Chasing Paper: A qualitative systems analysis of the tensions between money, diplomas, and learning in high profile intercollegiate athletics

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2014

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Education, Leadership and Policy Studies - College of Education

University of Washington

Abstract

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At the heart of the academic issues embedded within intercollegiate sports are the tensions between institutional academic prestige, athletic department revenue, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA's) desire to defend the ideals of the amateur student athlete. This qualitative study focuses on the affordances and constraints acting on "special admits" in high profile sports during their first year at a Division I University. Participant observation data are triangulated with interviews with seven first-year football players at the beginning, middle, and end of the academic year; and 12 staff members throughout the year. Utilizing "Figured Worlds" and Activity Theory frameworks, this study explores the role of athlete academic centers as hybrid spaces and addresses a current gap in the literature by developing a systems-level analysis of athlete experiences that incorporates NCAA policy.

Acknowledgements

I have been honored to work with my committee members on this research. Jim, thanks for being willing to let me put my cart before my horse on several occasions, believing that it would all work out in the end, and for your aggressive use of exclamation marks in the margins that helped me stay enthusiastic by seeing my work anew through your eyes. Ed, thank you for being a champion of research on intercollegiate athletics. You have brought your own experience as an athlete and scholar to bear on our conversations and this dissertation is better for it. Jennifer, thank you for being willing to jump into new territory through exploring theoretical frameworks with me. Your generosity with your time and energy both in supporting me on this project and in moving this line of research forward is inspiring. Alexes, thank you for your support in understanding the complexities of fieldwork. Discussing my coding and field notes with you early on helped me understand how to go from telling anecdotes to constructing theory. To my committee as a whole, your support, friendship, and mentorship has made this process so valuable to me. Many thanks.

To my colleagues in Undergraduate Academic Affairs, thank you for your support in making the time and space for me to complete this work.

To my family and friends, thank you for your patience, understanding, and support as I have disappeared into this project for the last couple years.

To Nicole, my expert editor, my chief transcriptionist, and my endless source of support - this was a team effort and you have been a fabulous teammate. Thank you.

To the Athlete Academic Center and staff of the athletic department at the University – your willingness to open your practices up to research shows your desire to do the best you can by the athletes you support. I have been honored to work with you, hear your stories, and support our collective work.

And most of all, thank you to Darnell, Clarence, Clayton, Rob, King, Kevin, and Ricky for sharing your lives with me. I will continue to follow your paths long after the final pages of this project have been printed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The American higher education system is unique for its intertwining of athletics into its

academic institutions. Over the last century, intercollegiate athletics have grown into a massive

commercialized enterprise, one which some scholars fear threatens the university systems' core

academic values (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Colleges are pressured to field the most

competitive teams possible, even if athletic competition falls outside of their stated mission

(Clodfelter, 2011). While many low profile sports, often referred to as "Olympic Sports," avoid

the limelight until brief glimpses of campus celebrity during championship seasons, men's

basketball, football, and (in some leagues) men's ice hockey are the focus of both campus

sporting culture and potential streams of revenue for athletic departments. Men's basketball and

football are often referred to as "revenue generating sports," but due to the reality that only a

handful of teams, even in Division I athletics, generate enough revenue to cover their actual

operating costs, I will refer to teams that are the focus of campus culture and media attention as

"high profile" sports (Shulman & Bowen, 2001)[1]. In order to win more games, especially in

high profile sports, colleges and universities lower their academic standards and admit applicants

who they bet will make contributions on the field of play, but whose academic profiles are out of

step with those of their classmates.

The Case of the Special Admit

There is no universally used term for athletes who are admitted and enroll with academic

profiles that are lower than regularly–admitted students, but the most commonly used term is

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[1] I will refer to students who engage in intercollegiate athletics as "athletes" and students who do not participate in intercollegiate athletics as "students at large." This is an intentional move away from the NCAA's term of choice: "student-athlete" which is both redundant since all people enrolled in school are students and stigmatizing as a potential trigger for stereotype threat, which I will address at length elsewhere (Stone, 2012).

"special admit" (Jaschik, 2008). While some institutions determine whether a student is a special admit through the use of a complex equation combining the applicant's high school GPA and SAT / ACT scores to predict his or her likelihood of holding at least a 2.0 GPA at the end of his or her first year of college, the common definition can be reduced to "students admitted under exceptions to normal admissions standards for reasons including 'special talent'" (Alesia, 2008). Journalists at *The Indianapolis Star* amassed data on special admits from 55 public institutions across six conferences using public records requests and content from the schools' most recent NCAA certifications, which are required every ten years. Of the 55 institutions examined, 31 admitted to having special admits, 16 claimed that they do not enroll special admits, and 8 did not provide information (Alesia, 2008). What journalists and researchers found most significant from the study was the discrepancy between the percentage of football players enrolled as special admits and the percentage of students at large, who enrolled as special admits. In 2004, the University of California at Berkeley reported that 95% of its freshman football players were special admits compared with 2% of the students at large (Jaschik, 2008). The full list of universities that provided a percentage of special admits among their freshman football players (21 schools) is listed below[2].

Figure 1.1: Percentage of Freshmen Football Players Considered Special Admits by Institution

Institution	Percent
UC Berkeley	95%
Georgia	94%
Texas A&M	94%
LSU	82%

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[2] The figure shows only 21 of the 31 schools that identified enrolling special admit student athletes because 10 institutions did not provide data that was translatable into percentages. The following are the schools that reported not enrolling special admits: Michigan State University, University of Nebraska, University of North Carolina, Purdue, Texas Tech University, University of Connecticut, University of Minnesota, University of Texas, University of Colorado, Kansas State University, Mississippi State University, University of Mississippi, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, University of Virginia, and The Ohio State University (Donahue, 2008).

Oklahoma	81%
Florida State	65%
Kentucky	64%
Missouri	61%
Washington State	60%
Washington	48%
Indiana	42%
Iowa	41%
Louisville	38%
Arizona	33%
NC State	25%
West Virginia	23%
Alabama	21%
Iowa State	21%
Florida	18%
Auburn	12%
Georgia Tech	9%

Of the schools that reported not enrolling special admits, Derek Van Rheenen, the Director of the

Academic Center for Athletes at the University of California at Berkeley, says that they are not

being transparent: "Just admit what you are doing," it is "incredibly cloak and dagger" (as cited

in Alesia, 2008). One of the primary tensions between athletic departments and universities is

played out through the recruitment of special admits. Former Georgetown coach Craig Esherick

illustrates this point in saying, "Coaches have been told many times, 'If you don't win, you're

going to get fired.' I was never told, 'If you don't graduate players, you'll get fired'" (as cited in

Alesia, 2008). Thus, the drive to win games pushes coaches to recruit the best athletic talent

available, even if that athletic talent does not come with an academic preparation that matches

that of the rest of the student body.

Why do universities care about fielding winning high profile teams? Wins are tied to

financial incentives through the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament,

bowl game appearances, and lucrative media deals. For instance, the Men's Basketball Fund

distributed $167 million in 2010 to institutions on the basis of post season play (Knight

Commission, n.d.). Dollars earned through the performance of high profile sports support the

teams' athletic department as a whole, alleviating the pressure on the universities to pick up the financial tab for athletics. However, the desire to be athletically competitive in high profile sports creates a system in which relatively underprepared college athletes enroll in moderately selective to elite colleges with much lower qualifications than their peers.

Statement of Problem

The admission of athletes who lack the same academic preparation as students at large presents real challenges and problems, both to the institutions that admit them and to the athletes themselves. The challenges for the athletes arise in the need to get a diploma, no matter what is learned, and the push to make it to the professional leagues and to "chase the paper" (or money) at the next level of play. The conflict between real learning, degree attainment, and the desire to make big money as a professional is at the heart of the tensions for athletes, but the very same outcomes are at play for universities as well. Universities balance wanting to have successful working-ready graduates and high graduation rates, with the income and national notoriety from big-time college athletics.

What do we know about the experiences of specially-admitted high profile athletes? As I will illustrate in my literature review, over 30 years of research reveals a pattern of systematic academic underperformance by high profile athletes, even below what their low entry credentials and background preparation predict. While athlete graduation rates continue to climb, their academic underperformance remains a constant. What is responsible for academic underperformance, and why does it persist for so long after it has been identified? Although much scholarship has been devoted to athletes' academic performance through analyzing individual and institutional challenges and problems, the resulting increases in NCAA policies and institutional support for athletes have failed to mitigate the achievement gap between high

profile athletes and their peer students with similar credentials. The goal of this research will be to provide a new framework for understanding the problem suggested here.

By analyzing the narratives of specially-admitted high profile athletes through the lens of the affordances and constraints acting on their pathways during their first year at their university, I will develop an understanding of the systems affecting their trajectories, highlighting the often competing goals between the business of athletics and the education of athletes. I will look at affordances and constraints acting on athletes in order to facilitate the shift away from the individual as the unit of analysis to understand the broader systems in which the athlete is embedded.

In order to understand what is meant by affordances and constraints, I will unpack the two terms. Importantly, an affordance in one domain may act as a constraint in another. For instance, the pedestal of prestige a high profile athlete may be put on and the attention he may receive in the school paper and field of play may become tethering posts in the context of the classroom. Thus, affordances and constraints may be too complex and overlapping to simply list in a table. Ultimately, when I analyze an athlete's experience through the lens of affordances and constraints, I am looking at his or her schedule; agency or choices; mobility; rules by which he or she is governed; relative athletic and academic preparation; academic and financial support provided; and expectations with which he or she is met. A developed understanding of the affordances and constraints acting on high profile special admit athletes in their first year of college will allow me to build a picture of the tensions within and between athletic departments, the NCAA, and academic support centers to gain new insight into why the problem of underperformance persists and what practitioners can do to transform the experiences of high profile athletes.

