. Met with athletic coaches individually, conducted virtual focus group, transcribed data, and uploaded to Atlas t.i. for thematic findings; analyzed findings. Evaluated the findings and reviewed the themes to begin developing the interventions

Cycle 3: AR team meeting, developed intervention plan. Identified time, location, and length of intervention for student-athletes. Implemented a 4-week intervention with student-athletes. Followed up with all student-athlete participants to learn how they were currently using what they learned from the intervention.

Table 3.2

Summary of Action Research Cycles

Cycle 1	Dates	Agenda
Constructing	January-April 2021	Formation of the AR team, conducted first team meeting, learned about AR and phases, learned about career maturity.
Planning for Action	May-June 2021	Recreated the CDMSE in Qualtrics and learned how to score the results
Taking Action	August 2021	Sent the CDMSE survey link to all student-athletes
Evaluating Action	August – September 2021	Scored the CDMSE results and analyzed the findings
Cycle 2	**Dates**	**Agenda**
Constructing	September 2021	Strategized approach to getting student-athletes to participate, attempted to add team members, evaluated cycle one
Planning for Action	September 2021	Developed semi-structured interview questions for focus group
Taking Action	October 2021	Met with athletic coaches individually, conducted virtual focus group, transcribed data, and uploaded to Atlas t.i. for thematic findings; analyzed findings.
Evaluating Action	November 2021	Evaluated the findings and reviewed the themes to begin developing the interventions
Cycle 3	**Dates**	**Agenda**
Constructing	January- February 2022	AR team meeting developed an intervention plan
Planning for Action	February 2022	Identified time, location, and length of intervention for student-athletes
Taking Action	March 2022-April 2022	Implemented a 4-week intervention with student-athletes
Evaluating Action	July 2022	Followed up with all student-athletes' participants to learn how they were currently using what they learned from the intervention.

Recruiting the Action Research Team

To tackle a complex problem, it was necessary to recruit a team of individuals to achieve the goal. As an insider in the organization, I established relationships in various parts of campus. With the help of the AAD, I sought individuals who may already work closely with student-athletes and shared the same interest in improving the experiences of these individuals. Coghlan & Brannick (2014) note, “From your insider knowledge, you have a sense of particular individuals whose support is a prerequisite for the change, and a critical mass whose commitment is necessary to provide the energy and support for the change to occur” (p. 82). Everyone brought a unique perspective to the group, knowledge, and understanding of each one working with student-athletes in different ways, but also the shared experience of the majority being former student-athletes. There was genuine passion and interest from all group members. The original action research team consisted of five individuals, including myself. I served as the facilitator and action researcher leading the project. The team members' roles included Associate Director of Career Development; this team member provided updated trends in the workforce, programming trends, and counseling background that supported student-athletes. The AASP worked in one-on-one settings daily with student-athletes, assisting with major selection, class schedules, eligibility, and study hall. This action research team member was vital in providing insight to the action research team on any new updates in athletics and communicating pertinent information to student-athletes. The Associate Professor of Literacy and Education spent much time outside of teaching, working with coaches and student-athletes struggling with reading and comprehension and offering one-on-one tutoring. The insight into student-athlete challenges and barriers academically was critical information to note as an action research team. The Assistant

Professor, outside of teaching, worked with student-athletes in the Sport Management major on volunteer opportunities and thus made up a dynamic action research team.

Table 3.3

The Original Action Research Team

Action Research Team (Pseudonyms)	Role	Connection to Student-Athletes
Jordan Member 1	Career Services Associate Director of Career Development	Former student-athlete works one-on-one with student-athletes in career development
Taylor Member 2	Athletic Academic Support Professional	Former student-athlete works one-on-one with student-athletes advising on class schedules and checking eligibility
Drew Member 3	Faculty -Literacy and Education	Former student-athlete works one-on-one with student-athletes, tutoring in reading and comprehension.
Lauren Member 4	Faculty-Sport Management	Former student-athlete works one-on-one with student-athletes in the classroom setting, teaching, and identifying internships/volunteer opportunities
Ryan Member 5	Faculty-Sport Management	Non-student-athlete works one-on-one with student-athletes in a classroom setting.

Cycle One: Unfamiliar Territory

Cycle One: Constructing

From the beginning, the team realized that the problem was complex, and we were preparing to navigate through unfamiliar territory. Most athletic departments are focused on wins and losses. Primarily because the Athletic Department is responsible for raising funds outside the university-allocated budget. Fundraising supports the athletic program in recruiting, salaries, uniforms, facilities, etc., and can enhance an athletic program; winning competitions makes it

easier to retain donors and attract new donors, and coaches keep their jobs. However, winning competitions also means student-athletes focus on their respective sport and, ultimately, limit their time to invest in other purposeful activities (Jolly, 2008; Paule & Gilson, 2010; Huml et al., 2020). As a team, we understood that we would face resistance as we moved along in the action research process with the new AD. So many changes were occurring at once that we could not anticipate the journey ahead. We worked to clarify and define the problem, especially during a transition in leadership. We wanted to be intentional and clear about the journey we were embarking upon.

In the first cycle of this story, the action research team needed to understand the action research methodology and the phases of action research *constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action;* after each cycle, we enacted the reflection process discovering new information, new obstacles, and constraints (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). As I facilitated, the team needed to understand the importance of their role as a member of the action research team and the level of commitment it would take to create change. There was excitement to be a part of something that had not been done before at Lantern University, and there was fear of the unknown. However, the action research team continued to gather all the tools needed for the next phase of the journey and was able to move forward and start planning the next steps.

Cycle One: Planning Action- The Loss of Team Members

During the first cycle, the team was tasked with understanding athletics, its present state, the problem, and the desired outcome for student-athletes. As the facilitator, it was important for each member of the action research team to understand that desired outcomes are not only solutions to the problem but also important learning outcomes that are useful for practitioners

and scholars (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Reflecting on our findings and democratically collaborating would help in solving the problem. Throughout much of cycle one, the action research team inquired about student-athletes career development challenges and student-athletes level of career maturity and experiences. The team learned about career maturity, the CDMSE survey (Appendix B), how the tool has been used over the years in other research, and how to score the results. As we prepared for the journey, we discussed which member would distribute the CDMSE survey and decided it would be best for the action research team member who worked in the Student-Athlete Development Office (Taylor) to send the survey out due to the amount of rapport and access to student-athletes. Doing so would help guarantee diverse participants and possibly more participation than if another action research team member attempted to send out the survey. Our reach was shorter as most of us only worked with a small group of student-athletes. The journey was off to a good start, or so we thought. As we were trekking along what seemed like a clear path, one team member realized the journey may just be too long and they wanted to give up. Two weeks before the action research planned to send out the CDMSE assessment, one of the action research team members (Jordan) announced they would depart the university for another position. It was clear that our team was not exempt from the impact of the campus and its challenges in retaining employees.

Nonetheless, Jordan decided to stay on the project until September 2021. Jordan committed to participating in the data analysis of the CDMSE assessment. Although losing a member wasn't ideal, it gave the team some comfort to know there would be support in analyzing the CDMSE results and that we could get a little further on our journey.

Cycle One: Taking Action

The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) survey (detailed in chapter 2) is a self-assessment tool used to learn about an individual career maturity. Before the survey was sent out, Ryan (Sport Management) added the consent form in Zoho Office Suite, which is used for businesses to upload documents, sign, share, and send documents faster, so we would not have a delay in getting consent forms back. Ryan recreated the CDMSE survey in Qualtrics for quicker and more accessible distribution to student-athletes. Our purpose for using the CDMSE survey was to learn how student-athletes viewed their career maturity through self-assessment. The findings were used to develop focus group questions based on the results.

The team agreed that the survey should be open for three weeks allowing student-athletes to access the link at any time. Taylor, who worked in the Student Development Office, sent the survey link to student-athletes and coaches, encouraging participation. All reminder emails were also sent from this team member for consistency. Due to the student-athletes and coaches' familiarity with Taylor, the first week's responses were fantastic; we had 40 student-athletes respond, which was encouraging for the action research team. However, the momentum did not last long because Taylor soon felt the fatigue and announced they would also depart for a new job. The news came one week after the survey link had gone out, and from there, participation in the survey became less, only gaining an additional 21 responses. Although the action research team member sent out reminders to complete the survey, student-athletes also learned of the team member's departure. We continued to get participation, but the momentum slowed down a lot. The action research team member honored the commitment to analyzing the CDMSE results and stayed on to the middle of September 2021 to provide insight as well to the team.

Cycle One: Evaluating Action

Each question on the CDMSE survey has a 5-point scale (1) *no confidence at all,* (2) *very little confidence,* (3) *moderate confidence,* (4) *much confidence* (5) *complete confidence.* Each question corresponds with one of the five scales. These scales measure self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem-solving of an individual's career maturity.

Table 3.4

CDMSE Five Factor Scale

Scale 1	Self-Appraisal	Questions 5, 9, 14, 18 22
Scale 2	Occupational Information	Questions 1, 10, 15 19, 23
Scale 3	Goal Selection	Questions 2, 6, 11, 16, 20
Scale 4	Planning	Questions 3,7, 12, 21, 24
Scale 5	Problem Solving	Questions 4, 8, 13, 17, 25

Note. Each question is associated with a scale to measure specific areas of career maturity.

The action research team took a scale each and calculated the questions aligned with the appropriate scale. Calculating the results of each question and then finding the mean. We found that only one participant first-year undergraduate scored a one on each question, indicating a lower career self-efficacy.

However, based on the results, most participants had moderate to much confidence in their career maturity. Out of an average of four being high, most participants had a mean score between 3.7-4.0. On each scale, participants scored themselves high in all five areas. The means for each of the scales is as follows:

Table 3.5

CDMSE Five-Factor Mean Results

Five-Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Self-Appraisal	3.92	0.93	0.86
Occupational Information	3.90	0.99	0.97
Goal Selection	4	0.99	0.98
Planning	3.79	1.18	1.38
Problem Solving	3.93	0.96	0.93

Note. 25 items are rationally distributed among five subscales, as indicated on the scoring key.

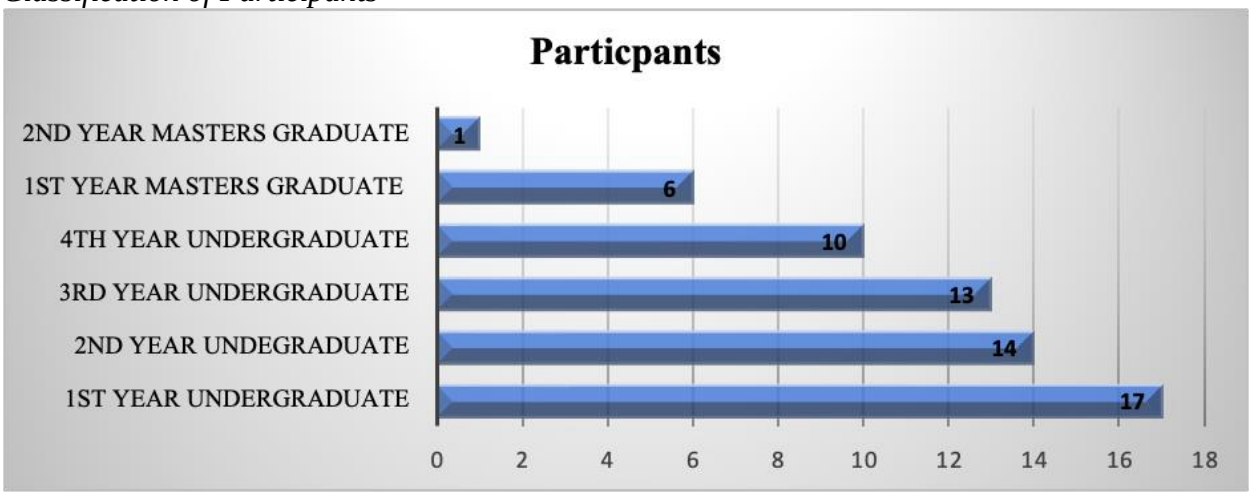
There was a total of 61 student-athletes who participated in the CDMSE survey. There were 35 women and 26 men student-athletes. Based on the CDMSE survey results, the action research team found that certain sports whose season falls in spring (track and field, baseball, tennis, and softball) participated in the survey. The sports in the fall season (football, basketball, soccer, cross country, and volleyball) did not participate in the survey. The results showed that most student-athletes felt career mature in most areas scoring the highest in goal selection, a mean of 4, and the lowest in planning, a mean of 3.79. In further examining the survey results, the action research team found that more first-year undergraduate students participated, and most respondents identified themselves as Caucasian/ white women.