Structure of the Dissertation

What follows is a series of chapters that systematically expands on the ideas presented above. Chapter 2 methodically presents the literature that undergirds our collective understanding of the problem addressed in this dissertation, first providing some history about college athletics, including examples from recent memory that underscore the dilemmas institutions and athletes face; followed by a detailed presentation and discussion of the conceptual ideas that can guide a systematic study of these dilemmas. Chapter 2 culminates with the posing of specific research questions that emerge from an analysis of the gaps in the literature the answers to which are discovered in a methodology that is grounded in the conceptual ideas previously presented. Chapter 3 introduces and develops two frameworks, Activity Theory and Figured Worlds, on which the data from this research will be analyzed. Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the methodology used to answer the questions posed in this study, along with the data collection and analytic approaches used. Chapter 5 provides a rich description of the narratives of the seven athletes interviewed over the course of this study. The athlete narratives are then situated within the context of 12 staff member interviews and participant observations to provide a multi-voiced understanding of the athletes' experiences. Chapter 5 concludes with an explanation of the open coding, axial coding, and selective coding processes used in a Grounded Theory approach to data analysis. Chapter 6 builds from the thematic results developed in the previous chapter and applies those themes to build an understanding of the affordances and constraints affecting athlete pathways. Chapter 7 takes a deeper look at the affordances and constraints as applied to a central paradigm developed through the Grounded Theory analysis. Chapter 8 then utilizes the Figured Worlds perspective to offer insight into the thematic analysis of the data. The second half of Chapter 8 takes the themes developed using a

Figured Worlds perspective and applies them to a systems-level analysis using Activity Theory to reveal the tensions within and between the systems acting on college athletes. Lastly, Chapter 9 will look at the utility of the two frameworks in presenting a new and nuanced understanding of the problem presented above. The findings in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 will be compared to the existing literature presented in Chapter 4. The dissertation will conclude with a series of recommendations for practitioners and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

Background and Context

The Role of the NCAA

As a result of enrolling relatively underprepared college athletes, two systems emerge: the NCAA as a governing body reacting to the shifting landscape of intercollegiate athletics, and academic support centers within universities that exist to serve college athletes. The role of the NCAA has developed over time, both to manage the system of championships across most intercollegiate sports and to regulate the recruitment, admission, and continuing eligibility of the players who participate within the intercollegiate athletics system. The NCAA has served as the policy-making machine protecting the notion of intercollegiate athletics as a bastion of amateur athletic ideals. In theory, the sanctions and eligibility policing done by the NCAA serve to protect the rights and academic endeavors of the athletes. The basic purpose of the NCAA, which they list as a fundamental policy, is: "The competitive athletics programs of member institutions are designed to be a vital part of the educational system. A basic purpose of [the NCAA] is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body and, by so doing, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports" ("NCAA Division 1 Manual", 2011, Article 1.3.1). The NCAA is thus committed to the union of athletics and academics in higher education and to the athlete as an integrated member of the student body, despite the tensions which, over time, are increasing the divide between high profile athletes and the student body (Jaschik, 2008).

The academic support structures for college athletes are a reactionary development to both weak academic graduation rates of college athletes in high profile sports and to issues of academic scandals prevalent within college athletics throughout the 1980's ("History," 2012). The 1991 NCAA National Convention Proposal No. 29 stipulated the creation of academic counseling and tutoring for all recruited athletes. The proposal left room for institutions to decide whether to embed the academic support within the athletic department or within non-athlete support services. Literature (Stratten, 1990; Whiddon, 1989) on outcomes for athletes who go through academic support within their athletic department versus through the academic side of the house show that support provided through the athletic department tends to produce higher graduation rates, but that support (athlete-only or not) received outside of the athletic department is the go-to shift for universities when facing reform after academic scandal[3]. Ultimately, the academic counseling of student athletes is an "eligibility game" in which advisers and counselors navigate NCAA policy and each athlete's academic proficiency to help maintain a student's progress toward a degree and points for their team's academic progress report (APR)[4] ("North Carolina," 2012).

At the heart of the academic issues embedded within collegiate sports are the tensions between institutional academic prestige, athletic department revenue, and the NCAA's desire to defend the ideals of the amateur student athlete. To complicate matters, institutional prestige and national rankings are based on selectivity (number of students admitted against number of

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[3] Both The Ohio State University and University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill moved reporting lines of academic support programs for athletes from within the Athletic Department to an academic department or Provost's Office in the aftermath of academic scandal. Some schools ward off concern over embedding academic support for athletes within an athletic department by establishing a dual reporting line to both athletic and academic administration.

[4] In 2003, NCAA academic reform created the Academic Progress Rate (APR) which scores each student a 0, 1, or 2. A student earns one point for remaining eligible and one point for remaining at the institution. Students must also mark progress toward a degree by annual benchmarks (described later). Penalties affect institutions that fall below the acceptable APR minimum of 925 in the form of lost scholarships and post-season play.

applicants) which is boosted in the years following a championship season for a high profile

sport based on the subsequent national *athletic* prestige increasing application numbers for the

institution (Toma & Cross, 1998).

Athletics in the Media Spotlight

Adding complexity to the landscape of intercollegiate athletics is the media scrutiny of

athletes, coaches, and athletic departments. Critics present athletics as a "corrupted system that

threatens the academic integrity of higher education" (Ferris, Finster & McDonald, 2004). The

academic year 2012-2013 was a banner one for scandal within intercollegiate athletics; most

notably 1) Penn State received enormous sanctions for its protecting a coach's illegal behavior,

2) Notre Dame's Manti Te'o's imaginary-dead-girlfriend hoax was played out on ESPN for the

world to see, and 3) the Rutgers basketball coaching staff's physical and verbal abuse of players

have already led to the firing of coaches and the stepping down of an athletic director. NCAA

president Mark Emmert summed up his concern over intercollegiate athletics by stating, "One of

the grave dangers stemming from our love of sports is the sports themselves can become too big

to fail and too big to even challenge. The result can be an erosion of academic values that are

replaced by hero worship and winning at all costs," ("North Carolina," 2012). Emmert and the

NCAA attempt to provide a system of checks and balances on the intercollegiate enterprise.

My interests lie at the intersection of athletics and academics in higher education. The

academic issues the media perpetuates stem from the stereotypes of players in high profile

sports. As sociologist Harry Edwards argues, "Dumb jocks are not born, they are systematically

created" (1984, p.8). The notion of college athletes' academic inferiority is accentuated in the

media despite the great diversity of college athletes' academic preparation and academic success.

The storyline of the athlete found academically wanting is a narrative that is played out all too

often. Within the past couple of years, two major academic scandals have rocked the upper

echelons of higher education, mostly made public through their connection to college athletes.

Harvard College faced a basketball season without two of its top players, Kyle Casey and

Brandyn Curry, who were both tied to a widespread academic scandal involving 125

undergraduates in a class of 279 who collaborated on and potentially plagiarized answers to a

take-home final in a government course. Casey was a front runner for Ivy League player of the

year and Curry was the team's starting point guard. Significantly, of the 125 students implicated

in the scandal, over half were varsity athletes (Winn, 2012). While Harvard found the scandal to

be an academic one and not an athletic one, the media spotlight, especially from outlets like

Sports Illustrated and ESPN, illuminated the high profile athletes implicated. Both Curry and

Casey chose to take the year off on the advice of the college administration in order to protect

their athletic eligibility for the following year (Pennington, 2012). The message was clear: do

not bring academic shame to the institution, but we would really like to have you back to take

another run at the Ivy League championship.

In response to the academic scandal at Harvard, the former president of the National

Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics, Gerald Gurney, noted that he thought, "Harvard

and the Ivies were different, but I guess they are not…I know they have high standards, but we

also know coaches and advisers find creative ways to place athletes in majors that protect them"

(as cited in Pennington, 2012). From what are athletes being protected? Are coaches and

advisers concerned about eligibility based on athletes' different levels of academic preparation?

While the Harvard cheating scandal gives insight into both the depth of media interest in athlete

wrongdoing and institutional desire to protect the eligibility of the athletes it has enrolled to

bring athletic prestige to the institution, the ongoing investigation into a three-year-old academic

and athletic scandal at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) provides more insight into the tension between athletics and academics within the higher education system. It is a description of these tensions that I turn to next.

<div align="center">**The Eligibility Game**</div>

I offer the following in-depth look at the UNC scandal and the specific cases involving two football players, Marvin Austin and Michael McAdoo, in order to both provide a context for understanding the potentially problematic intersection of specially-admitted athletes and academic support provided by their institutions, and to demonstrate the utility of the theoretical frameworks I will present in Chapter 3 and apply to my own data in Chapter 8. The depth of the academic scandal at UNC is immense; members of the Board of Governors have deemed it both "terrible" and "embarrassing" (as cited in Sims, 2013). It all began with tweets from UNC football player, Marvin Austin, announcing his partying in Miami in 2010 (Siner, 2013). The funding of the travel and expenses for Austin and his compatriots led to the investigation of Austin and other UNC football players who were found to have received funds from a sports agent, Terry Watson, while still enrolled as students at UNC, in violation of NCAA policies (Siner, 2013). The initial investigation of conduct with sports agents opened a review of academic misconduct, which uncovered that Austin earned a B+ in an upper division African American Studies class during the summer before he enrolled as a full time student and began "remedial writing" ("Disbelief," n.d.). Raised eyebrows at Austin's course work led to the uncovering of a widespread academic scandal in which the former chair of the department of African and Afro-American Studies, Julius Nyang'oro and the department's administrator, Deborah Crowder, were implicated in a more than decade-long academic scandal (Grasgreen, 2012).

Though the final findings of the academic scandal have not revealed any direct links to athletics, the trigger for the investigation began with an athlete and showed that up to two-thirds of the students enrolled in the questionable courses were athletes at UNC. The findings revealed that over 216 classes were "aberrant" and 454 unauthorized grade changes took place within the African and Afro-American Studies Department at UNC dating as far back as 1997 (Grasgreen, 2012). Because the classes were open to athletes and non-athletes and because work was submitted for grades, the NCAA had no recourse to sanction UNC for the scandal because none of the NCAA bylaws were directly violated.

The inquiry into Marvin Austin's coursework also led to the dismissal of Jennifer Wiley, a tutor for Academic Support Program for Student Athletes (ASPSA) who was found to have given an impermissible amount of academic support to athletes. Former fellow tutor Mary Willingham worked at ASPSA from 2003 to 2010. She claims that she brought forward a paper she was working on with an athlete as being suspicious, reporting it to then program director, Robert Mercer, and asserting that she believed Wiley had written the paper (Kane, 2012). Mercer dismissed the assertion. Willingham claims that UNC enrolls athletes in high profile sports who are unable to make the academic transition to college level work, stating, "There are serious deficits and they cannot do the coursework here. And if you cannot do the coursework here, how do you stay eligible? You stay eligible by some department, some professor, somebody who gives you a break. That's everywhere across the country. Here it happened with paper classes. There's no question" (as cited in Kane, 2012)[5]. Willingham presents paper classes as a tool used by ASPSA staff to manage the eligibility of athletes in high profile sports

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[5] Courses offered through the African and Afro-American Studies Department which were billed as lecture classes, but never met and only required students to submit a final paper were know within ASPSA as "paper classes". Though "paper classes" were not exclusively enrolled in by athletes, they were "largely filled with athletes" and seen as an "easy path for athletes." The most recent UNC investigation cites that athletes made up roughly two thirds of paper class enrollment (Grasgreen, 2012).

whom she refers to as "special admits" (as cited in Kane, 2012), though UNC claims not to enroll special admits (Jaschik, 2008).

The academic scandal at UNC again highlights how the media reacts to academic fraud with ferocity when tied to athletics. The final UNC investigation found that this was not a case of athletic misconduct, but one of academic misconduct; however, the tie between the high percentages of students enrolled in these "paper courses" raises the question, why did so many athletes wind up enrolled in classes that were found to lack rigor and to award high grades? Though the investigators found no systematic link between athletics advising and the African and Afro-American Studies department, the enrollment of men's basketball players in paper classes stopped abruptly in 2009 when a new academic counselor was hired at ASPSA and assigned to the team. Willingham told reporters that the new counselor was appalled at the notion of paper classes, which were "cut-and-paste" jobs that earned B's or better, but the practice continued for football players (as cited in Kane, 2012).

The significance of the end of basketball players' enrollment in paper classes highlights the link between academic counselors and athlete course selection. One athlete, Michael McAdoo, whose eligibility was revoked because of the "inappropriate" help he received in tutoring from Wiley, said that the counselors at UNC selected the AFAM studies major for him because it worked around the football team's practice schedule (Sims, 2013). McAdoo's comment points to two key tensions in the experiences of high profile college athletes: first, he views the selection of his major as something that was done for him by a counselor, and secondly, his academic schedule was built to fit around the prioritized football practices. Certainly, a class that never met would be an ideal fit for a packed athletics schedule.

Contradictions between Systems

While I have introduced the issues and tensions embedded in the intersection of athletics and academics in higher education, the UNC case study provides a salient example of conflicting interests, which in the case of Michael McAdoo resulted in a loss of eligibility, a subsequent lawsuit and appeal to the Supreme Court of North Carolina, and was partially responsible for the resignation of the a university chancellor. The following is a synopsis of McAdoo's appeal to the Supreme Court of North Carolina in his case against UNC and Holden Thorp as Chancellor, and the NCAA. The appeal filed by the legal counsel for the plaintiff-appellant, Mr. McAdoo, was issued on February 19, 2013. While the case is on-going, the tensions between academic institutions, the NCAA, athletic departments, and athletes are enduring. In brief, Mr. McAdoo is suing UNC and the NCAA for breach of contract. Mr. McAdoo claims that the UNC breached the instrument of student governance by adhering to the NCAA bylaws rather than to its contract with Mr. McAdoo as a student. Thus UNC treated him differently as an athlete than the institution treats students at-large in similar situations.

The statement of facts[6] in the McAdoo case is where the conflict between systems becomes apparent. In 2008, McAdoo was recruited to UNC to play football and upon arriving on campus he was assigned a tutor, Jennifer Wiley. Wiley supported him in two African American studies courses and a Swahili course that began in the fall of 2008 and ran through the summer of 2009. In 2010, amid the investigation of broader scandal involving Marvin Austin and others on the UNC football team outlined earlier, the tutoring provided by Ms. Wiley to Austin, McAdoo, and others was called into question. UNC's Honor Court investigated all three courses in which McAdoo worked with Wiley to determine whether McAdoo had violated the

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[6] Content of the McAdoo case comes directly from the Petition for Discretionary Review filed by Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough LLP on behalf of Michael McAdoo on February 19, 2013. I have included a web link to the petition in the references section.

Honor Code by turning in work that was not his own. McAdoo was found not guilty with respect to both his AFRM 428 and his AFRM 266 courses based on insufficient evidence. The Honor Court did find him guilty of receiving impermissible assistance from Wiley on a paper for his SWAH 403 course. The Honor Court punished him with a failing grade in the course, a semester of probation for the fall of 2010, and a suspension for the spring of 2011. The Court explicitly stated that McAdoo would be eligible to play in the fall of 2011. Similar to Harvard's messages to its star basketball players, UNC's clear message was that receiving inappropriate help would not be tolerated, but that punishment for academic infractions should not get in the way of McAdoo's contributions on the football field.

The Honor Court's findings are not where this story ends. According to NCAA bylaws, member institutions must report any perceived violations of the bylaws by an athlete to the NCAA, and the member institution must declare the athlete ineligible. The athlete then must remain ineligible unless the NCAA reinstates the athlete. In the McAdoo case, UNC filed a self-report to the NCAA for the violation of bylaw 10.1(b) for unethical conduct for all three courses in which McAdoo was being investigated by the Honor Court. Along with filing the self-report, UNC requested McAdoo's reinstatement.

In reviewing reinstatement requests, the NCAA considers the culpability of the athlete as a mitigating factor. For a violation of the bylaw to occur, the athlete must have "knowing involvement in arranging for fraudulent academic credit or false transcripts for a prospective or enrolled student-athlete" (NCAA Division 1 Manual, 2011, Bylaw 10.1(b)). McAdoo stated that he thought that Wiley was providing appropriate assistance and UNC's self-report to the NCAA claimed that McAdoo was "not aware that the assistance being provided him by the institutional staff member was improper" ("McAdoo," 2013). However, based on the "multiple instances" of

inappropriate help reported to the NCAA by UNC, the NCAA deemed McAdoo sufficiently culpable and not only denied McAdoo's reinstatement, but deemed him "permanently ineligible to play intercollegiate sports" ("McAdoo," 2013). In doing so, the NCAA ignored the findings of the UNC Honor Court which, again, only found McAdoo guilty in one of the three contested classes. With no available means of recourse, McAdoo entered the 2011 National Football League's (NFL) supplemental draft and was signed by the Baltimore Ravens.

McAdoo's lawsuit stems from the denial of due process afforded him as a student at UNC. Specifically, the NCAA is framed as coercing member institutions into breaching its contract with its students who are athletes. In order to meet its obligations to the NCAA, UNC denied McAdoo's rights as a UNC student by holding itself to a lower standard of treatment of a student who participated on behalf of the University in intercollegiate athletics than of its students at large. McAdoo lost his eligibility, had his reputation tarnished, and had to forgo potential earnings from the formal NFL draft process due to the NCAA's findings, which contradicted UNC's own investigation. McAdoo's case highlights the tensions at play when strong (in this case, highly selective) academic institutions enroll students whose academic credentials fall well below the average of the incoming class. The support provided to keep athletes like McAdoo eligible requires skillful negotiation of courses of study, including selection of courses requiring low levels of rigor, both in terms of time-in-class and required workloads. Tutors provide hands-on support to relatively underprepared athletes through their coursework, all while balancing the projected image of the NCAA's ideals for amateur collegiate athletics. McAdoo's case is an example of when the system fails to maintain the façade of idealism the NCAA projects. McAdoo's eligibility was revoked, though both he and UNC claim that he did not know he did anything wrong in receiving help from his tutor, Jennifer Wiley.

I include McAdoo's vignette as a case study highlighting the tensions inherent within the broader system of intercollegiate athletics. The case raises many questions: why was McAdoo in those classes that were found to lack rigor? Why did he need a tutor upon entering UNC as a student? Why was the tutor compelled to provide McAdoo with inappropriate levels of support? Why was McAdoo not aware of what constituted appropriate assistance on his course work? Ultimately, as former ASPSA tutor Mary Willingham argues, many of the athletes she worked with were "amazing kids" who wanted to be successful both athletically and academically, but they were so far behind in the classroom that academic success was an "almost impossible goal. It's not right. It's the adults who are not doing what they are supposed to do" (as cited in Kane, 2012). The most salient tension in collegiate sports is between the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics and the mission of universities, which manifests in the enrollment of athletes whose academic credentials are well below the institutional averages in order to field the most competitive high profile teams possible and ultimately to garner both academic and athletic prestige for the institutions.

The Landscape

In order to focus in from the tension created through enrolling special admit athletes to a specific problem at the intersection of athletics and academics in higher education, the following review of literature related to academic performance of college athletes will illuminate the currently identified problems and the gaps within the literature, and will inform the conceptual frameworks that will be used in this study. I will begin by taking a step back and looking at the big picture of athletics in higher education.

Prominent scholars James Shulman and William Bowen looked at the landscape of academic performance and life outcomes of athletes relative to students at large in moderately

selective to highly selective universities in their 2001 book, *The Game of Life*. Bowen later

teamed up with former college athlete Sarah Levin in 2003's *Reclaiming the Game* to look

specifically at schools that do not offer athletic scholarships to see if athletic participation

impacted the campus climate outside of what is traditionally considered big-time college sports.

In researching the validity of the negative stereotype tied to athlete status, Bowen and Levin

(2003) critique the opportunity cost associated with admitting athletes with lower-than-average

incoming SAT scores and high school grade point averages, especially in light of the

researchers' findings that athletes as a whole academically underperform beyond what their

incoming credentials predict. Their finding means that an athlete with similar academic

preparation and entry credentials (which include controls for socioeconomic status, race, and

parental education) compared with a student at large, would be likely to underperform relative to

his or her non-athlete peers. The underperformance observed by Bowen and Levin is seen most

severely among athletes participating in high profile sports. Graduation rates of athletes appear

to present a contradictory finding: athletes are graduating at higher rates than students at large

(Shulman & Bowen, 2001), and athletes in high profile sports are improving their graduation

rates consistently (Marot, 2010). However, Shulman and Bowen point out an interesting trend

that leads researchers to question whether simply tracking graduation rates gives an accurate

picture of the athlete experience. When looking at rank-in-class of male cohorts, Shulman and

Bowen found a downward trend in athlete performance over time. By 1989, the average of high

profile athletes dipped down to the 25th percentile of rank-in-class and low profile athletes came

in at the 40th percentile compared with students at large at the 49th percentile (2001, p. 62). The

comparable percentiles in 1951 showed high profile athletes averaging in the 45th percentile, low

profile in the 50th and students at large in the 47th (2001, p.62). Shulman and Bowen's point is

that even if athletes are graduating at comparable rates to students at large, their performance in the classroom is dropping significantly relative to students at large.

In order to analyze the performance of athletes versus students at large, Shulman and Bowen conducted a multivariate analysis controlling for SAT scores, major, and socioeconomic status[7] and found that for male athletes, as the selectivity of the institution increased, their underperformance relative to their peers increased as well (2001, p. 66). Although high profile athletes at public universities underperform, they statistically perform at a level consistent with what is expected of them based on their entry credentials, meaning that much of their underperformance is explained statistically by their high school transcript and entry credentials (2001). Because of NCAA mandates for athlete academic support and sanctions on institutions for failing to keep college athletes on a path toward a degree, one would expect the high level of institutional support provided to special admit college athletes to boost their performance relative to their peers. However, research finds that the opposite effect is true; special admits are underperforming despite institutional support – even if they are earning diplomas. One of the goals of my research will be to go beyond test scores and GPAs to examine what learning looks like for special admit[8] high profile athletes.

Bowen and Levin also found a discrepancy in the admissions advantage by sport, with football players receiving the greatest admissions advantage, beyond athletes in any other sport. Bowen and Levin use the basis of recruitment, admissions bonuses, and relative acceptance rates

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[7] The authors point to these three variables as shown to be significant in predicting academic success based on prior research.

[8] Although there is not a consistent definition for the term "special admit", I will use it to signal an athlete whose entry credentials would not be sufficient to gain access to their institution through a regular admissions process. In other words, special admits are athletes who fall close to the NCAA's low initial eligibility requirements of a minimum 2.0 high school GPA and SAT score on a sliding scale. A 2.0 GPA requires a 1010 SAT score, while an SAT score of 700 qualifies an applicant with a high school GPA of 2.8. The complete initial eligibility sliding scale can be found at www.eligibilitycenter.org. Depending on the selectivity of the institution, the initial eligibility requirements set athletes up for varying levels of success and require different levels of admissions exceptions.

to critique the quality of academic contributions produced by athletes. In their words, "athletic talent, dedication to sport [and] teamwork – are unlikely to be highly correlated (positively) with SAT scores" (2003, p. 94). These "costs" result in an "athletic divide" which manifests with athletes' low ranking within their class, "bunching" within the social sciences and social segregation from the campus community and students at large (2003, p. 94).