The last chart shows the ethnic demographics of those participating in the CDMSE survey. Research shows that more women participate in online surveys than males (Smith, 2008). Though the CDMSE survey is not the main foci of the study, the use of the CDMSE survey was to learn, on average, where student-athletes felt the most career mature within the

five scales. The results were helpful for the action research team to see which population of student-athletes felt most career-ready. Still, this information did not provide enough insight into how other ethnic backgrounds or student-athletes rated their career maturity.

Figure 3.2

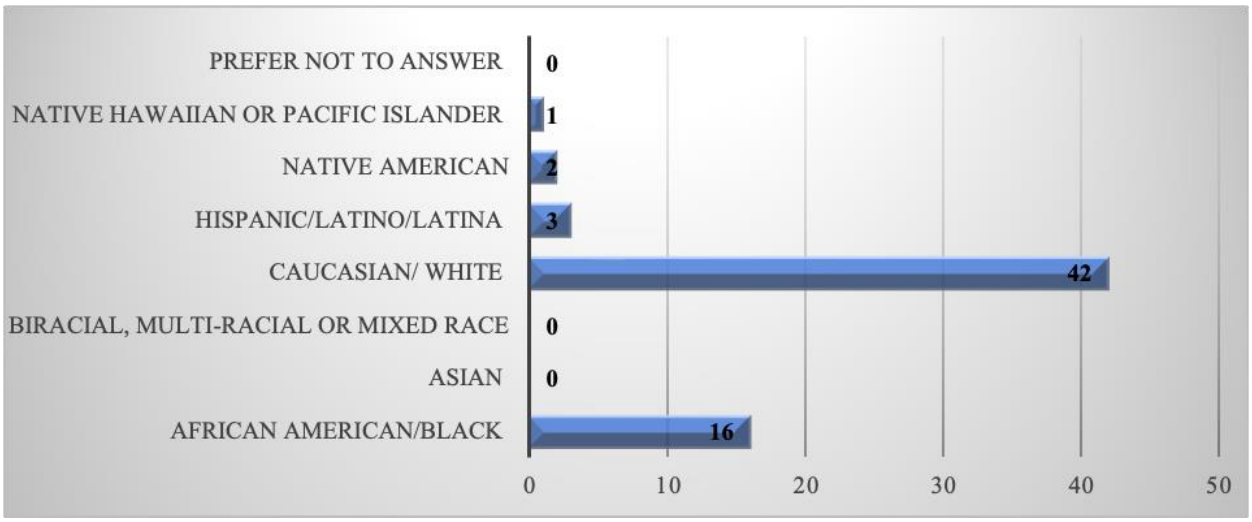
Classification of Participants



Note. Participants who are graduate student-athletes are 5th year eligible or gained a year of participation back due to Covid

Figure 3.3

Ethnicity of CDMSE Participants



Note. The figure shows the race of participants from the CDMSE survey.

The action research team gained knowledge into which student-athlete populations may be willing to engage in career development activities and which student-athlete populations may not be ready to engage in career development activities based on the participation of the survey. In conclusion, to answer the main research question after cycle one, *What is learned at the individual, group, and system level that advances theory a practice in an action research project to understand student-athlete career maturity*? We reflected on cycle one.

Reflecting By The Fire Side

Cycle One: Individual-Level Learning

As the facilitator of this project, I learned early that the campus morale impacted everyone, even the action research team, and I learned through observation and active listening how each member felt about their roles in their respective departments and about the departure of the two action research team members. As a facilitator, these were barriers, but barriers I could

not control. The CDMSE survey results were not strong enough to say how student-athletes felt about their career maturity. As a facilitator, interpersonal recruitment was limited due to the pandemic; most communication happened through email and virtual meetings. During this time, going door-to-door to coaches' offices wasn't ideal. Many coaches worked from home unless they were at practice working with their team which required each person to be Covid tested daily, limiting human interaction as much as possible for safety. The biggest challenge was losing Taylor due to the rapport Taylor had with student-athletes; it was difficult to identify a solution to keep the journey's momentum going, especially in emails to student-athletes.

Instead, I focused on motivating and reassuring the team of the importance of their role in the action research project and the long-term impact we would be making on student-athletes. Taking on a complex problem required more than one person, the need for the team to stick together and remain consistent in the process was crucial in moving the project along. At the end of cycle one, a lot of group learning happened for the action research team.

Cycle One: Group-Level Learning

The action research team found student-athletes who participated in the CDMSE survey to have high career maturity. The action research team learned that we should have engaged our stakeholders early and often to increase student-athlete participation. Out of 364 student-athletes, 61 participated in the survey, which is only 16% of the student-athlete population. The survey did not give the action research team a clear indication of how career-mature most student-athletes are due to the low number of participants. As a group, we learned early how to overcome adversity with action research team members leaving and the challenge of getting student-athletes to participate.

The morale and feelings of being overworked hit home. Luckily Jordan and Taylor kept their commitment to analyzing the results of the CDMSE before turning back and leaving the group. Both provided helpful insight making suggestions on how to engage student-athletes moving forward, especially engaging the male student-athlete population. Their recommendations included reaching out to specific coaches who showed enthusiasm for supporting student-athletes and asking student-athletes we knew to invite a teammate or share the message with their teams. Strategies we adopted in cycle two.

Cycle One: System-Level Learning

It was clear once we lost Taylor that there wasn't much support from others in athletics to push the student-athletes to engage in a career development activity. The system had been operating customarily for many years, and these behaviors and traditions are deeply rooted. Making a change or penetrating the system in a new way was still difficult. What we learned about the system was that we needed to take a different approach to how we could create the conditions for change and learn to work with multiple individuals within the system. We relied heavily on the one action research team member to push the survey instead of all members pushing the survey. Still, we learned that there are more individuals within the system whom we needed to cultivate a relationship with to render support of the system. "When we work with people, we need to create the conditions that will mobilize their energy, engage their enthusiasm, and generate activity that can be productively applied to the resolution of issues and problems that concern them" (Stringer, 1996, p. 25). At Lantern University, very early, there seemed to be a forgetfulness about the intended goal to improve student-athlete career development in the Student-Athlete Development Office. Although the level of engagement wasn't what the action research team had hoped for, we still were able to learn about the system.

Based on the CDMSE results, we found that the system has helped student-athletes with goal selection regarding their career maturity. Student-athlete participants scored this scale the highest on their self-assessment, and this can be an indicator that student-athletes could set career goals. Goal selection is not an area of concern for student-athletes. The lowest area of the CDMSE results was a mean of 3.79 under the planning scale. Although this is not a strong indicator of low career maturity among participants, it indicates that the student-athlete participants did not feel they were as career mature in planning for the world of work. These findings still were useful for how the action research team would construct and conduct the focus group in the next cycle. However, before the action research team could move forward, we reflected on the barriers we encountered during cycle one.

Cycle One: Barriers

In cycle one, the action research team struggled very early on with team members transitioning out of their roles and moving on to other opportunities. Both departed action research team members provided insight into the CDMSE results, which was helpful to the team as we made plans to move forward. However, losing the action research team member from the Student-Athlete Development Office (Taylor) hit the action research team the hardest because of the access to student-athletes. We relied too heavily on Taylor. This type of one-on-one daily interaction meant the action research team did not need to go through anyone else in athletics to gain access to a wider student-athlete audience, and the student-athletes were more willing to participate due to their own familiarity with Taylor, who worked in the Student-Athlete Development Office.

The second challenge the action research team faced was the inability to engage more student-athletes to participate in the CDMSE survey. Once Taylor announced their departure

from the position, the momentum seemed to be lost. One team member, Drew, did ask for support from the AAD and the AD as our team member was transitioning out of the Student-Athlete Development Office. When Drew asked for support, the AD offered to send an email encouraging coaches to let their student-athletes know about the importance of the CDMSE survey and the need for participation. The survey link was shared with coaches, but there was no proof or guarantee that it was sent to student-athletes. However, this was the only communication sent from the AD to further push the CDMSE survey out to all student-athletes. The lack of communication did not slow the action research team down, but it was evident that we needed to go back to the drawing board and strategize on better ways to engage student-athletes and the system as a team to be better prepared to pivot sooner when adversity occurred.

Cycle Two: Ascending

Cycle Two: Constructing

As we continued on the path, we found ourselves going uphill and progressing toward our destination. Our action research team now consisted of three members, including myself, Drew, and Ryan. During cycle two, we discussed the idea of adding new action research team members. We all reached out and tried to engage other employees who may be interested in the study, but unfortunately, staff shortages across campus made it challenging to add action research team members. The action research team decided unanimously that we needed to move forward and should not waste more time trying to identify new action research team members. The action research team members felt it might be better to be a smaller team and were willing to take on more to help move the study along.

In cycle two, we became more intentional about what we wanted to learn from student-athletes. We wanted to learn about the student-athletes career preparedness and their experiences.

Once we shook off the nerves from cycle one, we became more comfortable with each other and were more aware of the challenges to engaging student-athletes. We realized the support we needed should come from others in the system and not just stakeholders. Initially, we weren't sure what would happen, the process, or the outcomes. We learned what we could have done better in cycle one. All action research team members needed to engage student-athletes, not just one person. In cycle two, each of us felt more prepared.

Cycle Two: Planning Action

We began strategizing how to gain participation and who would be responsible for facilitating the recruitment of student-athletes for a focus group. Drew took the lead and facilitated. We discussed going to coaches' offices before or after practices to ask them to identify any student-athletes they felt might participate in a focus group. We discussed engaging student-athletes we already worked with in one-on-one settings, and we discussed sending out emails to all student-athletes and asking for participation.

Given our results with the CDMSE survey, Drew felt that all three approaches would be appropriate in giving the action research team more opportunities to reach student-athletes. As a team, we created a list of semi-structured interview questions (Appendix C) we wanted to ask; we wanted to get student-athletes to talk and share openly about their career development experiences. The action research team developed over 10 questions but agreed that all questions weren't necessary, but we should have them on hand in case we needed them to move the focus group along. As we continued to plan, we had to be intentional about our timeline, thinking about when we could conduct the focus group because of student-athletes practice times, competitions, when they were on campus, and study schedules. Due to the uncertainty of the

pandemic and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, we also had to conduct the focus group virtually per safety protocol. Ryan shared that doing virtual focus groups would also guarantee that student-athletes would participate and minimize the barriers to not participating. Ryan took the lead in creating the Zoom link and uploaded the consent forms in Zoho to capture digital signatures from participants, which automatically sent a copy of the consent form to the participants once signed. Our planning efforts would ensure we would be able to get student-athlete participants and make the process smoother for better results. We developed a timeline for the focus group.

Table 3.6

Focus group timeline

Action	Date
Action Research Team Meeting	September 13, 2021
Recruit Student-Athletes deadline	September 27, 2021
Action Research Team Meeting	September 28, 2021
Contact student-athletes who agreed to participate in the focus group	September 29, 2021
Send out detailed email and consent form via Zoho link	September 29, 2021
Virtual focus group via Zoom	October 12, 2021, at 7 pm

Cycle Two: Taking Action

The action research team began contacting coaches, explaining the importance of the project and its long-term benefits for student-athletes. Since coaches spend a significant amount of time with student-athletes and provide support throughout their collegiate careers (Adams, Coffee, & Lavallee, 2015; Bojornson & Dinkel, 2017), most of the coaches had no problem sharing the information with their teams. However, some coaches showed more enthusiasm and

support for the action research team's project and clarified that they would support us in any way possible. These coaches provided names of which student-athletes we should ask directly because the coaches knew there would be a willingness to participate. The coach's support was very helpful, and their support proved there was care for student-athletes career development growth. The student-athletes whom we were able to ask directly agreed to participate in the focus group without hesitation, giving the action research team momentum. I facilitated the focus group while the two other action research team members supported me by taking notes and recording the session.

Focus Group

Although we had 20 student-athletes initially say yes to participating, we ended up with a total of nine student-athletes who participated in the focus group. When we drew closer to the focus group date, some student-athletes decided they weren't interested, had projects due, or it wasn't a way they wanted to spend their free time. Student-athletes have busy schedules, so it wasn't surprising when it came to how they wanted to invest their time (Huml et al., 2020). Student-athletes choose certain activities based on cost-benefit, individual identity, and peer affiliation (Juvonen, Espinoza, & Knifsend, 2012; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Student-athletes view this as a trade-off. Spending time doing one activity restricts time that can be committed to another (Huml et al., 2020). The eight student-athletes who participated in the focus group were seniors finishing their last year of undergraduate coursework. One student-athlete was in the first year of graduate school but in the final year of athletic eligibility. Although the group was small and did not necessarily represent all 17 sports, the group was eager to share their experiences.

Table 3.7

Focus group participants

Pseudonym Name	Sport
Shawn (participant 1)	Men's Basketball
Cody (participant 2)	Baseball
Joy (participant 3)	Women's Basketball
Vonnie (participant 4)	Softball (graduate student)
Amaya (participant 5)	Women's Golf
Tommy (participant 6)	Football
Jennie (participant 7)	Women's Soccer
George (participant 8)	Baseball

Cycle Two: Evaluating Action

The action research team wanted to learn what career experiences student-athletes had, the influencing factors on their career development, and their level of preparedness. We conducted a focus group recorded using Zoom and lasted for one and a half hours. After the focus group, the recording was saved, and Ryan uploaded the transcription to REV, a transcription software. Drew reviewed for accuracy, which is done by simultaneously listening to the recording and reading the transcript before uploading it to Atlas t.i. I took the lead in coding the transcription in Atlas t.i. since I was the only person with a license to access the software. The transcripts were uploaded to Atlas t.i. and I began developing a coding frame which is done in qualitative analysis. A coding frame is a list of codes that capture the most significant features of data and are then organized into simplified code categories (Connor & Joffe, 2020). Codes

give labels and thematically sort information giving meaning to qualitative data (William & Moser, 2019). To interpret the data, I assigned codes to the entire data set (transcription) and identified keywords or phrases to reduce the data set. I created a word cloud with the first layer of codes to visualize the words that stood out.

Figure 3.4

Word Cloud of First Layer of Codes

Note. Word cloud was created using Atlas t.i.

To further narrow down the codes, a second coding layer was created, and I began pairing keywords, coding for patterns in the data, and looking for commonalities or data that worked together. In Atlas t.i. these are called code groups. As I started connecting and putting codes in groups, the data became narrow, and I formed three code groups which became the three main themes of the focus group. Code group (1) is *career*, code group (2) is *influence*, and code group (3) is *preparedness*. Throughout the coding process, I communicated with the action research team and shared each step with them. We discussed codes and key findings for further group reflection.

Table 3.8

Codes from Atlas t.i

Code	Groundedness	Code Groups
Advisors	12	Code Group (3)
Athlete	51	Code Group (3)
Career	54	Code Group (1)
Career Development	6	Code Group (1)
Career Services	9	Code Group (1)
Coaches	19	Code Group (3)
Communication	5	Code Group (3)
Confidence	7	
Interest	15	Code Group (1)
Internship	18	Code Group (1)
Jobs	39	Code Group (1)
Major	18	Code Group (2)
Participate/Participation	5	Code Group (2)
Preparedness	16	Code Group (2)
Schedule	17	Code Group (2)
Time	34	Code Group (2), Code Group (3)
Transition	0	
Volunteer	11	Code Group (1)

The focus group findings are presented and grouped into themes from the participant's responses.

There was one code *time* that did fit into two different code groups influence and preparedness.

The two code groups and time were interrelated.

Figure 3.5

Themes that emerged in response to focus group

Cycle Two: Student-Athlete Career Preparedness

Before we concluded the focus group, a key area the action research team wanted to learn was if the student-athletes thought about how their student-athlete experience prepared them for the world of work. I asked the focus group participants to rate their level of career preparedness on a scale of 1-5 (lowest to highest), and many scored in the mid to high range, except for one who rated himself lower regarding career preparedness. These results align with how student-athletes rated themselves in the CDMSE, but the difference is that the CDMSE scale looks at specific parts of career preparedness such as goal setting, planning and problem solving, but there is not a scale that specifically measures career preparedness.

Table 3.9

Focus group self-rating of their career preparedness post athletic experience

Participant	Self-Rating of Career Preparedness
Vonnie	4
Shawn	3.5
Jennie	3.5 or 4
Amaya	4
Tommy	3 or 4
Cody	2 or 3
George	5
Joy	3.5

After the focus group, the action research team began to understand the problems around student-athlete career development. The focus group provide more in-depth information and gave the action research team more to reflect on as we prepared to implement the intervention.

Catching Our Breath

Cycle Two: Action Research Team Group Learning

At this point in our journey, we were working well as a group; collaborating well, and communicating more, we listened to each other's ideas, and we didn't break down when a challenge was presented; instead, we supported each other, something we did not do as well during cycle one, especially with the number of changes that occurred within our group.

We learned that not all student-athletes may have a high career maturity. If more student-athletes had participated in the CDMSE survey, more than likely, we would have seen lower career maturity means. We also learned that CDMSE does not directly measure career preparedness, so in asking the focus group to rate their career preparedness though most were relatively mid-high range on a scale of 1-5, there were a couple of student-athletes who rated themselves low-mid range, which was a cause for concern since the participants were all seniors. This was also an indicator that career preparedness should be an area of focus when developing the intervention. Learning about the experiences of the focus group was insightful in moving the action research team toward developing the intervention. The focus group offered knowledge about the system and its impact on student-athletes.

Cycle Two: System-Level Learning

Based on the focus group results, we found that the system needed improvement in career preparedness for student-athletes and disseminating information. Mainly because we found no consistent practices in athletics that support student-athletes; although it is not the coach's job to make sure their student-athletes are career ready; we found some coaches were supportive regarding the career development needs of their athletes. At the same time, other coaches did not support student-athletes in their career development needs. The Student-Athlete Development

Office is a place on campus student-athletes visit daily, and we found there is a lack of communication about resources, offices on campus, or other career-related opportunities that student-athletes would benefit from as it pertains to their career development. We found this to be evident from the focus group results.

Cycle Two: Barriers

Cycle two presented some obstacles to more student-athlete participation in the focus group. Time seemed to be a significant factor for student-athletes, but the inability to conduct an in-person focus group was somewhat of a barrier. Ideally, the action research team would have conducted two additional focus groups to reach more student-athletes, gain more insight into their career development experiences, and learn about other influences that may hinder their career preparedness.

As the action research team ended cycle two and began preparing for cycle three, the intervention, we started noticing Ryan's lack of engagement. The behavior change did raise concerns for me and Drew. Ryan shared that they were suffering from mental health challenges and having difficulty. As a group, we all agreed it was important for Ryan to step away from the action research project and focus on their mental well-being. Losing another action research team member was another challenge for the action research team; this was the reality for many individuals living in a pandemic, and unfortunately, Ryan was impacted.

It was at this point in the study that I made the decision to abandon AR and focus on creating a qualitative study. I no longer had an action research team; the system was resistant, and it was most difficult to continue to pivot and try to hold together a crumbling house. The student-athletes who participated offered a lot of insight into the problem, and I chose to focus on the data I collected from the focus group.

Cycle Three: Descending

Cycle Three: Constructing

The action research team was no longer a team. As we began to move downhill, we took a hard left we lost another member due to injury. The journey was hard however, Drew and I continued to work together to implement the intervention for student-athletes. We constructed a plan to engage student-athlete participants. Based on experience from cycles one and two and working to engage student-athletes, we decided the intervention could not be extensive and needed to be scheduled when student-athletes would more likely participate. We also had a small window to conduct the intervention due to competitions, practice, spring break, and academics.

Cycle Three: Planning

For cycle three, we strategically planned to implement the intervention. The intervention happened between March and April 2022, and careful not to lose participants over spring break week. We decided that the intervention would be once a week for four weeks lasting 1-1.5 hours long. Covid restrictions were more relaxed during spring 2022, so Drew and I decided to ask participants how they wanted to meet virtually or in person to keep the engagement and participation up. Drew and I intentionally scheduled individual in-person meetings with both the AAD and AD to gain support, reiterating the need for their support to yield better results. Both seemed to be on board and committed to ensuring we would have more participation from Athletics. Like before, Drew and I reached out to all coaches for assistance in getting student-athletes to participate. We did not create any demographic restrictions; we wanted any student-athlete interested in participating. We also asked our focus group participants to join in the intervention.

Cycle Three: Taking-Action

We were able to get 12 student-athletes to participate in the intervention. These participants represented track and field, women's basketball, volleyball, baseball, football, and men's basketball. There were only three student-athletes from the focus group who participated. All others were either in competition season, graduated, or engaged in other things.

Table 3.10

Student-Athlete Intervention Group and Classification

Sport	Classification
Football	Junior (focus group participant)
Men's Basketball	Senior (focus group participant)
Men's Basketball	Junior
Track and Field	Freshman
Track and Field	Junior
Track and Field	First-year graduate student
Track and Field	Junior
Track and Field	Freshman
Volleyball	Sophomore
Volleyball	Senior
Women's Basketball	Senior (focus group participant)
Women's Basketball	Senior

The student-athletes who wanted to participate asked for the intervention to be conducted on campus, expressing that it was familiar and more accessible. Drew facilitated all communication with student-athletes by scheduling a meeting room and sending out meeting times and reminders via email while I facilitated the interventions. We shared a schedule with the 12 participants so they could plan accordingly.

Table 3.11

Intervention Schedule

Date/Time	Career Topic
Thursday, March 10 @7pm	Resume & cover letter writing
Thursday, March 17@7pm	Job & internship search
Thursday, March 31@7pm	Interviewing
Thursday, April 7@7pm	Salary negotiations

Note. No meetings occurred during the week of March 20-26 at Lantern University spring break. No location is displayed for confidentiality purposes.

Resume and Cover Letter Writing Session # 1

Our first session covered resume and cover letter writing. All participants were asked to bring their resume and cover letter or just jot down any experiences they had from volunteering, internship, part-time jobs, or being a part of clubs if they did not have a resume or cover letter. The session's objective was to teach student-athletes how to highlight their athletic accomplishments, create a resume or make changes to enhance their resume through a hands-on approach. Doing so also helped student-athletes who had very little to no experience think about ways to gain more experience to build a resume. The cover letter proved to be more challenging for the student-athletes because many had never written a cover letter before or had never worked. I spent more time teaching the process of cover letter writing. As I workshopped the session, student-athlete participants would provide support to each other. Without asking or mentioning, the upperclassman would sit next to or get up to move to help the lower classman by showing them what they had done and sometimes started engaging in conversation on some things to do around campus that would help with gaining experience. Drew observed and noted

one student-athletes support for another. The time flew by, and to our surprise, the student-athletes did not mind staying a little longer to get their questions answered or fellowship with other student-athletes. I ended by asking the participants if they found the session helpful. It was a resounding yes. I did provide sample resumes and cover letter handouts so they would continue to work on their documents. The student-athletes stayed to support each other, and we noticed their engagement level was also very high, giving Drew and me the momentum for the subsequent intervention sessions.