Systematic Underperformance

The amount of literature analyzing the differences between athletes and students at large is substantial. Although research in different decades and at different institutions has arrived at varying outcomes, several constants transcend both time and place. In an attempt to define the role intercollegiate athletic participation plays in academic achievement, Michael Maloney and Robert McCormick undertook a massive quantitative study at Clemson University in 1991. The study comprehensively assessed every grade awarded by the University (279,302 data points in all) over the four-year period between 1985-1989 (p. 556). The duo found that students at large received an average of a 2.681 grade points per course compared with a 2.379 points per course average for athletes (p. 556). When Maloney and McCormick separated out athletes competing in high profile sports from those in low profile sports, they found that athletes participating in low profile sports earned nearly identical grades as students at large with similar background characteristics (p. 562). Analyzing the average course grades of the athletes from high profile sports, the GPAs were below the mark: men's basketball players averaged 1.93 grade points per class over the four years, and football players, an average of 2.12 (p. 570). Most strikingly, Maloney and McCormick concluded, "Something about athletes in revenue sports causes them to do worse in the classroom over and above their poorer background" – the same finding echoed by Bowen and Levin two decades later (p. 563). High profile athletes enter universities

academically underprepared relative to students at large and underperform when compared with their counterparts from similar academic and socioeconomic backgrounds. While Maloney and McCormick cite the "in-season" effect and time demands overriding self-selected "easier classes" as a possible explanation, I argue that more is going on in terms of the creation – or denial – of an academic identity than the two recognized in their analysis (p. 563). The "in-season" effect would be more far-reaching and not isolated to high profile sports to be deemed a credible cause of the high profile athletes' underperformance.

Almost 30 years after the Clemson study, Umbach, Kuh, and Hannah used the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to assess the effects of athletic participation on students in 395 four-year colleges and universities. The implications of the study included a similarly high level of concern over the lower grades reported by male athletes, even after controlling for pre-college achievement (SAT scores) relative to students at large (Umbach et al., 2006, p. 726). Umbach et al. confirmed existing literature showing a pattern of academic underachievement among male athletes as both predictable and commonplace, even when factoring in background preparation. Though Umbach et al.'s study did not isolate race or sport, over a 30 year span of inquiry, multiple researchers looking at a spectrum of institutions found that male athletes, and specifically African American male athletes in high profile sports, underperform academically relative to their non-athlete peers with similar background and preparation. What is responsible for this phenomenon, and why does it persist over 30 years after it was first observed?

The Role of Stereotype Threat

Not all researchers agree that athletic participation in higher education negatively affects academic performance. Counter to Bowen and Levin's findings, Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, and Banaji (2004) conducted a four year longitudinal study at a highly selective university. They

found that athletes entered with lower academic credentials, but that their academic performance was not below what would be expected based on their entering profiles. Significantly, Aries et.al. used the threshold for being a "highly committed athlete" as being involved in athletics for ten hours or more per week (p. 577). Using that definition, athlete status was not significantly predictive of lowered academic performance. In an attempt to bridge the gap between their findings and those of Shulman, Bowen and Levin, the authors concluded that underperformance may relate more specifically to "recruited athletes" – "Thus faculty and administrators need to re-examine negative stereotypes about student-athletes in general" (2004, p. 599). Being a recruited athlete may lead to lower academic performance if athletes experience stereotype threat relative to the "dumb jock" identity.

In brief, stereotype threat is based on identity contingencies – the things a person has to navigate and negotiate in a situation because of their social identity (Steele, 2010). The key feature of stereotype threat is the cognitive disruption from situational threats due to the concern about how one is viewed by others. The cognitive disruption experienced in a classroom by a recruited athlete when trying to answer a difficult question is caused by the athlete's fear of proving the 'dumb jock' stereotype correct by appearing incompetent to peers and instructors. Claude Steele's theory of stereotype threat has been applied to college athletes in several studies. In one such experiment, Jeff Stone primed athletes with one of three identities: student, athlete, and student athlete, prior to taking a difficult standardized test. Though the NCAA insists on using the term "student athlete," Stone found that athletes primed with the "student athlete" identity performed significantly worse than when they were primed with either the "student" or "athlete" identity (2012). Interestingly, athletes primed with the "athlete" identity performed the best even though the task was academic in nature. Darren Yopyk (2006) argues that athletes

have two competing highly salient identities and that they may have a high degree of fluidity

between the two. In light of Stone's findings, there is something about triggering both identities

simultaneously that leads athletes to underperform academically. One gap in the literature I plan

to address is the transition athletes make between athletic, academic, and hybrid domains.

One key factor in the functioning of stereotype threat is a strong desire or investment in

performing well on the task for which one's identity is threatened. If an athlete does not care

about his or her performance on an academic test, the salience of the 'dumb jock' identity will

not likely trigger a threat and subsequent underperformance (Steele, 2010). However, social

identity threat can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby a person comes to resemble his or

her reputation, living down to social expectations (Aronson & McGlone, 2009). Nancy Cantor

and Deborah Prentice (1996) found significant peer effects on academic performance for college

athletes. If the percentage of athletes on the team underperforming goes up, the depth of their

underperformance increases.

Athlete Stigma

Stereotype threat may be affecting athletes invested in their academic performance, and

peer effects of their teammates' performance may in turn influence their own. Before moving

on, I want to investigate the stigma around being an athlete on campuses that have "big-time"

athletics related to the "dumb jock" stereotype. The athlete stigma should not be underestimated

on college campuses. The level of stigma experienced by the athlete depends on where he or she

falls on a spectrum between the least stigmatized athletes (white, female, low profile)[9] and the

most stigmatized (black, male, high profile) (Simons et al., 2007, p. 267; Aries et.al., 2004).

Although many researchers have attempted to 'unpack' the athlete stigma in higher education,

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[9] Aries et.al. found that females showed less cognitive underperformance than males in their study. The authors offer the idea of stigma associated with being a college athlete applying on a scale rather than being of an absolute value (2004, p. 579).

most have focused on perceptions of athletes among faculty and students at large. Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, and Jensen (2007) took a different approach by asking athletes themselves to gauge how they were perceived and treated by faculty and students at large. Among all athletes surveyed (538 of 800 on campus), they found that 33% reported being perceived negatively by their professors; 59.1% stated that they were perceived negatively by their peers (p. 251). As the researchers began to dissect the data to code for sex, race, and revenue status, some significant trends emerged. African American athletes reported much higher negative perceptions from their professors at a rate of 42.9%. When asked if the athletes were ever given a hard time or denied academic accommodation for athletic participation or travel, 73% of African American athletes responded affirmatively compared to only 59.8% of white athletes surveyed (p. 258). The university used in the study is a highly academically competitive institution; over 5000 students with 4.0s in high school are rejected each year (Simons et al., 2007, p. 267). The blend of academic selectivity and big-time athletics makes the intersection between athletics and academics problematic for a student body that feels that their diplomas are devalued by the admission of a linebacker or a point guard. Significantly, two-thirds of the athletes in the Simons et. al. study reported resentment from non-athlete students. Peer resentment and the perception that others view athletes as lacking academic competence further distance them from the rest of the student body (Aries et.al, 2004).

In a study of faculty attitudes toward athletes, Eddie Comeaux (2011) found significant differences in both race and gender in how faculty members perceived athletes in given scenarios such as "drives an expensive car" or "was admitted with lower scores" based on a revised version of the Situational Attitude Scale (p. 525). Comeaux found that Black faculty members' attitudes were more positive toward athletes and that Asian / Pacific Islander faculty responded

significantly less favorably toward athletes. On one scale item, "drive an expensive car," White, Hispanic (Latino) and Asian / Pacific Islander faculty members were, "more resentful, suspicious, angered, and negative [toward athletes] as compared to Black faculty members" (2011, p. 526). Also, in all scenarios that showed a significant difference by gender, female faculty members responded more positively toward athletes than toward male faculty members. Comeaux's study indicated that not only is the stigma associated with the athlete identity applied on a spectrum, but who reacts to the stigma also varies. The athlete identity and the reaction to it are likely to compound one another. While a white female cross country runner driving an expensive car may not raise many eyebrows or resentment from peers and faculty, a black basketball player driving an expensive car may illicit tropes of scandal, illegal booster benefits, and the focus on a professional career in athletics.

Among the most stigmatized demographic, why do some athletes persist and excel while others struggle within the higher education system? Rhonda Hyatt's (2003) analysis of barriers to persistence among African American athletes dissects the value of cognitive versus non-cognitive variables. While cognitive variables assess a student on the basis of SAT scores and GPA, the non-cognitive variables represent the intangible and much harder-to-quantify factors of attitude, motivation, and sense of self. Although universities admit students on the merit of their cognitive abilities, African American athletes persist on the basis of their non-cognitive skills. Thus those who do persist have positive attitudes, intrinsic motivation, and a developed sense of self that enables them to avoid lowering their own expectations to match what they perceive to be low academic expectations from the athletic department and university (Hyatt, 2003).

A Shift toward Qualitative Insight

Thus far, the literature I have reviewed on academic performance, stereotype threat, and stigma have all been based in quantitative research. In order to look at how a sense of belonging may affect high profile special admit athletes' academic performance, I will review two qualitative studies, one on men's basketball players from roughly 30 years ago, and one on football players from about 15 years ago. In order to understand the landscape of college athletics at the time of these qualitative studies, I will also present the shifts in NCAA academic policy as a backdrop for these studies and indicate how I may look at current athlete experiences in light of the policy shifts implemented in the last decade.

From 1980 to 1984, Peter and Patricia Adler researched a major college basketball program at a medium sized private institution in the southwestern United States. The authors present their work as "the first systematic participant-observation study of college athletes" with the goal of seeing "whether athletic participation hinders or enhances academic performance" and uncovering the factors and processes that influence the relationship between athletic participation and academic performance (1985, p. 242). Their ethnographic work provides a snapshot of big time college athletics at the point in which basketball was undergoing a massive boom in popularity and scandals – both academic and athletic – were ripping through the landscape of intercollegiate athletics (Adler & Adler, 1991). The duo first published an article on their research in 1985 focusing on the shifts on academic performance they observed in the players, and followed with *Backboards and Blackboards* in 1991, which focused on using the framework of role engulfment, role domination, and role abandonment to analyze their data. Adler and Adler write of an era before the NCAA reforms began, before graduation rates were tracked and before there were any stipulations regarding the need for an athlete to make progress

toward a degree. Athletes just needed to pass 24 credits in a year to remain eligible. Those 24

credits became the lowest common denominator that coaches focused on, exactly what was

needed to keep the player on the court (1991, p. 142). While some of their recommendations

have resulted in policy reform, when their narrative is compared to the case study presented on

UNC, one is left questioning how much the system has actually changed.