Job and Internship Search Session #2

Drew sent out the reminder for the second session, and all 12 student-athletes attended. I opened the session with reflection and asked the student-athletes to describe how they felt about the last session and one word to describe the second session. Some participants shared *eye-opening, excited, concerned, ready, thankful, and go-time.* Drew observed the session as I facilitated. During this session, student-athletes asked many questions about how to find jobs on campus, in the community, or internships for the summer. Instead of the session being only a general overview, it quickly became more individualized. I showed student-athletes how to search for their specific interest, on-campus jobs, and when to start looking for summer internships. At the end of the session, I asked the participants to reflect again on how they felt. The group unanimously shared enthusiasm. Drew and I noticed that the participants were taking notes. I provided handouts on job and internship search tips, so each participant had a takeaway to refer to.

Interviewing Session # 3

As we prepared to meet for the third session, Drew and I briefly paused on our walk downhill, and he informed me that I would be on my own, but reminders for the meeting were sent out, and only one participant had communicated that they would not attend due to illness. A total of 11 participants came to session three. During this session, we went over the types of interviews (panels, one-on-one, virtual) and types of questions (behavioral and situational) that can be asked in an interview. I had participants get into pairs and practice being the interviewer and interviewee to create more of a more stimulating experience. The exercise generated many questions and started a conversation amongst the group. We discussed ways to talk about athletic accomplishments in an interview setting. I challenged the group to think about the skills they have gained from being a student-athlete and how that can carry over into an interview. Although I facilitated by myself, the session went very well. I provided the participants with a handout on commonly asked interview questions. I asked each participant to reflect on the session by giving me one word. They shared happy, grateful, fun, funny, practice, needed, learning, developing, new, wow, and nervous. I reminded the group that we had one session after spring break, and I encouraged them to all come for the last meeting.

Stuck in the Mud Alone

Salary Negotiation Session #4

It had been two weeks since session three, and I was concerned about the number of participants that would come. Drew sent reminders to all participants but did not attend the last session and showed little engagement in the project. I felt stuck in the mud, and my momentum was slow and heavy, I fought fatigue but took small steps forward. For the previous session, all 12 participants attended, and one participant decided to bring a teammate along, making the

participants total of 13. Before getting started, we did a review of all the topics that they learned from each topic. We discussed how they could use the specific areas to apply to the upcoming summer or future. I taught the student-athletes the importance of salary negotiations, dos, and don'ts. To help participants, I created a stimulating exercise. I handed out a real job description for all participants to read over. I gave some time for them to write down their skills, review the salary and come up with a salary number without letting me know to see if they could negotiate or get close to the number they wrote down.

Each participant came up and role-played with me. Participants learned other things they could negotiate outside of salary and asked many questions. I provided a dos and don'ts tip sheet as a takeaway. Some participants asked if they could contact me if they needed help in the future on any of the career topics they learned about over the last few weeks. To which I responded yes. I also informed participants that I would do a follow-up via email with them during the summer. As we ended, I wanted to check in and learn more about how the student-athletes felt about their career preparedness. I asked participants to reflect on their overall experience, and here is what was shared: *Every session was insightful. I am a freshman, and this was helpful. I recommend this to other student-athletes. I am more confident in going out for a job. I feel excited! I will be doing research this summer, and I feel prepared.* The feedback was positive from the student-athlete participants.

Cycle Three: Evaluating

Between taking action and evaluating, I waited three months to see if the intervention worked for the student-athlete participants. In July 2022, I sent the participants four questions (Appendix D) as a follow-up email. There was a total of six participants who responded. All

participants felt they could plan better for their future and felt more prepared for the world of work.

Joy, a focus and intervention groups participant who plays on the Women's Basketball team, shared that she interned over the summer and felt more prepared to plan her future better. She shared that resume, interviewing and workplace etiquette are topics that all student-athletes should learn. She is now in graduate school.

Cam, who participated in the intervention group, said she completed a clinical research internship over the summer in another state and learned a lot. She found an opportunity that has helped build her resume for the future. She felt that resumes and interviewing were topics all student-athletes should learn. Cam will be graduating in spring 2023.

Tommy participated in the focus, and the intervention groups who played football shared that he interned in sports over the summer and now works in IT sales. He used what he learned from salary negotiations. He felt salary negotiations, resume, and job search were topics student-athletes should learn. He graduated in the summer of 2022.

Melanie participated in the intervention and is on the track team said she worked as a camp counselor over the summer and has decided to become a teacher and coach. She felt the resume and interviewing were topics all student-athletes should learn.

Katie participated in the intervention group and is on the Volleyball team and shared that she is interning and thinks all topics are important for student-athletes to learn. She will graduate in December 2023 and plans to go to graduate school.

Alice participated in the intervention and is on the track team. She said she got a job at a behavioral health company and used salary negotiations. She felt that all the topics covered were important for student-athletes to learn. She is finishing her second year of graduate school.

Although all 12 participants did not send responses, it was evident that the student-athletes who did respond to the follow-up email found the career development interventions helpful. Some participants applied their learning to practice. The intervention proved to be effective.

Back Where I Started

Cycle Three: System Learning

The intervention revealed that the system does not support and lacks an understanding of student-athletes career development. The system does not intentionally support an environment where student-athlete can participate in valuable career-related activities or have an individual whom student-athletes can work with when it comes to career preparedness. Interestingly, the system has attempted to provide volunteer opportunities for student-athletes. Still, the opportunities do not align with individual career goals or are not necessarily viewed by student-athletes as valuable in preparation for a post-athletic career. The system does not hold the capacity to provide individualized career development for student-athletes or create additional volunteer opportunities that can align with student-athletes interests. There is a lack of cross-departmental collaboration and a lack of information about career-related options, so student-athletes do not know what else is available to them unless they seek the career opportunities themselves.

Cycle Three: Barriers

Although Drew and I individually met with the AAD and AD, we did not gain student-athlete participation. I strategized and tried to find ways to get the AD to support the project and get the word out to student-athletes. I even drafted an email he could send. Instead, the AD sent an email to my supervisor saying he could not guarantee participation. The message was forwarded to me by my direct supervisor the AD never communicated with me. When I reached out to the AAD, he told me to contact the AASP in the office for a list of student-athletes to

contact. There was only one AASP in the office; Taylor's position was eliminated. I followed up and never got a response. Drew and I had come up with a timeline; we decided to use the same strategy we used for the focus group.

Drew and I gained student-athlete participation by asking our focus group participants and visiting coaches and asking for their support again. Getting student-athletes to participate in the intervention was still challenging, which is why we ended up with 12 participants. The strategy did work and helped with moving the intervention forward. Even though the intervention progressed, Drew never communicated that he had lost interest in the project. He just decided not to come back after the first two intervention sessions. I reached out, and we spoke over the phone and through email about the project, but it was evident that his attention was elsewhere, and the project was no longer a priority. He had mentioned that if I needed any more help, let him know. What started as an action research team turned into a favor to support me. To end this journey, I scheduled a coffee meeting with the AAD to go over the study's findings. The AAD felt the information was valuable, when I brought up the lack of support in helping to engage student-athletes the feedback was that they only saw a few emails from me. The AAD commented that colleagues always have great ideas, and then they never follow through on them, especially when helping student-athletes, if you are interested in implementing new ideas, you should take ownership. He even mentioned that coaches should prepare student-athletes to help with career development coaches needed to take on that responsibility. At that moment, it was evident that my study didn't touch the glass ceiling of change. I had embarked on a journey with a group of people who had given up before we really started there were too many external barriers and internal barriers that I could not control. I worked so hard to keep the group

and study together, only to find that the journey proved to be too brutal, and I realized I finished in the exact same spot I started this time by myself.

CHAPTER 4

INSIGHTS AND CONCLUSION

The action research study aimed to examine Division II student-athletes' career maturity and career preparedness. The action research project was to build a sustainable career development program that supported student-athletes. To answer the action research questions, it was essential to involve members of the organization in forming an action research team; that would develop sustainable change that the Student-Athlete Development Office could adopt. The process of change was to assist student-athletes in navigating their career development. The use of action research in this study was to produce practical knowledge for everyday people (Bradbury & Reason, 2008). Student-Athlete Development is often tasked with providing career-related opportunities for student-athletes. To better understand the needs of student-athletes at the Division II level, the action research team set out to learn about student-athletes career maturity and their level of career preparedness. The action research study adopted a mixed methods approach to explore and answer the research questions. Quantitative data from the CDMSE survey and qualitative data from the focus groups suggested that student-athletes had a mid-high level of career maturity, specifically in career goals, but a low to mid-career maturity in planning for a career. The action research team used the CDMSE survey data and the focus group data to build interventions that would address the gap in how the athletic culture and processes impact student-athlete career maturity and transition at the Division II level. Although the action research team fell apart after cycle two before the interventions started, interventions

were still implemented in an attempt to create sustainable change. The study's data produced insightful learning and attempted to answer the research questions:

1. What was learned at the individual, group, and system level that advances theory a practice in an action research project to understand student-athletes career maturity?
2. How does the system support the growth of student-athletes career maturity?

Chapter four presents the self-efficacy and transition conceptual framework, the themes that emerged from the focus group and intervention groups that shaped individual, group, and system learning, the connection to literature, the study's limitations, future research opportunities, and the conclusion of the study.

Table 4.1

Thematic Chart of Findings

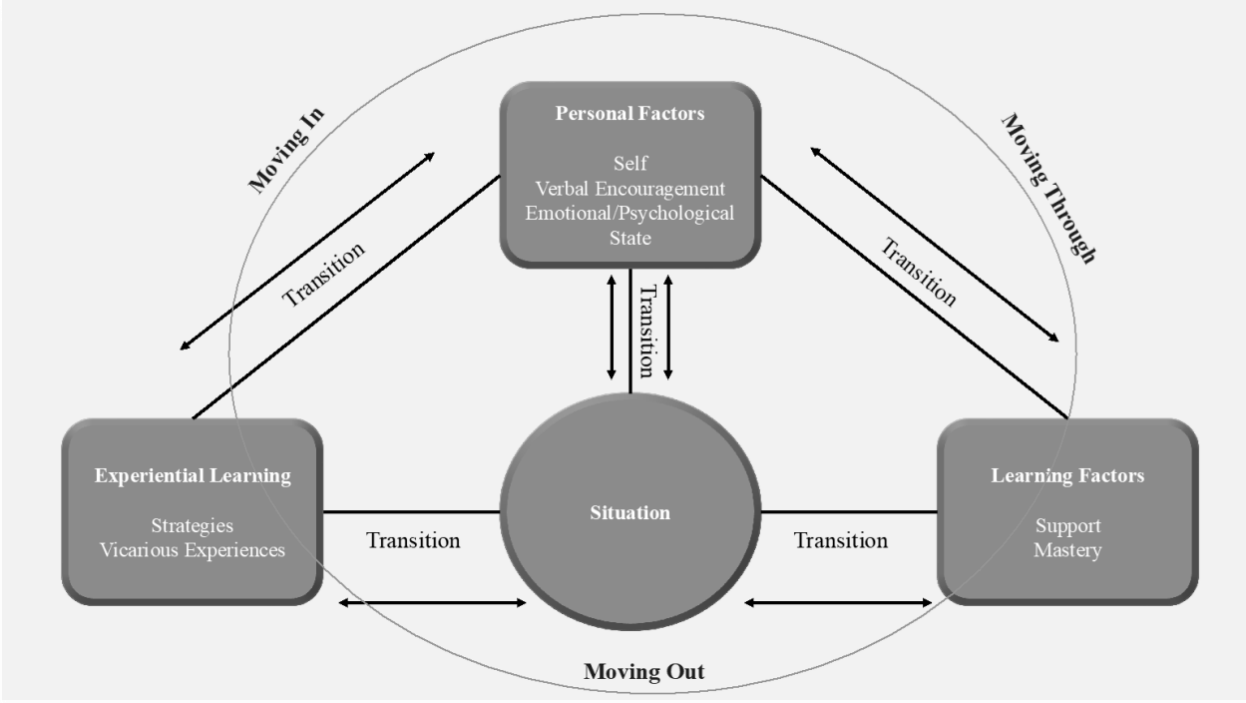
Levels of Learning	Findings	Research Questions
Individual Learning Topics: Unawareness of Services, Misalignment of athletics to career	Focus group participants wanted career development support. Student-athletes did not seek out career-related sources on their own Volunteer opportunities are not aligned with career goals or career interests.	What was learned at the individual, group, and system level that advances theory a practice in an action research project to understand student-athletes career maturity?
Group Learning Topics: Community of support, Application of knowledge	Participants created a supportive space Career development knowledge applied to the world of work.	
System Learning Topics: Lack of system support, No lines of communication	Participants recognize system problems and impact. Breakdown of communication between the system, internal campus partners, and student-athletes	
Topic: No support to grow student-athletes career maturity	The system shows minimal support for student-athlete career growth	How does the system support the growth of student-athletes career maturity?