Adler and Adler found that most of the basketball players they observed entered college

with an idealistic and optimistic vision of their academics, and that they intended to graduate.

Based on athletes' initial expectations, 47% wanted to go into pre-professional majors, 45% had

no specific aspirations and "were enrolled by coaches in more 'manageable' athletic related

majors" requiring less work, and only 8% voiced not caring about getting a degree and wanting

to only do what was necessary to maintain eligibility (1985, p. 243). However, the athletes'

academic goals and behaviors became "increasingly influenced by their athletic involvement"

and less individualized (1985, p. 241). While coaches initially strengthened the athletes'

idealism by stressing the importance of "getting that piece of paper" or diploma early on and

through the reinforcement of study halls, support in finding tutors, and encouragement to attend

class during the athletes' first few months, the support faded over time (1985, p. 243). By the

end of their first year, athletes' idealism shifted to disappointment as they realized how difficult

completing coursework would actually be.

One issue was the extent to which the athletes felt connected to the academic courses in

which they enrolled. Adler and Adler very specifically framed the work of enrolling students in

classes as lying in the hands of an assistant coach. The coach "handled academic matters for the

athlete" including registration, declaration of major, and progress reports from professors,

leaving the athletes largely disconnected from and lacking agency within the academic domain

of the university (1985, p. 244). One student in their study remarked, "The day before classes

you go up to the office and they hand you a card that got your schedule all filled out on it. You

don't say nothin' or think nothin' 'bout it, you just go…it's they's job, not yours" (1991, p. 130).

Ultimately, athletes lacked either close contact with or reinforcement from the academic domain.

Athletes grew to perceive that their coaches only cared about them completing the 24 credits to

stay eligible. Additionally, the coaches enrolled the athletes in classes they could pass without

having a clear direction toward graduation.

The athletes became disengaged from academics because of the content of their classes.

One sophomore remarked, "How could I get into this shit? They got me takin' nutrition, mental

retardation, square dancing, and camp counseling. I thought I was goin' to learn something here.

It's a bunch o' bullshit" (1991, p. 134). For the athletes who were driven academically, they

learned that the priority of basketball in their life would prevent the pursuit of academic goals.

One athlete who wanted to be a veterinarian realized early on that since labs were held in the

afternoons, his intended major would not be feasible (1991, p. 185). The voices of the athletes in

Adler and Adler's study are powerful. They show a level of understanding of the systems that

are affording and constraining their education. Within the Adler and Adler ethnography, getting

a diploma or "that piece of paper" is synonymous with an education, even though there is no

emphasis on learning skills en route to attaining a degree.

Adler and Adler focused on the athletes in three spheres of university life: the academic,

athletic, and social. They found that the athletic world slowly took over all others, which they

frame as role engulfment. Socially, they found that athletes were isolated within separate dorms,

which led to an increase in homogenous thinking and separation from the campus as a whole

(1991, p. 245). Academically, they found that the athletes who entered with high ideals for

success in pre-professional majors suffered a 75% attrition rate and those who survived reduced

their effort to the bare minimum to continue to survive. Adler and Adler include a quote from a

junior who discussed the tension between the role of athlete and role of student inherent in the

experience of a high profile athlete whose academic preparation is weak:

> The two images are set apart because one side of us is, "My momma send me to
> school to be a engineer, and in order to be a engineer, I gots to go to class every
> day and study hard," and the other side is "I come to school to play basketball. I
> didn't come to school to study hard." So to keep those two images apart, to keep
> you thinking basketball night and day, they puts you in with all these other jocks
> dreaming' in they dream worlds (1985, p. 246).

The quote above makes Yopyk's (2006) argument that college athletes balance two competing

salient identities ring true. The quote also shows what Adler and Adler frame as a move toward

"pragmatic detachment" from academics by athletes by externalizing blame for their academic

failures, the peer effect of commonly striving for average (or eligible), and the limited goal

graduation, regardless of effort or learning (1985).

Adler and Adler's research is foundational to understanding the high profile college

athlete experience. In the wake of their research, the NCAA stepped in to create multiple

mandates and reform measures to protect the athletes from taking courses simply aimed at

keeping them eligible with no movement toward an actual degree. Below I will outline in brief

the academic reform measures the NCAA has adopted to regulate intercollegiate athletics. I am

focusing on reform in the modern era, after the debates around freshman eligibility (1903-1968)

and the major separation of divisions (1968 to two and 1978 to three).[10]

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[10] Principal Sources for time line are Shulman and Bowen (2001), Bowen and Levin (2003), NCAA.org, the eligibility center within the NCAA (www.eligibilitycenter.org), and personal communication with an academic adviser for athletes.

Figure 2.1: Time Line of NCAA Academic Reform

Year	NCAA Academic Reform in Context
1905	NCAA founded.
1965	"1.6 Rule" approved – predict ability to hold a 1.6 GPA during first year of college. Based on SAT, GPA, and class rank. Athletes below 1.6 predicted mark could not practice, compete, or receive aid.
1973	Admissions standards established by the NCAA as a 2.0 high school GPA minimum.
1978	Expand to three recognized divisions.
1983	NCAA adopts Proposition 48 which requires an entering freshman to have a combined SAT score of 700 or a 15 on the ACT, and a high school GPA of at least a 2.0 in 11 core courses.
1984	ESPN and other cable networks expand revenue possibilities for NCAA and universities.
1986	Proposition 48 takes effect. Adler and Adler have already completed their research.
1988	"Right to Know Act" makes Division 1 and Division 2 schools disclose graduation rates as a federal mandate.
1989-1990	The NCAA adopted Proposition 42 – eliminated partial qualifiers and required meeting Prop 48 standards for eligibility in freshman year, then was overturned the following year.
1991	Division 1 adopts Proposal 29 which mandates academic counseling and tutoring services for all recruited athletes. Support may come through athletic department or non-athletic division. 50% Rule begins: athletes must complete 50% of their course work by the start of their 4th year.
1992	NCAA adopts Proposal 16 (effective in 1995) raising the minimum high school GPA to 2.5 in 13 course courses and increasing the ACT requirement to a score of 17. The SAT and GPA are set on a sliding scale. The 25/50/75 rule is adopted to ensure progress toward a degree: by the end of an athlete's second year, they must have completed 25% of their degree requirements, 50% by the third year, and 75% by the end of their fourth year. A separate 75% Rule, #14.4.3.1.3, replaced an existing 27 credit per academic year requirement by stipulating that athletes must complete 75% of their credits for the year during the traditional school year. Athletes had been passing 10-15 credits during the school year and then catching up with their eligibility by taking huge course loads over the summer.
1996	Proposal 16 implemented after a one year delay; after re-centering of SATs, the new minimum is an 820. An additional measure, Proposal 36 is implemented for partial qualifiers setting an initial eligibility index at an SAT of 600 or an ACT of 15 with a core GPA of a 2.75. Partial qualifiers can receive athletic based financial aid.
1997-2002	Series of law suits aimed at the NCAA over freshman eligibility, and disproportionate impact of Proposal 16 on African Americans.

1998

Football Bowl Championship Series (BCS) is established.

2001

Champs Life Skills division of NCAA is founded and promotes five pillars: academics, athletics, career development, personal development, and service.

2003

Division 1 increases core course requirements from 14 to 16 effective in 2008.

2004

Introduction of massive academic reform package; established the Academic Progress Rate (APR) which looks at performance of teams academically each semester or quarter. Penalties established for not meeting APR benchmarks. Established the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) which allows for the deduction of athletes who transfer in good standing. The nuances of this reform package are important. Progress toward degree is increased to 40/60/80 meaning that an athlete has to have 40, 60, and 80% of credits toward his or her degree by the end of his or her second, third, and fourth year respectively. The package also requires that athletes pass six credits per semester / quarter toward graduation requirements.

2008

Division 1 approved an APR portfolio for coaches which meant that the academic eligibility and retention rates followed a coach, not just the university.

2010

NCAA forms the division of student athlete welfare.

2011

Increase initial eligibility standards for athletes in the first year at institution to be eligible to practice, increase in core requirements and stipulation around how many must be completed before senior year, boost to transfer student requirements from 2-year to 4-year institutions. APR penalties shift as of 2012-2013 to result in the loss of practice hours and mandated non-athletic study time.

2013

NCAA proposes raising the initial eligibility standards establishing a new category of incoming athlete, the "academic redshirt" applying to athletes who would currently qualify to enroll and play, but who would only be able to receive aid and practice under the new rules. The minimum eligibility standard as of August 2016 would rise to a high school GPA of 2.3 in 16 core courses with a SAT score of 1080 on a sliding scale. Athletes not meeting the 2.0 high school GPA red shirt minimum with an SAT of 1020 would be deemed a "non-qualifier." APR requirements will also rise for 4-year Division 1 schools. As of 2012-2013, the NCAA's Committee on Academic Performance has set the minimum team APR averaged over four years at 900. The Committee plans to raise the APR to a minimum of 930 in 2015-2016. These plans have been put on hold due to push back from member institutions.

  The chart above shows the reactionary trends of the NCAA. Policies are developed and implemented to add to the oversight of athletes' academic welfare. When loopholes are being exploited, new policies are formed to fill them. The NCAA Division 1 Manual for the 2011-

2012 school year is an astonishing 439 pages long. The rules are so specific and pervasive that

NCAA president Mark Emmert said, "You can't cross the street without breaking one of our

rules" (personal communication, April 25, 2013). The push to improve the Graduation Success

Rate (GSR) motivates much of the shift in initial eligibility and policy at large. The NCAA

points to improvement in the GSR over time as proof that academic reform is working (NCAA

Research Staff, 2012). Adler and Adler's research finished just as the first federal graduation

rates were being recorded. The second qualitative study I will review, by Kristen Benson (2000),

looks at the cohort of athletes who were the first to be admitted under the major reform package

implemented in 1992 and is among the first to have GSR data reported. The graduation rate

trend from 1984, just after Adler and Adler's study, to Benson's era in 1995 to the most recently

reported entering cohort in 2005[11] shows that athlete graduation rates continue to improve and

athletes currently out-graduate students at large in every demographic. Looking at the Federal

Graduation Rate (FGR)[12] comparison between the 1984 cohort and the 2005 cohort of athletes

reveals a shift from and overall rate of 52% in 1984 to 65% in 2005 (NCAA Research Staff,

2012). For the cohorts of football players, the numbers are interesting, especially when we

separate the athletes by race. For the 1984 cohort, 35% of African American football players

graduated compared to 51% of the 2005 cohort. However, Caucasian football players in the

1984 cohort graduated at 56% and increased to 73% in the 2005 cohort. Shifting to the GSR as

the measurement, African American males in the 1995 cohort graduated at 51% compared to

Caucasian males at 76%. The GSRs for the 2005 cohorts indicate a continuation in the upwards

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[11] Since graduation rates are typically calculated either as 4 year or 6 year rate, the entering cohort in fall 2005 had until the spring of 2012 to complete their degrees based on the 6 year calculation. The NCAA released data on the 2005 cohort in October of 2012.