The Self-efficacy and Transition Conceptual Framework

The study used both Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy and Schlossberg's (1984) transition theories to guide the study. The theories were combined to create a conceptual framework to understand student-athletes career maturity (self-efficacy) and coping mechanism (transition) through a visual model. Student-athletes are a complex population that comes from various backgrounds. While the career-related experiences differ from student-athlete to student-athlete, the conceptual framework helped to connect the specific factors *(personal, learning, experiential)* to understand better the different levels of self-efficacy and transition of student-athletes at Lantern University.

Figure 4.1

Self-Efficacy and Transition Conceptual Framework



Note. Transition is constantly happening and moving at any stage of the model.

The conceptual framework for this study focused on the concept that student-athletes constantly move in, move through, and move out of transition during their collegiate athletic experience. As they move, student-athletes experience various levels of career development (situation) changes. The conceptual framework was built on the idea that at some point over a student-athlete college experience, student-athletes will simultaneously experience various levels of self-efficacy shifts and transition.

Overview

The research attempted to unveil what was learned about student-athletes career maturity (self-efficacy) and career transition at a Division II institution at the individual, group, and system levels. The three levels of learning presented a significant theme and a sub-theme that helped to understand the athletic culture and the processes that impact student-athlete career maturity. It is vital to note that *time* was always a theme at all three levels of learning due to the subject matter, but not the focus of the study. The study instead focused on other themes and sub-themes from the data. Direct quotations help shed light and provide insight into the relationship between student-athlete career maturity.

Individual Learning

Each focus group participant shared their individual experiences with the Career Services Office. Individually participants were able to reflect on what they knew about services on campus that support their career development needs. Direct quotations from student-athletes help support the section and highlight student-athletes individual learning and experiences.

"Career Services? I Have Never Used It"

As a student-athlete, it can be a challenge to navigate a college campus and to know where resources are located when most of the student-athlete time is spent going to class and

then to the practice facility. Most college campuses have a Career Services Office or an individual who supports students' career needs. Career services serve the institution's student body by assisting with major selection, career coaching, resume development, internships, volunteer opportunities, and other career readiness support. For many student-athletes, resources across campus, such as career services, are underutilized (Murdock et al., 2016). The focus group of student-athletes at Lantern University consisted of eight seniors. It became evident in the focus group interviews that student-athletes were unaware of the services offered on campus. Student-athletes found that making it to the Career Services Office was a challenge, given that the athletic facilities are located on the opposite side of campus, away from resources and academic buildings. Although the location of facilities is essential in addressing student-athlete career development needs at Lantern University, it was not a primary theme that was found to impact student-athletes career maturity. The primary theme that emerged from the focus group that highlighted individual learning was the unawareness of services on campus and the subtheme of the misalignment of athletics to career opportunities.

Unawareness of Career Services

Career Services Office assists with career planning and is often used as the first step in career development. To grasp the student-athletes career planning process, the focus group participants were asked to reflect on a time they used the Career Services Office at Lantern University. Data from the focus group revealed that student-athletes were unfamiliar with the Career Services Office and the purpose of the office. Participants unanimously shared that they had not had an experience with Career Services Office at Lantern University.

Shawn (Men's Basketball) commented:

> *I didn't really know what career services was; I mean, I spent two years in junior college. We didn't really have anything like that. And when I was on campus, it was just sports from there on other than school. So no, I did not know what career services was or that we had one.*

Amaya (Women's Golf) was confused about the office and responded with

> *Career Services? I have never used it.*

And Cody (Baseball) was familiar with the office but did not take advantage of the opportunity to visit the Career Services Office at Lantern University.

> *Not here. I did a little bit at my last school. But not in-depth. I feel like I needed to.*

Most of the focus group was at a loss regarding what services were offered. Further underlining that student-athlete need the time to invest in career-related activities. Cox et al. (2009) mention that it is challenging for student-athletes to address their career needs before graduating. If student-athletes are unaware of what the institution offers to all students, then there will continue to be a delay in growing the career maturity of student-athletes. The focus group responses emphasized the lack of career planning for student-athletes. Visiting the Career Services Office is a part of the career planning process for many students. The assumption from the focus group was that their coach(es) or AASP would inform them if they needed to use any additional services on campus or if there were other offices they should visit. The topic of career services sparked conversation among participants, each asking if their coach(es) or AASP ever told them about this office or why it hadn't been shared with all student-athletes. Martens & Lee (1998) suggest that imposed structure can also inhibit student-athletes career development. The focus group participants had a sense of dependence on the coach(es) and AASP for information.

The AASP assumed that student-athletes would be informed of career-related opportunities on or off campus.

Unfortunately, student-athletes at Lantern University shared that when they came to campus, everything, such as class schedules, tuition (if on scholarship), housing, and meals, were already taken care of for them. Although the lives of student-athletes are more structured than those of non-student-athletes (Martens & Lee, 1998), the focus group participants did not take advantage of other resources on campus because they did not know much about Career Services or its purpose. Student-athletes focused heavily on athletic participation and staying academically eligible with some experience through volunteering yet creating a misalignment of athletics to careers for student-athletes.

The Misalignment of Athletics and Career

Every year student-athletes share an experience of participating in the same volunteer opportunities. These opportunities include reading to the local elementary schools, volunteering at the animal shelter, and helping other athletic teams on game days. Participants agreed that it was important to give back to the local community that supported the athletic program, and student-athletes also agreed that volunteering could be rewarding. However, the challenge with offering the same volunteer opportunities to all student-athletes is that these opportunities do not always align with every student-athletes major, career goals, or interest. Another challenge is that most times, student-athletes are expected to participate in the same volunteer opportunities annually, and it is not optional. Meaning there is not a direct career connection or emotional connection to the student-athlete because they do not choose where they volunteer. Often the volunteer opportunities offered by Lantern University Athletics Department are a marketing tactic to engage the local community and a sign of appreciation for supporting the institution and

Athletics. For the focus group participants volunteering was not self-motivated. Volunteering is often driven by an individual who is self-motivated and committed to helping over time (Shye, 2010, Martin et al., 2019). If student-athletes are not committing themselves, the volunteer opportunity is not as valuable for their career goals. Instead, they are just doing what is expected of them as student-athletes.

Martin et al. (2019) mention that there has been a lot of research on volunteering and student-athlete personal development but very little research on student-athletes satisfaction with the opportunities the athletic program provides. The focus group did not feel the volunteer opportunities were bad but felt there weren't enough and participating in the same opportunities each year became mundane. The focus group participants were unsure if the volunteer experiences made a difference. Martin (2019) affirms that "With the growing amount of attention placed on community services, it is becoming increasingly important to understand student-athletes' volunteer experiences in order to help administrators better coordinate impactful volunteer opportunities for their students (p. 113). Focus group participants did not report engaging in other career-related activities, especially during the competition season. For most focus group participants, the volunteer opportunities offered through the athletic program were the only career-related opportunities student-athletes would participate in for the academic year.

Vonnie (Softball) shared:

> *They offered many volunteer opportunities through the Student-Athlete Advisor Committee, where we would go to the elementary schools and read: we also helped the animal shelter, not too far, but in terms of internships, we never really*

had time to do that. Or at least, we didn't really have a lot of time to pursue internships or jobs or anything like that.

Amaya (Women's Golf) recalled participating in career-related opportunities during the off-season to gain experience and attempting to continue to gain career-related experience while in season. Amaya recalled when the coach felt the participant needed to focus on the sport more than gaining experience that would lead to career opportunities.

I did a lot of community service; I did the SAAC community service, like reading to the kids. And then I've done a lot of community service with a country club. And then I also, well, my coach kind of frowned upon us when we did try to get a job, And basically told me to quit my job. So, working during school and playing golf really wasn't accessible.

And Jennie (Women's Soccer) mentioned that she has only participated in volunteer opportunities offered through athletics and did not volunteer in any other career-related opportunities that aligned with her career.

We've like in past years we went to schools and read books and stuff like that. But as far as career-wise, no. I wish I did other things, you know.

Participants agreed it was important to gain experience while in college but oftentimes were not sure of how to engage in career-related opportunities. It was not clear to the student-athlete participants where to find career-related opportunities if it was not offered through the athletic program. Participants reflected on their individual experiences and agreed that they should have been asked about volunteer opportunities they wanted to participate in per team instead of continuing to volunteer with the same external partners, which was not beneficial to all

student-athletes. While most student-athletes did not engage with the Career Services Office, student-athletes like Amaya understood the importance of gaining experience during the off-season outside of volunteering for athletics. My findings align with those (Adler & Adler, 1987; Parham, 1993; Watt & Moore III, 2001 & Lally & Kerr, 2005) that student-athletes need time to focus on career planning activities throughout their collegiate experiences.

Findings

At the individual level, I anticipated that there would be at least half of the student-athletes from the focus group knew of or has some exposure to Career Services Office at some point in their collegiate experience. However, I found that all student-athlete participants were unfamiliar with the Career Services Office on campus. All student-athletes need assistance with career decision-making, and some students need specifically tailored help to progress due to their unique circumstances (Gordon, 2006; Buzzetta et al., 2017).

The focus group participants wanted career development support and wished they had been informed sooner and that student-athletes might've gained more career-related experiences; however, many of the focus group participants did not seek to learn about resources on campus or ask questions about career development on their own impacting their ability to enhance their career planning skills. The focus group participants engaged in volunteer opportunities offered through Lantern University's Athletic Department but did not make the connection between their major and career goals to the volunteer opportunities in which they participated.

Conceptual Model: Personal Factors

Undoubtedly, The student-athlete focus group had a shared experience around unawareness of services on campus and the misalignment of athletics and career goals. However, each participant desired to do more career-related activities during their athletic experience and

was aware of what career-related experiences they needed individually. Some student-athletes attempted to find opportunities independently but found their lack of knowledge about campus resources was a barrier to achieving their career goals. There is an alignment between student-athletes individual learning and the conceptual framework that guides this study. Specifically looking at the situation and the connection to personal factors. The student-athlete participants wished they had improved their career development skills (situation) to gain experience that aligned with their career interest (self) but also found athletics encouraged and guided student-athletes toward volunteer opportunities within the community (verbal encouragement). From these opportunities, although not aligned with the student-athlete participant's career goals, participants expressed the challenge in trying to gain career-related experiences (emotional and psychological state), which may have caused some levels of stress or feelings of being overwhelmed when trying to gain career-related opportunities outside of the opportunities provided for them. Bandura (1977) states that higher self-efficacy is based on repeated successful experiences and is not always focused on personal goals. The focus group participants did not consistently experience successful career-related experiences that aligned with their career interests or majors during their athletic careers, and they lacked the knowledge of where they could find career-related opportunities or support.

Group Learning

Focus group participants and intervention participants reflected on their experiences with coaches and athletic academic support professionals. Through group collaboration and reflection, student-athletes were able to exchange feelings, experiences, and support for each other. Through the interventions, student-athletes created their own community and space for learning.

"We Try to Help Each Other"

Student-athletes have a sense of community among teammates and other student-athletes participating in other sports. Often the sense of community that student-athletes experience helps in navigating the college experience and improves the quality of life for the student-athletes (Warner & Dixon, 2011). The focus and the intervention groups shaped group learning. Participants from both groups shared their experiences on what it is like to be a student-athlete at Lantern University; there was a level of trust among each group when they shared their experiences. From the focus group interviews, I found that the student-athletes had built a community and shared mutual respect, no matter if they played the same sport or not. The idea of community was not necessarily spoken out loud by student-athletes. Instead, it was understood that student-athletes belonged to a community. Group learning occurred with the student-athlete participants from the focus group and in the career development interventions group. The primary theme in group learning was a community of support and the sub-theme application of learning.

It is vital to understand what support looks like for student-athletes. Each sport, gender, and age group have different needs and ideas regarding support, and often, student-athletes look for support from those they spend most of their time with, coach(es), teammates, and AASP. Coach(es) become mentors and trusted guides for everything a student-athlete does and experiences. "Interpersonal relationships between coaches and athletes are a central part of the coaching process" (Choi et al., 2020, p. 3). While student-athletes also have a close connection with AASP (Buzzetta et al., 2017). Therefore, some student-athletes will ask their coach(es) or AASP for advice about career-related opportunities.

Seeking a Community of Support

The focus group participants openly shared the experiences that they have had with their coach(es) around the topic of career development. A couple of student-athletes felt their coaches were not interested in their lives after college athletics. Tommy (Football) shared:

I think personally that my coach doesn't really care about like what I'm doing after school. It's mainly just okay; compete and then play good. And oh, you graduate, you're outta here. That's kind of how it is.

Cody (Baseball):

> *Yeah. I've been here for four years now. And the first time one of the coaches has ever asked kind of what I wanted to do when I graduated was probably about three weeks ago. So, I guess that just kind of shows how it is.*

For Tommy and Cody, their experiences with their coach were primarily about performing and grades. When your athletic experience is over, the coaches move on to the next student-athlete. This behavior is not uncommon for coaches. Their jobs are to win competitions, so some coaches have no interest in what their student-athletes want to do outside of sports. Some coaches feel it is the student-athletes responsibility to figure their career development out and seek out the proper resources that can support them. Kramer (2013) at Bleacherreport.com mentioned that coaches are interested in athletes' academics because they must be, but the job is performance-based, and there is very little room for failure. The coach's livelihood depends on wins and eligible student-athletes.

George (Baseball):

> *I think my coaches' stressed academics in order to compete, but they were never really interested in what was happening next. Like they had talked about it, but it*

wasn't like one of the main things like during exit meetings or anything like that to kind of see what was happening next.

Meanwhile, some focus group participants had the opposite experience with their coaches and reported coaches checking in with them and taking an active interest in their career development needs. Shawn (Men's Basketball):

Yeah, yeah. for the most part, he knew that I was interested in sports broadcasting and stuff like that. He was just like, you know, when everything's all said and done, whatever I want to do, whether that's a professional athlete or pursue the sports analyst route he would support me, and he'll try to use his connections to help me get where I want to go.

Joy (Women's Basketball):

We meet once a week, and they ask me about how it's going. And to me, that's, is not a lot, I guess, but it still means something to me because in my last school I wasn't asked that. In that aspect, in terms of mentally, where I am emotionally, where I am in the direction that I'm going, they have been supportive in that way.

Although each focus group participant had a different experience with their coach(es) unanimously, none felt it was their coach's responsibility to make sure they had careers lined up, but the student-athletes did appreciate being asked about their career choice and would have accepted the guidance and support if it was offered from their coaches because they felt most comfortable with them.

Outside of practice, student-athletes also spend a great deal of time in the Student-Athlete Development Office for multiple reasons, including academic advisement, eligibility reasons, or study hall. While student-athletes spend much of their time working with the AASP, they often

go to this office to seek advice about classes. Some student-athletes just go to ensure they are taking the right classes to stay eligible, and this was the case for Tommy (Football), who said:

Yeah, they make sure you are in the classes that you need to be eligible. Yep. That's about it.

Jennie (Women's Soccer) also agreed that career development support wasn't necessarily something student-athletes sought from their AASP; she felt she could ask for help the AASP would try to help.

> *I would go straight to my athletic academic advisor to kind of like schedule everything. But that career part, we had talked about it, but the planning part wasn't necessarily there. I don't know if they feel pressured to do that or unless we brought it forward, then they would kind of assist in that.*

At Lantern University, participants shared that coach(es) and athletic academic support professionals had not demonstrated consistent practices or support in career development or career-related opportunities in their engagement with student-athletes. Focus group participants did not expect their coach(es) or athletic academic support professional to assist or show support related to career development. The focus group shared that when they find or learn about career-related opportunities, they share them with their teammates. The participants shared that they do not mind supporting their teammates and other student-athletes because they all understand the challenges of being student-athletes inside and outside of the classroom.

Application of Knowledge

Since student-athletes spend a lot of time with each other, whether it is by choice or the influence of the athletic structure (Comeaux, 2011), during the career development interventions,

the student-athletes who participated showed a lot of engagement and desire to learn. There was also a lot of support among the group. If one student-athlete wasn't sure about a concept or had a question, another student-athlete jumped in or offered to help outside of the intervention meeting. In the first intervention on resumes, a student-athletes noticed a peer's confusion and quickly jumped in to help. Alley (Track and Field)

Don't stress out. I didn't know about resumes either when I first came; we can talk more when this is over.

Emma (Volleyball) responded to a fellow participant Emmitt (Men's Basketball). He was having difficulty understanding how to prepare for interviewing and how to deal with nerves during a job interview by saying: *You just need to focus on your breathing the whole time. Think of an interview as a competition. You want to win, so you practice and focus on building endurance, you know.*

The student-athletes did not participate in the same sport and only knew each other either from being in the athletic vicinity, but there was still a level of support for each other's learning and career development growth. Emma's advice was to help Emmitt understand that career development was like participating in sports to make career development concepts easier to understand. I would argue that among the intervention group of student-athletes, there were different career maturity levels. Some student-athletes were familiar with career development knowledge and wanted to learn more, while for others, the career development concepts were new knowledge. The sense of collaboration among participants also comes because student-athletes spend more time together than they do with other college students outside of athletics, which presents a challenge in developing relationships outside of sports, further strengthening student-athlete bonds (Hamilton & Sina, 2001). The intervention group showed a high level of

engagement and commitment to supporting each other and participating in the interventions. Student-athletes created a positive learning environment. I asked student-athletes to reflect on their experience with the career development interventions, and Jessie (Women's Basketball) was most vocal in sharing:

I feel like this is something all student-athletes need because we are busy, and no one teaches us this kind of stuff. So, we try to help each other.

Joy (Women's Basketball) also shared:

> *We need all of this. Because I can tell you there are players on my team that will say, I don't know what I want to do. I don't even know what half of this stuff is. They don't have any kind of direction, and it's not like the coach is going to say, let's sit down and, you know, figure it out. There isn't one individual topic I can pick. All of it is important. I want to all of them.*

Once the interventions concluded, there was a three-month hiatus between intervention and follow-up for student-athletes. There were not a lot of student-athletes who responded to the following email. In the email, I specifically asked student-athletes to reflect on what they learned from the interventions, which topic they felt would benefit other student-athletes, and how they applied their learning to the world of work, if at all. Participants shared how they applied their learning.

Cam (Women's Track and Field), who participated in the intervention group, shared that she completed a clinical research internship over the summer in another state and learned a lot. She found an opportunity that has helped build her resume for the future. She felt that resumes and interviewing were topics all student-athletes should learn.

Tommy (Football) participated in the focus, and the intervention groups who played football shared that he interned in sports over the summer and now works in IT sales. He used what he learned from salary negotiations. He felt salary negotiations, resume, and job search were topics student-athletes should learn.

Melanie (Women's Track and Field) participated in the intervention and shared that she worked as a camp counselor over the summer and has decided to become a high school teacher and Track and Field Throwers Coach. She felt the resume and interviewing were topics all student-athletes should learn.

Findings

At the group level, I anticipated student-athletes would be less prone to engage or fully commit to the interventions since this was not a required activity, given that the interventions happened later in the evening. I did not anticipate many student-athletes participating in the career development interventions. There was a turnout of 13 student-athlete participants, but all participants were committed to the entire process. The topic was important to them. The level of engagement from both the focus and intervention groups showed that career development was an important topic to them. At each meeting, student-athletes demonstrated support for each other. The interventions took place after practice and did not overlap or interfere with student-athletes schedules, so student-athletes participation was self-motivated. Research shows that when student-athletes have career development activities included in their schedules, it does reinforce the message of support. (Martens & Lee,1998). The career development interventions were not a part of the participant's schedules, but they made it a part of their schedules, and what the student-athlete learned from the intervention group some participants used and then applied the knowledge they learned to the world of work. Student-athletes found career-related opportunities

to engage in during their off-season and improve their career development skills and career maturity. Further signifying that student-athletes have the desire to be career ready, an appreciation for learning together, and supporting each other. The intervention environment allowed student-athletes to share their career goals and struggles openly, and participants had no problem asking for help. When one athlete commented or expressed support to another athlete, it was received positively, and the athlete who needed the support did not push back but instead accepted the support.

My findings aligned with the notion that student-athletes need support and space to develop their autonomy to make career decisions. Going to college is a journey and requires student-athletes to make decisions, be responsible, and understand their career needs (Strange, 2004). In group learning, student-athletes understood a need for support as it pertained to career-related opportunities. Student-athletes from the intervention group also made the decision and a commitment to participate in the interventions without being directed by coach(es) or athletic academic support professionals. Student-athletes who participated took charge of their learning (Lavine, 2010) and begin mastering the career planning process, and applied what they learned to career-related opportunities that aligned with their career interest or goals.

Conceptual Model: Learning Factors

Group learning is nestled in the learning factors section of the conceptual framework, which focuses on support and mastery. Lantern University student-athletes were looking for support from their coach(es), athletic academic support professional, or fellow student-athletes on their career development needs. While student-athletes understood it was not necessarily their coach(es) or athletic academic support professional job to focus on student-athletes career development, there was a need to feel supported in career decisions. Student-athletes found

support in each other, and support was shown through action by speaking up during the interventions or offering to help a fellow student-athlete, no matter the level of the relationship. Additionally, student-athletes at Lantern University wanted to master their skills. In this case, student-athlete participants wanted to improve their career development knowledge and apply it to meet their career needs. Student-athletes at this stage of the conceptual framework were continuing to move in, move through, and move out of transition to ensure they were learning career development skills and student-athletes identified support systems and ways to master their career goals to move towards gaining career-related experiences.

System Learning

The system has much influence on student-athletes day-to-day, and it was apparent from both the focus and intervention groups. There was an awareness among student-athletes of how much the system impacted their career development. Participants expressed openly their desires for more support and how the system hindered their career growth.