[12] Federal graduation rates differ from the NCAA's Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in that the federal rate does not count transferring students as successful at their previous institution, nor do they count athletes leaving in good standing as successful. The GSR counts athletes transferring out or leaving in good standing and successful.

trend with African American males graduating at 62% and Caucasian males at 82%. (NCAA Research Staff, 2012). Although the NCAA can show improvement over time, the graduation gap, even if decreasing slightly from 25percentage points to 20 points, between African American and Caucasian football players indicates that race may develop as a salient theme in research on high profile athlete success.

Adler and Adler's study of a high profile basketball team from 1980-1984 shows us what college athletics looked like before academic reform that started in the late 1980's and continues through the present day. The second qualitative study I will review, Benson's (2000) "Constructing Academic Inadequacy: African American Athlete's Stories of Schooling," serves to represent a halfway point between when Adler and Adler conducted their research and the present day. Benson's (2000) qualitative interview study focused on giving voice to the experience of African American scholarship recipient football players at a Division 1 public university in the southeast. Benson focused specifically on interviewing athletes' in their sophomore to senior years whose low academic record at the university had landed them on an "at-risk" list compiled by coaches and academic advisers. Benson begins by criticizing the "deficit" perspective that emphasizes "the deficiency of African American athletes compared with other groups…generally [leaving] the impression that the poor performance is primarily their fault" (p. 224). Her qualitative research gives stigmatized athletes a voice within the research that surrounds them. In her analysis of the interviews, she finds the "establishment and reinforcement of limited expectations and attitudes by peers, advisors, teachers, and coaches" (p. 229). Benson emphasizes the role of the other actors within the system surrounding athletes in creating a context in which academic detachment (as seen in Adler and Adler) becomes the norm, "[athletes'] subjective realities demonstrate that their experiences have been constructed in

the process of interactions between themselves and the people and institutional structures around them" (2000, p. 226). Restated, Benson's major finding was that the low academic performance of the African American football players in her study was a phenomenon built out of the practices and interactions of all members of the athletes' academic domain, which included traditionally athletics-related actors such as coaches. Thus, peers, advisors, teachers, coaches, and the students themselves were complicit in constructing academic inadequacy among this specific athlete group.

Similar to Adler and Adler's (1985, 1991) findings that many athletes in high profile sports entered with a level of idealism and shifted toward pragmatic detachment, Benson's subjects voiced that as early as their recruiting trips they learned that the school would not expect much of them academically – regardless of their interest level. Eventually, athletes learn how to work the system and complete minimal work. In looking back over his college career, an African American football player remarks, "I would have done a whole lot better if it weren't for coming in and having a group of people say, 'This is the minimum you need to do'…They were already expecting me not to do well, so why would I want to do more?" (2000, p. 229) In parallel with Adler and Adler's research, athletes felt as though they did not have agency to choose their own academic paths. Advisers were framed as not listening to athletes' academic interests and registering them for classes even before they met to discuss them. Although having academic advisors is a positive shift forward from Adler and Adler's depiction of academic advising as falling in the lap of a low-level assistant coach with limited interest beyond eligibility concerns, Benson's picture of advisers pre-selecting classes for athletes and steering them toward "easy" classes with "hand-picked" athlete-friendly faculty still shows the systems operating around the

athletes as distancing them from engagement with the academic sphere of the university (2000, p. 224).

One issue the athletes in Benson's study found concerning was the lack of faculty holding them accountable for class attendance, staying awake, and participating. One athlete articulated his frustration toward faculty that allowed him to leave class or remain passive by saying, "You can't just have a lot of leeway, because people start getting over on you. You gotta put your foot down and have a little rules to you" (2000, p. 231). The athlete perceived the lack of demanding accountability from his teachers as a sign that they did not care about him and a signal to behave however he choose. While Benson frames this concern as a signal to faculty and staff to pay more attention to students, to hold them accountable, and to tell them that they are wanted in class, I view this tension as highlighting a massive discrepancy between behavioral expectations and learning within athletic contexts versus academic contexts. Emphasis on timeliness, persistent focus, and consistent evaluation are hallmarks of athletic practice; however, classroom environments – especially in large lectures courses – are mostly passive in nature. While the world of athletics is one of "musts" the world of academics is one of "shoulds." The difference between the two is interpreted by athletes in Benson's study as an uncaring academic domain with little reinforcement to go beyond the minimum. Rather than attempt to define learning and academic success through literature, what constitutes academic success and what learning looks like across domains will be a focus of my research.

The Literature Gap

While the experience of the athletes in Adler and Adler's study seems to mirror the experiences of Benson's athletes, the difference between the two studies is more evident in the theoretical perspectives they bring to understanding the athletes' experiences. Adler and Adler

focused on the individual phenomenon of detachment from an academic role and the engulfment of the athletic role without including the impact of others operating within the system on the athlete's experience (1985, 1991). In contrast, Benson's analysis of her data moves away from viewing "merely deficient students engaging in ineffective and unproductive academic practices or students caught in a conflict between two masters" and shows how the athletes' academic performance revealed "a deficient system, comprised of many persons engaging in ineffective and unproductive practices" (2000, p. 237). Benson's perspective that athletes' poor academic performance is produced jointly by the athletes' actions and the other actors within the system is a fundamental step forward in understanding the importance of context in unraveling the complexity of the intersection of athletics and academics in higher education; but research needs to take the next step. The major gap in existing literature is a systems analysis that moves beyond conceiving of the context as the system within an athletic department or even a university as a whole. Research needs to address what policies constrain how actors operate within the systems. Thus, research needs to introduce the systems surrounding NCAA policy into the conversation to understanding what pathways are afforded and constrained for athletes, specifically those who come in as special admits (or relatively academically underprepared) in high profile sports.

Based on the quantitative findings of Maloney and McCormick (1993), Shulman and Bowen (2001), and Umbach et al. (2006) paired with the qualitative research of Adler and Adler (1985, 1991) and Benson (2000), one sees that the academic performance of athletes has continued to be compromised over time beyond the effects predicted by athletes' entry credentials. One key tension that develops out of the review of literature is the notion of what academic success looks like for a high profile athlete. Graduation is the default for success to

which most systems fall. In Mark Alesia's (2008) article on special admits in college football, he recounts the story of one football player who was admitted to Vanderbilt, a highly selective private school in the Southeastern Conference, with a combined SAT score of 710. The athlete's coach had to work through a special admissions committee and present letters of support from the athlete's former coach and teachers to gain entry. The coach concluded, "[The athlete] was admitted, he was one of our better players and he graduated. That's the way the process is supposed to work" (Alesia, 2008). While the NCAA, Vanderbilt and their athletic department may see the student with very low entry credentials graduating after having boosted the performance of his team as a success story, there is likely much more to the narrative. The qualitative ground work laid out by Adler and Adler and Benson show that researchers should be looking more at athletes' experiences and pathways within the contexts of their universities and the larger systems that constrain intercollegiate athletics and higher education. We know that the football player at Vanderbilt graduated, but we do not know what he wanted to study and in what he ended up majoring. We do not know what his experiences were like in the academic, athletic, and social domains. We do not know if he ever felt empowered to speak up in the classroom. Ultimately, we do not know what the student learned during his college career; all we know is that he got that piece of paper: "success."

Ultimately, the gap in the existing literature on athlete academic performance is a systems-level analysis of the tensions both within and between the systems surrounding college athletes. The major problem to address is what is lost when the systems focus on Academic Progress Reports and Graduation Success Rates? By taking a step back to look at the broader systems at play, the goals and motives of the systems will illuminate what a definition of academic success looks like for a special admit high profile athlete. The target population of my

research will focus on high profile athletes who enter through special admissions accommodations (special admits or a comparable demographic) because the NCAA uses this population as its lowest common denominator when making policy that governs all intercollegiate athletes. They are the population most removed from the student body as a whole both because they are subject to an emphasis on extracurricular activity as a professional career pathway and because they are recipients of academic support provided by universities to ensure that they are retained as students and remain eligible to compete for the university. In light of the academic underperformance of athletes in higher education, the scandal surrounding academic support gone wrong, and the literature on how athlete academic performance is embedded in higher education, my research will focus on a systems-level analysis looking at high profile special admits' transition into the academic and athletic spheres of the university within the greater context of current NCAA policy.

Research Question

The focus of my research is on athletes with low academic credentials, "special admits," who compete in high profile college sports. Knowing from the literature that such athletes tend to underperform relative to their academic entry credentials despite receiving high levels of academic support, I will use the NCAA mandated academic support center for athletes as the location from which I position my research. My research will focus on broad systems and on-the-ground experiences for athletes as they develop identities both temporally (over their first year on campus) and contextually (when in athletic and academic domains). The following questions will drive my research:

- What are the affordances and constraints acting on high profile special admit athletes in their first year of college?

- Based on the affordances and constraints, what tensions exist within and between systems in which such athletes are embedded?

Themes developing from the data collected in this study will drive the creation of emergent questions through blocking together themes of affordances and constraints and developing narratives around each theme. Through the lens of affordances and constraints, I will develop and understanding of the intersections and resulting tensions between the systems governing college athletes.

I have chosen to focus on academic support centers because while it is generally understood that athletes underperform academically, there is little transparency into what specifically occurs in these academic centers; it is unknown how NCAA policy affects the work of the staff at such centers, or how these centers fit into the broader network of activity systems surrounding athletes. My goal is to look at one such center as a case study to see how policy affects athlete pathways using two frameworks I will develop in the next chapter: systems based Activity Theory and athlete inhabited Figured Worlds.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

Based on the prior qualitative research on college athletes, I will use two conceptual

frameworks in tandem to address the gaps in the literature and to revisit previous scholarship.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT or Activity Theory) will provide me with a

conceptual analytical tool for looking at activity systems and the tensions that exist within and

between them, to address Benson's (2000) call for a broader systems-level analysis of athlete

academic performance. I will also use the framework of "Figured Worlds"[13] to look at how

meaning is created and how roles and identities are formed within the cultural spheres athletes

inhabit. From the latter framework, I will revisit Adler and Adler's (1985, 1991) research on

athletes' athletic role engulfment and pragmatic detachment from academics while moving

toward an analysis that incorporates cultural influences. An ethnographic revisit allows me to

undertake participant observation at my field site "with a view to comparing [my] site with [a

similar] one studied at an earlier point in time" (Burawoy, 2003, p. 646). Such a revisit will push

me to "to developing explanations of historical change" (Burawoy, 2003, p. 647). I will provide

the theoretical background of the two frameworks and then develop both the conceptual frames

of Activity Theory and Figured Worlds relative to existing literature on college athletes and my

research.

A Focus on Contexts

Both Activity Theory and Figured Worlds develop out of the same sociocultural

foundations that have developed into what James Greeno frames as a "situative approach"

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[13] The phrase "Figured Worlds" is developed at length by anthropologists Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte and Cain (1998).