"They Didn't Tell Us; They Don't Communicate"

In this study, the system is the Athletics Department which is a part of a university system, and the Student-Athlete Development Office is the sub-area of the Athletics in which the study focused. Some could argue that Athletics functions as a separate entity from a university system because of the number of employees, student-athletes, funding, and influence it has on a university. Athletics is a complex system that is most times enriched with culture and traditions that are rarely shifted, if at all. Lantern University has experienced many systematic shifts in leadership, but the culture and traditions have not changed, especially in the area of student-athlete career development practices. The action research team set out to help improve student-athlete career development in conjunction with the Student-Athlete Development Office. The

Student-Athlete Development Office wanted to identify ways to improve student-athlete career development. In hopes of making the case of hiring a career development professional within the office due to the number of strategic initiatives, this office is tasked with providing guidance for student-athletes. In the beginning, there was a lot of support for the study, but halfway through cycle two, there was a shift in behavior and attitude from the Associate Athletics Director (AAD) and Athletic Director (AD) toward the study and a lot of resistance to moving the study along, especially when I or the action research team members made a request that would assist us with making change. System-level learning revealed the theme of lack of support for student-athlete development and the sub-theme of poor relationships between the Student-Athlete Development Office and internal campus partners.

Lack of Support From The System

For this study, interviews were not done with people who work in the system. Instead, it was most important to learn through the lens of student-athletes who are a part of the Athletic system and interact with the Student-Athlete Development Office daily. Student-athletes from the focus group were asked to reflect on how they feel the Student-Athlete Development Office could support student-athletes career preparedness or career development. Participants were most vocal about their perceptions of the system and what they felt they needed in order to grow their career maturity.

Shawn (Men's Basketball) mentioned:

They can present us with opportunities, like, you know, internships and things that that may interest us, you know, to expose us to these things or help make connections with people who have connections.

Joy (Women's Basketball):

> *They can make sure we have time to cater to ourselves and our, you know, professional needs and stuff like that outside of sports instead of making it where they take up all of our time to do what we have to do as student-athletes.*

Vonnie (Softball agreed with Joy and added:

> *I would agree, yeah. I think we need to be a priority. I know for some coaches, it might differ in that way, but ideally, I mean, I don't think it's necessarily the coach's job to handle that career part. I think it comes from the Student-Athlete department. So, I think it needs to start from the top down.*

Tommy (Football) went on to explain what he wished student-athletes had and needed:

> *We need somewhere we can go to have basically our own advisor for career services and through the entire time. There would be someone there helping us with everything that we aren't able to do as an athlete. I mean specialized career services for anything we need.*

Zero Communication

Focus group participants felt it was the job of the Athletics Department and the Student-Athlete Development Office to provide career development support. These findings aligned with previous research (Adler & Adler, 1991; Killeya-Jones, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Settles et al., 2002; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005; Nite, 2012) student-athlete participants felt that if they were there to do what they are supposed to do as athletes, then the department should do more to fostering their career development even provide a career advisor who can help in giving

guidance. A sub-theme that emerged from the focus group was the lack of relationships that student-athlete participants perceived to be a problem. Some participants felt they had no connection with the AD and never felt like there was consideration for what student-athletes said they needed to thrive.

George (Baseball):

> *I would say just take more consideration into; you know, the athlete that is within the program. I mean, when we got a new AD, I think I saw him one time. He came to one of the practices, or it was a game or something like that. I don't think I ever saw him again. He asked us what we wanted or needed from them. I don't recall seeing any work toward those things or things we said we needed.*

While Jennie (Women's Soccer) shared that there was a lack of communication between departments and student-athletes.

> *I think there needs to be more communication between departments especially like for career services and stuff like that, and what student-athletes actually want to do or helping them use what they have learned and prepare them for life after sports. Especially for student-athletes who might end their career a little earlier or for those who go through injuries. Like, who's talking to them, or does their sport just end? I feel like it makes it harder for them when they leave.*

And Vonnie (Softball) felt like career development programs existed already.

> *I honestly think the programs are there. There is just a lack of communication between the departments and requiring student-athletes to go to those departments or at least to the Career Development Center to talk about what we*

want to do and things like that. We talk about not having time, I mean it should be required to graduate.

One student-athlete, Amaya (Women's Golf), expressed frustration with the Student-Athlete Development Office and shared that she has had to go back to learn career development because she was close to graduation and realized she was not ready.

I mean, you're so caught up in your day-to-day stuff with school, workouts, and practice that you don't think about your career or those kinds of things. You are literally graduating in 6,7,8 months and realize you don't know anything about your career or next steps, and your athletic advisor knows this but doesn't mention anything or someplace you can go for help.

The focus group participants did perceive the Student-Athlete Development Office to lack relationships and lack communication with other offices on campus, especially the Career Services Office. Due to the lack of relationships, student-athletes did not get the career development support necessary to be successful.

Findings

At the system level, I anticipated support from the AAD, who seemed passionate about making change within the Student-Athlete Development Office, so I was surprised to see the shift in behavior and lack of accountability for supporting the study and student-athletes. I did not anticipate student-athletes having such an awareness of the problems within the system and feelings about the system. My findings and insights at the system level are aligned with previous research (Watt & Moore, 2001; Strange, 2004, Tyrance, 2013) about improving communication between athletics and campus partners, the importance of student-athletes being prepared for careers and aligned with the Self-Efficacy and Transition Model *Experiential Learning.*

Conceptual Model: Experiential Learning

The experiential learning area of the Self Efficacy and Transition Model focuses on student-athletes attempting to figure out their career development and how the system can work to support the process of student-athlete preparation for the world of work. At Lantern University, student-athlete participants felt they lacked a career plan *(strategies)*. Student-athlete participants also did not have an individual who modeled successful strategies for overcoming a problem *(vicarious experiences)*. Participants felt they were not supported by the system and that the system did not communicate with them or with internal campus partners to help student-athletes overcome their lack of career preparedness. If student-athletes do not transition well to the experiential learning area of the model, they will find themselves transitioning back to the personal factors or learning factors area of the model before coming back to the experiential learning part of the model to identify a solution to improving their career maturity.

In this study, there were a lot of layers at the individual, group, and system levels in identifying themes and sub-themes and areas where themes and sub-themes were interrelated among student-athletes. All three levels of learning provide insight into student-athletes career maturity from their perspective. The three levels of learning produced findings from the participant data to answer the research questions.

Conclusions

The study attempted to respond to the Student-Athletes Development Office's desire to improve student-athletes career maturity. However, in doing so, other problems were exposed in understanding the impact on student-athlete career maturity through participant data at all three levels of learning, offering the major conclusions from the research study.

Conclusion 1: Hire a Student-Athlete Career Development Advisor who can guide and support student-athletes within the Student-Athlete Development Office.

From the study's participants, the perception of the Student-Athlete Development Office is that there is no interest in helping student-athletes prepare for the world of work, which was apparent to student-athletes based on the lack of communication of career-related opportunities or resources. However, the scarcity of communication may stem from the fact that AASP lack knowledge about campus resources themselves. Some advisors have reported a lack of preparation for the job (Rubin, 2017). This study did not focus on the level of training or qualifications of athletic academic support professionals. However, without trained staff to support the student-athlete population, career development initiatives cannot be implemented by the Student-Athlete Development Office. Research shows that some athletic academic professionals provide career advisement (Menke, 2015). However, for Lantern University, it is vital for the Student-Athlete Development Office to consider creating or hiring a Career Development Advisor who specializes in career development and can help provide tailored career services to student-athletes. Hiring someone to fulfill the role would improve the student-athletes career maturity and assist with their career transition (Shurts et al., 2004, Lally & Kerr, 2005).

University's strategic initiatives provide the support student-athletes need to grow their career maturity, assist in their career planning, and transition from collegiate athletics.

Conclusion 2: Sustainable change cannot occur in an athletic system without a team.

Athletics is complex; it is also traditional in how the system operates; to achieve success in athletics, leadership must initiate and demonstrate a behavior for change and fully support the effort of those interested in making change happen. The concern for student-athlete

employability post-athletic career is a topic of interest within collegiate athletics (August, 2018) nationwide, and there is a need to break from tradition and support student-athletes in innovative ways. At Lantern University, implementing sustainable change and using action research methodology to solve the problem of improving student-athlete career maturity would have been innovative for a Division II school. However, enacting change requires collaboration with a community of stakeholders with a shared interest (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). The action research team had a shared interest. Still, the interest wasn't enough to overcome the external chaos and penetration of the larger system, the institution, or Covid and its challenges. The action research study never stood on solid ground. I tried to make a change by myself and found overwhelming resistance. It is easier for the system to push back when there is one person, but the system may have had a more challenging time resisting if there were a large community of stakeholders.

Conclusion 3: The Self-Efficacy and Transition Model should be adopted by the Student-Athlete Development Office.

The Self-Efficacy and Transition Model support student-athletes career development and transition. The model can help the Student-Athlete Development Office identify where student-athletes may be in their career development. The model can be used to help the office develop strategic support for the student-athlete transition. Doing so would provide holistic and consistent career development for all student-athletes, further helping student-athletes build their self-efficacy around their career. The model serves as a guide and should be adopted into the athletic program to address student-athletes career maturity and transition.

Limitations of the Study

The study presented challenges early in the action research process, making it difficult to enact change. The action research study took almost three years (one year lost due to Covid). There were several limitations to the study, including the disbandment of the action research team, the inability to engage large numbers of student-athletes, and the lack of support from the Student-Athlete Development Office. The first limitation of the research project was that the system seemed ready and willing to change and improve the experiences of all student-athletes. There was a need to demonstrate how the university's strategic initiatives were being met under new leadership. Unfortunately, multiple external factors impacted the action research team, from the campus morale, and leadership changes, to Covid and mental health, causing the action research team to fall apart. The original action research team all worked well together and communicated effectively, which seemed promising in enacting sustainable change. Bradbury & Reason (2003) describe the collaboration between an action research team as a family due to the amount of time dedicated to the action research process. Unfortunately, this study did not have a stable action research team and did not develop familial collaboration with the transition of action research team members. These transitions caused the team to crumble early and made it challenging to complete an action research cycle. However, there are implications for theory and practice.

The study was the unable to engage large numbers of student-athletes to participate in the interventions. Without the support of the AAD, AD, and an unstable action research team, trying to engage student-athletes was a challenge. Student-athletes have busy schedules, and trying to engage every sports team simultaneously was difficult, partly because of different teams' competition schedules. Some sports teams compete in the fall, the others in the spring, and

because student-athletes are dedicated to their respective sport, engaging them during the season was impossible. It was also difficult to engage coaches during competition because they were focused on the season. Participation was low without system support to inform student-athletes of the study or career-related activities. Other challenges included the inability to interact personally due to Covid at the start of the study. The cautiousness and safety protocols made engagement in person difficult and forced the action research team to utilize email to communicate most of the study.

There was a lack of system leaders supporting the project, which meant the dissemination of information was not funneled down to coaches, staff, or student-athletes. The study was not high on the priority list for the Student-Athlete Development Office because the system did not want to take ownership of the change or do the necessary work to improve the office and student-athletes' experiences. The system only had an interest in taking credit for the change I had the privilege of insider access and still couldn't prevail in penetrating the system. I was a woman of one pushing back against a system that wasn't positioned to budge, making it challenging to enact change.

Doing an action research study at a Division II school attempts to fill the gap in examining student-athletes career maturity. First, to conduct an action research study with Athletics, the system must be stable, open, and willing to embrace changes needed to support student-athletes career maturity. Understanding professional play is only guaranteed for 2% of all student-athletes (NCAA, 2014b), it is equally important for leadership to support the efforts and develop strategies to help them gain career-related skills. There were a couple of implications for theory and practice in this study.