(2006). The situative approach is defined by a shift away from focusing on the individual as the main unit of analysis, as seen in cognitive research and mainstream psychology, and instead focuses analysis on performance and learning of an activity system: "a collection of people and other systems" (Greeno, 2006, p. 83). Greeno coined the term "situative" as distinct from other related perspectives that use the term "situated" (e.g., Lave and Wenger's (2001) situated learning) because he wanted to emphasize that all activity is situated within contexts that provide meaning, either structural in Activity Theory or cultural in Figured Worlds (2006, p. 79). Using the term "situated" implies that some actions are situated within contexts and that others are not.

Since the stereotypes athletes face are cultivated and reified at the societal level, a theoretical lens that takes context into account will allow me to situate interactions between individuals within the broader system of affordances and constraints influencing individual actors. This approach contrasts with social-cognitive theory, which places understanding of motivation and engagement at the level of the individual (Dweck, 1999). Within a situative approach, the social system becomes the unit of analysis as a result of combining people and contexts in the process of meaning-making (Nolen & Ward, 2008). Understanding athlete learning from a situative perspective means understanding the complexity of the social organizations that shape learning; these include college athletes' interactions with coaches, peers, advisers, learning specialists, faculty, tutors, and the NCAA – as well as the social environments in which they come together (Greeno, 2006).

The choice to focus on two different situative frameworks is important because using the two in tandem will allow me to analyze my data using an etic system-structure approach and an emic cultural meaning-making approach. Importantly, both Activity Theory and Figured Worlds

move beyond the analysis of individuals as developed in research like Adler and Adler's.

Greeno identifies the problem with focusing analysis on individuals:

> Without analyzing the activity system as a whole, we risk arriving at conclusions that we think are about the individual, but in fact depend on broader features of the activity system, and thus would not readily generalize from the laboratory to real-world learning environments (2006, p. 83).

Greeno's argument echoes Benson's concern that athletes with low academic achievement are often viewed through a deficit perspective model which ignores broader contexts of their performance.

Vygotsky's Legacy

The importance of culture and contexts in understanding learning inherent in both Activity Theory and Figured Worlds develops from the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who in the 1920's and 1930's pushed to transform psychology away from behaviorism by positioning humans as culturally mediated and embedded in activity (Edwards, 2011). Vygotsky, along with fellow colleagues, A.N. Leont'ev and A.R. Luria, transformed Marx's focus on "revolutionary practice" in labor to "practical-critical activity" embedded in mundane everyday "human object-oriented activity" (Engestrom & Miettinen, 1999, p. 3). While Leont'ev and Luria expanded upon Vygotsky's origins of Activity Theory[14] into modern CHAT, other lines of scholarship developed out of the Vygotsky tradition via fellow Russian Mikhail Bakhtin, who emphasized semiotics, which influenced Clifford Geertz and modern anthropology, including Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, and Cain (2003), who developed the framework of Figured Worlds (Edwards, 2011). Though Activity Theory and Figured Worlds have developed within different disciplines, their core focus on the importance of holistic analysis of systems or worlds makes them well suited to work in tandem with the goal of

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[14] Vygotsky's original framework for Activity Theory is commonly referred to as First Generation Activity Theory and will be explained at length below.

generating both systems-level and a cultural meaning-making analysis of the same data. In the following sections I will develop both Activity Theory and Figured Worlds as conceptual frameworks using examples from college athletics to demonstrate the utility of the frameworks for analyzing data generated by my research. Specifically, I will use the examples of Marvin Austin and Michael McAdoo, which I develop at length in Chapter 2, to illustrate the utility of the frameworks. The frameworks explained below will be applied to the data I present in Chapter 5 and analysis in Chapters 6 through 8.

Components, Principles, and Generations of Activity Theory

Activity Theory has developed significantly since Vygotsky introduced the idea of culture as mediating human activity. In this section, I will outline the main components of CHAT and its five main principles, and then discuss the development and utility of the three generations of Activity Theory based on Engestrom's (1999) Outline of Third Generation Activity Theory ("Engestrom," n.d.). The basic architecture of Activity Theory is a geometric triangle with specific places for the main components for the theory: subjects, objects, tools, outcomes, rules, divisions of labor, and community. Leading activity theorist Yrjo Engestrom defines each main component of Activity Theory as the following:

> In the model, the *subject* refers to the individual or subgroup whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis. The *object* refers to the 'raw material' or 'problem space' at which the activity is directed and which is molded or transformed into *outcomes* with the help of physical and symbolic, external and internal *tools* (mediating instruments and signs). The *community* comprises multiple individuals and/or subgroups who share the same general object. The *division of labor* refers to both the horizontal division of tasks between the members of the community and to the vertical division of power and status. Finally the *rules* refer to the explicit and implicit regulations, norms and conventions that constrain actions and interactions within the activity system (1996, p. 67).

Activity Theory has a high degree of utility as an accommodating "metatheory" that allows researchers to bend it onto various frameworks – not to find tidy answers, but to develop

thoughtful questions that unearth new layers of old problems (Roth &Lee, 2007, p. 191). The first principle of Activity Theory is that an object-oriented activity system that is mediated by tools and artifacts is the prime unit of analysis ("Engestrom," n.d.). This first principle simply outlines that CHAT is moving away from a traditional cognitive focus on individuals in order to focus on the systems in which the individuals are embedded. The second principle is that activity systems incorporate multiple voices and points of view through recognizing the different divisions of labor within a system and the different positions and histories each member of the system carries ("Engestrom," n.d.). Based on Engestrom's argument, the multi-voicedness is both "a source of trouble and a source of innovation, demanding action of translation and negotiation" (p.3). Within an activity system involving college athletes, thinking back to the discussion on academic scandal at UNC, one can see how coaches, tutors, advisers, etc. would all bring different and sometimes conflicting voices to the activity system of academic support based on their background and point of view.

The third principle of Activity Theory is historicity, which takes into account the formation of the system over long periods of time. Conflicts within and between systems can be understood against the backdrop of their historical development ("Engestrom," n.d., p. 3). The historical shifts in the activity systems surrounding college athletes can be understood against the development of NCAA academic policies and the reactions of NCAA member institutions over time.

The fourth principle of Activity Theory looks at the central role of contradictions as a motivating "force of change and development" (Engestrom & Miettinen, 1999, p.9). Tensions that build over time both within and between activity systems end up serving as catalysts for change. For instance, high profile athletes graduating at low rates relative to other athletes and

students at large drive the decision making within the NCAA to raise initial eligibility standards which the NCAA hopes will achieve their goal of improving graduation rates (personal communication, Mark Emmert, April 25, 2013).

The fifth and final principle of Activity Theory discusses the "possibility of expansive transformations in activity systems…as individual participants begin to question and deviate from [the activity system's] established norms… [and the] object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized" ("Engestrom," n.d., p. 3-4). This notion of transformation develops from tensions and contradictions within and between systems reaching a point of crisis. Looking at the current debate over the commercialization of college athletics, the inflow of money into institutions with big-time high profile sports programs, and the limited compensation to the athletes themselves, the overarching activity system of intercollegiate athletics might be heading toward a point of expansive transformation.

The Generations of Activity Theory

To impart a deeper understanding of the principles of Activity Theory and the central components of Activity Theory, I will outline how the theory was initially developed by Vygotsky in what is known as first generation Activity Theory through the current iterations of CHAT in its third generation. First generation Activity Theory was largely focused on individuals with a focus on how subject(s) orientation toward an object is mediated by tools.

Figure 3.1: First Generation Activity Theory

Mediating Tools: Cultural Artifacts, Signs

Subject(s) – individuals or groups   Objects ⟶ Outcomes
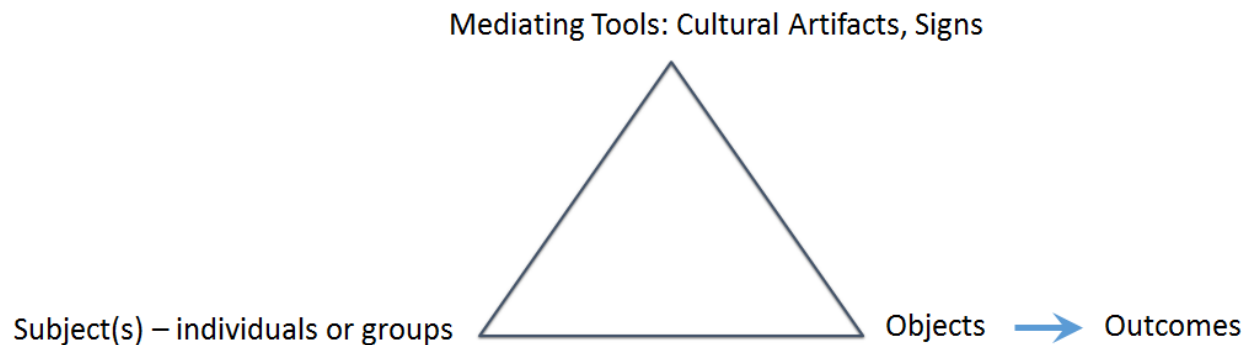
Using a contemporary example from the previously outlined UNC scandal, one can see how an

individual, Marvin Austin, focusing on the object of playing college football, used the tool of

paper classes and excessive academic support to achieve the outcome of remaining eligible until

charged with an Honor Code violation[15]:

Figure 3.2: First Generation as Applied to the Marvin Austin Case

Mediating Tools: Enrolled in "paper classes";
received "Inappropriate" help from tutor

Subject(s) – Marvin Austin   Object: Playing college football ⟶
Outcome: Staying eligible until charged
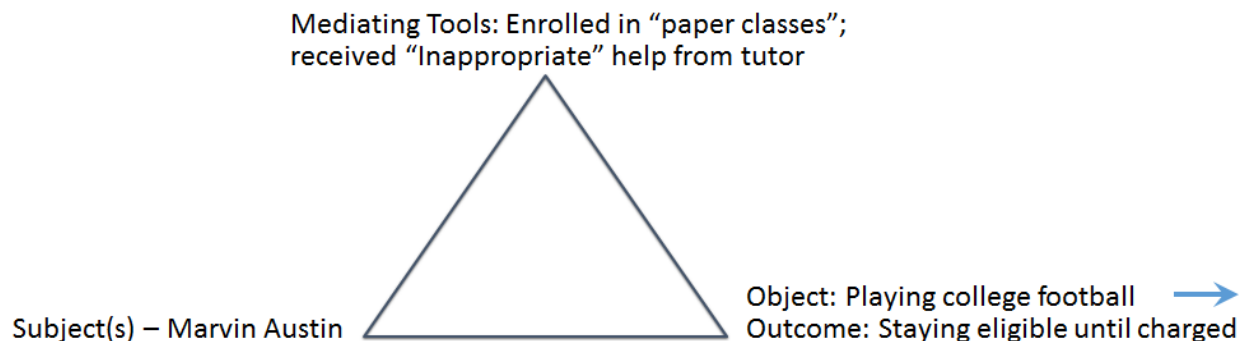
In the figure above, Austin is seen as a single subject, but the reality of the activity system

surrounding his case is much more complex. Thus, the major limitation of first generation

Activity Theory is that the unit of analysis remains largely individually focused. Following up

on Leont'ev's crucial expansion of the model through the inclusion on division of labor,

Engestrom developed a second generation of Activity Theory which added the concepts of rules,

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[15] Note: Marvin Austin's case is complex, in that he was charged with receiving funds from a potential sports agent and further investigation revealed that he also enrolled in paper classes and received a B+ before starting his first fall semester at UNC. (See Chapter 2 for more details.)

community, and division of labor. By placing the UNC scandal into the model of second generation Activity Theory with the athletic department as the subject, one can observe a more complete picture, including tensions within the system that lead to changing practice.