Table 4.2

Implications for Theory and Practice

Implication for Theory and Research	Implication for Practice
More research is needed on student-athletes career maturity at Division II schools would benefit other Division II schools in the long term.	The system needs to prioritize the career maturity of student-athlete and strengthens campus partnerships.
More research is needed to understand student-athletes' perspectives on volunteerism and satisfaction.	The action research methodology should be used to address student-athletes career maturity and transition. Develop a four-year career plan that guides student-athletes career development and assist with transition into the world of work

Implications for Theory

The implication of the theory supported this study. Student-athletes who participated in the study did have challenges with self-efficacy, specifically around goal setting. The focus group also revealed the student-athletes' feelings about their career maturity and level of career preparation and transition. Bandura's (1977) and Schlossberg's (1984) theories supported the study and aligned with the student-athlete participant's self-efficacy and transition.

Future Use of Self-Efficacy and Transition Theories

Previous research exists around student-athletes career maturity using Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory, primarily at the Division I level, focusing on football and basketball. There have been limited studies examining student-athletes career maturity at the Division II level. This was the first action research study to address student-athletes career maturity and transition at this level. Self-efficacy is a concept that refers to a person's belief in their ability to achieve a

goal or something of importance (Bandura, 1977). While Schlossberg's (1984) Transition Theory has been used widely to study transition in various topics, especially with student-athletes career transition, both theories have not been combined and used together to examine student-athletes career maturity and transition.

Further research using both theories would increase the effectiveness of understanding what impacts student-athletes career maturity and what transitions a student-athlete may experience simultaneously. The study only begins to fill in the gap in research on how the athletic culture and processes impact student-athlete career maturity and transition at the Division II level. The use of self-efficacy and transition in this research study assisted with addressing student-athletes at Lantern University's experiences.

Student-Athletes Perspectives on Volunteering

Identifying tools or resources for student-athletes early and often would improve student-athletes career maturity and better prepare student-athletes for transition post-collegiate athletic participation. August (2018) states, "The extensive hours spent in their sport thus rarely translate into post-college employment, unlike hours other students may spend in part-time employment or internships. Certainly, being prepared for post-college employment concerns most graduating college students" (p. 178). The system has attempted to assist student-athletes with gaining experience by offering volunteer opportunities in which all teams participate; however, those opportunities do not all align precisely with student-athletes career development needs, which causes student-athletes to disengage or struggle to find the purpose of volunteering. The data from the focus group revealed that all student-athletes participated in the same opportunities yearly. This may be an indicator that the volunteer opportunities are long-standing partnerships that have been traditionally done with specific organizations. Since the partnerships are not

intentionally aligned with student-athletes majors or career desires, the experiences do not improve student-athletes career maturity, specifically around planning for a career, but benefit the system instead. The system must learn what interest student-athletes have as it relates to volunteering. Volunteer opportunities should be intentional and help build student-athletes career maturity; additionally, making this change would allow student-athletes to engage in career-related activities annually, which ultimately helps student-athletes for transition out of athletics.

Implications for Practice

The study revealed that the implication of practice was lacking from the Student-Athlete Development Office. It was revealed that a lack of communication between the Student-Athlete Development Office and the rest of campus impacted the student-athletes ability to improve their career development. To improve student-athletes career maturity and transition, the Student-Development Office needs to break out of operating in silos and improve cross-campus collaboration to improve student-athletes career maturity.

Prioritizing Student-Athletes through Campus Collaboration

The athletic academic support professional role is to ensure that student-athletes are eligible to compete and enroll in the correct courses. Although the Student-Athlete Development Office has been tasked with demonstrating support for student-athlete career development, there is no evidence that the staff is trained to lead career-related efforts. The study's participants did not feel that the AASP was responsible for helping them with their career development and did not feel the staff was trained to take on the role. However, student-athletes did feel it was the responsibility of the AASP to disseminate communication on where student-athletes could find career-related opportunities or direct them to the proper campus resources, the Career Services Office. Thus, student-athletes career maturity is not directly impacted by their AASP, but

student-athletes career maturity is affected by the lack of communication and relationship between the AASP who work within the Student-Athlete Development Office with internal campus partners at Lantern University. When campus partners collaborate, these departments start to understand each other's respective areas and what is within the confines of the job, current organizational barriers, and what is not within the confines of the job when it comes to services for student-athletes. Rubin & Lewis (2020) also support this notion and explains that "literature has also shown that familiarization with the roles of advising counterparts is key to enhancing cross-campus communication and collaboration" (p. 93). More specifically, the Student-Athlete Development Office and Career Services should work more closely to support student-athletes to improve student-athletes career maturity and transition. Research shows that collaboration improves when there is clear communication between the Career Services Office and the Student-Athlete Development Office (Ledwith, 2014; Lenz et al., 2010). Developing more robust partnerships between both offices would be a promising step toward supporting student-athlete career development needs.

Continual Use of Action Research

Additionally, The action research methodology should be used to address student-athletes career maturity and transition. Action research is a methodological approach done by or with a community to address a particular problem within an organization (Herr & Anderson, 2005). One person cannot enact change in a complex system. Furthermore, multiple action research cycles should be implemented to effect change due to the complexity of Athletics and the challenges of the Student-Athlete Development Office. At Lantern University, making small changes happen by working with one to two sports teams at a time over an extended period could improve student-athletes career maturity. Building rapport with one to two teams and

implementing career development strategies would minimize barriers. Taking a slower approach and moving through multiple cycles allows an action research team to work through pulling back the layers that prevent student-athletes from growing their career maturity. Working with coaches and student-athletes in one-on-one settings could prove to be successful and potentially gain the buy-in of other coaches. Moving slower would be a long process, and this could create sustainable change. It is essential to develop strategies that help student-athletes transition out of athletics (Hansen et al., 2019) and create a model that equally supports all student-athletes long-term career maturity.

The implications for theory and practice for this study only touched on what Lantern University can do to move forward in improving student-athletes career maturity. Overall, the system entertained the idea of changing and enhancing the career development of student-athletes; there was no investment to change. Evidently, the system also did not have enough employees or trained employees who could perform career development tasks. The lack of campus collaboration also hindered the growth in support from the Student-Athlete Development Office.

Develop a four-year career plan for student-athletes to follow to address career maturity and career planning. For student-athletes to grow their career maturity, they should be engaging in career-related activities yearly. Student-athlete participants from the research study did not feel it was the role of their coach(es) or athletic academic support professionals to guide student-athletes in careers but felt it would have been nice to know there were career-related services offered on campus. It is imperative to ensure that student-athletes have relevant workforce skills when they leave college (Dent, Sanserino, & Werner, 2014; Ganim, 2014; August 2020). The Student-Athlete Development Office should work with the Career Services Office to develop a

four-year career plan that gives student-athletes a checklist that can be followed by all student-athletes. The four-year career plan should include mandatory career activities such as developing a resume and provide additional optional career activities such as working a part-time job or interning within a certain time frame; this way, student-athletes can tailor the plan to their career interest and needs to grow their career development. The checklist should be a part of the AASP advising meetings with student-athletes. For example, if the AASP is checking off classes the student-athletes need to take, they should also be able to check off their career development activity for the year. The Student-Athlete Development Office would not be responsible for career coaching a student-athlete but instead keeping student-athletes accountable for going to Career Services. The four-year career plan would assist in developing student-athletes autonomy in taking charge of their career development needs early and often. Building such a collaborative partnership would help the Student-Athlete Development Office meet the goals of the

Final Reflection

Behavior and comfort in any organization are hard to change. In this case, the system at Lantern University built thick barrier walls made with solid beliefs, behaviors, and culture on shifting ground. Penetrating the barrier walls proved to be unsuccessful. As an insider within the organization, I was welcomed inside the barrier walls, but when I took a left turn, I walked right into quicksand, and no one was there to save me. This is the best way to describe my study. There is still much to learn about how athletics supports student-athletes career maturity and how student-athletes' assess their career maturity at a Division II level.

As the facilitator, I learned early how to pivot when challenges arose, and I recognized there were challenges beyond my control. To do action research takes a strong community of collaborators committed to improving systematic changes. Taking on a system that rarely breaks

tradition required a larger action research team than what was put together. I worked diligently trying to save the study but made little impact. The more I moved, the faster I sunk. While the study did not create sustainable change, the student-athletes who participated benefitted and felt more career-prepared, which proved there is a need to provide career development support for student-athletes. There is still more research needed on student-athletes career maturity and transition.

In an environment that started to experience shifts in leadership, introductions of new strategic initiatives, and loss of staff, the need to develop new ways of thinking and doing around student-athletes' career preparedness was essential and would have been an opportunity for the Student-Athlete Development Office to establish new behaviors that support student-athletes. Moving forward, I believe that action research can be used to address the complexity of an athletic department, address challenging problems, and can identify new ways of thinking and doing when it comes to student-athletes career development, self-efficacy, and transition.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Document

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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Human Research Protection Program

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

November 9, 2021

Dear Laura Bierema:

On 11/9/2021, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Athletic Advisors Impact on Student-Athlete Career Maturity
Investigator:	Laura Bierema
Co-Investigator:	Lauren Johnson
IRB ID:	PROJECT00003215
Funding:	None
Review Category:	DHHS – Exempt 2(ii)

We have determined that the proposed research is Exempt. The research activities may now begin. Since this study was determined to be Exempt, please be aware that not all future modifications will require review by the IRB. For more information, please see Appendix C of the Exempt Research Policy. As noted in Section C.2, you can simply notify us of modifications that will not require review via the "Add Public Comment" activity.

A progress report will be requested prior to 11/9/2026. Before or within 30 days of the progress report due date, please submit a progress report or study closure request. Submit a progress report by navigating to the active study and selecting Progress Report. The study may be closed by selecting Create Version and choosing Close Study as the submission purpose.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

Benilda P. Pooser, Ph.D., CIM
Director, Clinical Research Compliance

Appendix B

CDSE- Short Form Example

Instructions: For each statement, mark the choice that best fits your confidence level (i.e., No Confidence, Confidence, etc.)

Example

How much confidence do you have that you could summarize the skills you developed in your jobs?

a. Confident
b. Moderately Confident
c. Not Confident

Questions

Some questions used for this study are listed below:

What is your level of confidence…

1. Determine what your ideal job would be.
2. Find out the employment trends for an occupation over the next ten years.
3. Choose a career that will fit your preferred lifestyle.
4. Prepare a good resume.
5. Change majors if you did not like your first choice.
6. Decide what you value most in an occupation.

Scoring

A five-point scale was used to score self-efficacy. Each question is associated with one of the scales. Each subscale score is the sum of the responses given to the five items on that subscale; this sum is divided by 5

- Self-Appraisal
- Occupational Information
- Goal Selection
- Planning
- Problem-Solving

Total Score = Sum of all 25 items/25

This tool is not to be used without permission from Nancy Betz and Karen Taylor.

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how you chose your major?
2. During your time as a student, have you used Career Services?
3. If you haven't used Career Services, what is the reason why?
4. If you used Career Services, what services were helpful?
5. What types of services do you think Career Services offers?
6. Can you share what types of career opportunities have you engaged in during your time at Lantern University?
7. Have you thought about careers that fit your interest? If so, what are some of the other careers that may fit your interest?
8. In what ways has your coach supported your career development?
9. Have you participated in any volunteer opportunities during your time at Lantern University?
10. How do you feel your athletic career has prepared you for career opportunities?
11. What do you think Lantern University can do you support student-athletes career transition?
12. How confident do you feel that you will be able to find a job you love and rate 1- 5
13. How prepared do you feel for the workforce?
14. If you could have individual career services, what would they be?

Appendix D

Intervention Group Follow-Up Questions

1. After participating in the career development session this past spring, how have you applied your learning? (i.e., summer jobs, internships, etc.).

2. Which career development tool did you find most useful

3. Which career development tool do you think student-athletes would benefit from most?

4. What's next for you?