Figure 3.3: Second Generation Activity Theory Applied to UNC

Tools: Course selection of "paper classes"

Subject – UNC Athletic Department

Object: Eligibility of high-profile athletes ⟶ Outcome: Potential to win more games

Rules:
- from the NCAA: Academic Progress Reports, Graduation Success Rates
- From UNC – the University Honor Code

Community: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Division of Labor: Academic counselors, tutors, coaches, faculty members

Second generation Activity Theory allows the researcher to zoom out from the individual and see the bigger picture in which the activity is situated. Importantly, second generation Activity Theory becomes a more flexible unit of analysis of human interaction, which allows the researcher to focus on individuals as subjects, or to expand out to conceptualize an entire university as the subject of the system (Russell and Yanez, 2003; Rogoff, 1993). In the figure above, I have replaced Marvin Austin as the subject and have expanded out to look at the UNC athletic department as the subject of the activity system. Even though the news articles discussed in Chapter 2 claimed that there was no systematic link between the athletic department and the high percentage of athletes taking paper classes, the figure of second generation Activity Theory above shows how the goal of the athletic department – winning games – is achieved through the

object of maintaining athlete eligibility and protecting the systems' labor force. Based on the

low academic credentials of some of the high profile athletes, such as Marvin Austin and

Michael McAdoo, enrollment in paper classes becomes a tool to mediate athletes' eligibility.

Second generation Activity Theory is useful in showing contradictions within activity

systems. When contradictions within a system arise to the level of consciousness, those tensions

become the driving force of change and adaptation both within and between activity systems

(Roth & Lee, 2007). Expanding on the example from above, one can see how an individual actor

in the system can change practice:

Figure 3.4: Contradiction within Second Generation Activity Theory Leading to Change

Tools: Course selection of "paper classes"

Object: Eligibility of high-profile athletes ⟶ Outcome: Potential to win more games

Subject – UNC Athletic Department

New academic counselor for basketball

Rules: NCAA and UNC

Community: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
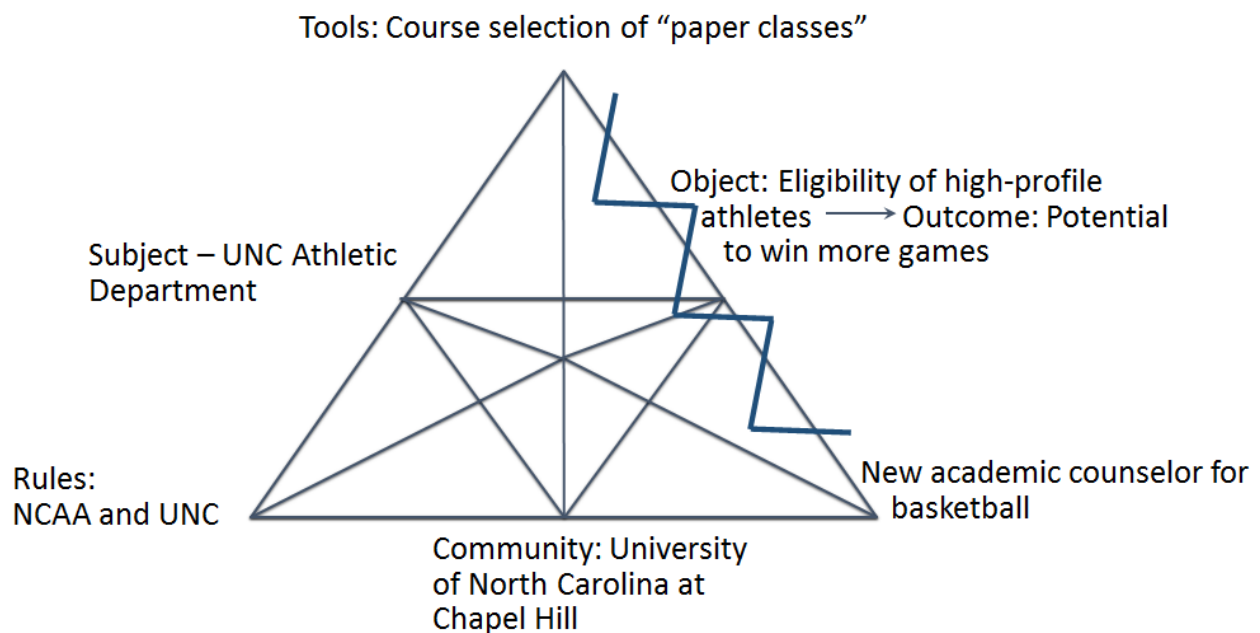
Although the practice of enrolling athletes in paper classes continued in many sports across

UNC, the practice stopped when a new academic counselor for basketball was hired into UNC's

Academic Support Program for Student Athletes (ASPSA). Recall that Mary Willingham, a

fellow ASPSA employee, speculated that the new counselor was appalled at the lack of rigor and

learning within the paper classes and ended the enrollment practice for the students with whom

she worked. Thus, a conflict between the division of labor and the tools within the system outlined above (indicated by the jagged line) led to a shift in practice that affected many high profile athletes in basketball. The counselor's ability to change the practice within the activity system also illuminates the mechanism by which athletes were steered toward or away from paper classes, despite the formal investigation not finding a systematic connection. The change in the activity system illustrates the fourth principle of CHAT: the central role of contradictions, whereby the tension created over time by the enrollment in paper classes allowed for development within the system

A third generation Activity Theory, developed by Engestrom (1999), expands on the second generation model by looking at the interactions of multiple activity systems, specifically around how multiple systems focus on the same object. Third generation Activity Theory acknowledges that such systems are embedded in networks of systems. The final expansion of the theory allows researchers to see dialog between systems, multiple perspectives on shared objects and power dynamics at play through the interactions between systems (Roth & Lee, 2007). In analyzing the conflict between the systems in the current legal case involving Michael McAdoo, I use the figure below to represent both the activity system surrounding the UNC athletic department and the activity system of the NCAA.[16]

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[16] For a full explanation of the McAdoo case, please refer to question one. The key complaint of McAdoo, a former UNC football player, is that he was denied due process through UNC's Honor Court by the relationship between UNC and the NCAA.

Figure 3.5: Third Generation Activity Theory Using the McAdoo Case
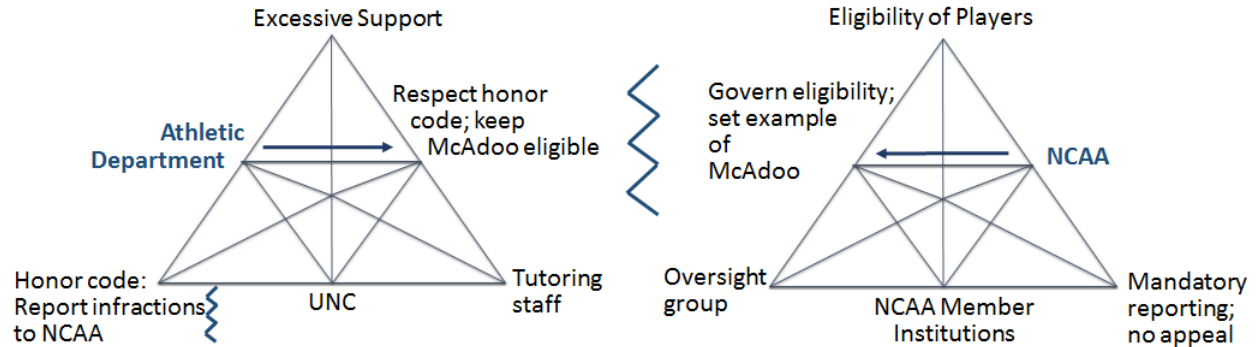
In the figure above, the conflict between the object of the NCAA, governance of eligibility, and

the object of the UNC athletic department, to respect the university honor code, are not

necessarily at odds with one another. However, the rules within the UNC athletic department's

activity system are in conflict with each other because UNC must follow the honor code, and it

must report all infractions to the NCAA when they happen. The rules between the NCAA and

the UNC Athletic Department are also in conflict, which led to McAdoo being denied due

process through UNC. The conflict within the UNC activity system leads to a conflict between

the outcomes of the activity systems on several levels. First, the athletic department chose to

punish McAdoo, but the punishment ensured that McAdoo would be eligible for the coming

football season to protect the department's economic interests and goal of winning football

games. The NCAA, on the other hand, wants to protect the ideals of amateur athletics and ruled

on the McAdoo case based on UNC's initial report of possible honor code violations in three

courses. The NCAA banned McAdoo for life in order to make an example of him to other

member institutions. Therefore, the lifetime ban handed down from the NCAA and the minimal

punishments from UNC are in direct conflict. McAdoo's legal case addresses the conflicting

outcomes of UNC and the NCAA activity systems.

Activity Theory illuminates contradictions within and between activity systems that surround the experiences for college athletes. Activity Theory does not provide clean answers; rather, it helps to develop insightful questions (Russel & Yanez, 2003). Beyond looking at static systems, Activity Theory has the ability to document change over time through what Engestrom, Y., Engestrom, R., and Vahaaho (1999) refer to as knotworking. Knotworking is defined by the authors as "a rapidly pulsating, distributed and partially improvised orchestration of collaborative performance between otherwise loosely connected actors and activity systems" (p. 346). Knotworking allows researchers to see how systems come together, and then separate. The notion is that the center, or knot, does not hold the systems together over the long term. Instead, knotworking allows researchers to map change over time as snapshots in a sequence as they are played out. The concept of knotworking can help generate questions around the systems that touch college athletes. Specifically, one can ask whether athletics are a part of the university as a whole. Or do athletic departments operate as auxiliary enterprises, occasionally tied to the greater institution by a knot that does not hold?

Structure to Culture

Both Activity Theory and Figured Worlds focus on analyzing everyday experiences within context. The difference between an activity system and a Figured World is not significant. Engestrom and Miettinen (1999) argue that "social worlds" are a "unit of analysis roughly equivalent to [an] activity system" (p.7). The main difference between Activity Theory and Figured Worlds lies in their utility to understand data. Activity Theory, as outlined above, leads to insight and thoughtful questioning of systems, while a Figured Worlds perspective sheds light on the meaning behind the action, or thick description in Clifford Geertz's (1973)

anthropological terminology. In order to explain the difference between the two frameworks, I

present visual representations of both overlaid on the experience of college athletes.

Figure 3.6: Visual representation of Activity Theory
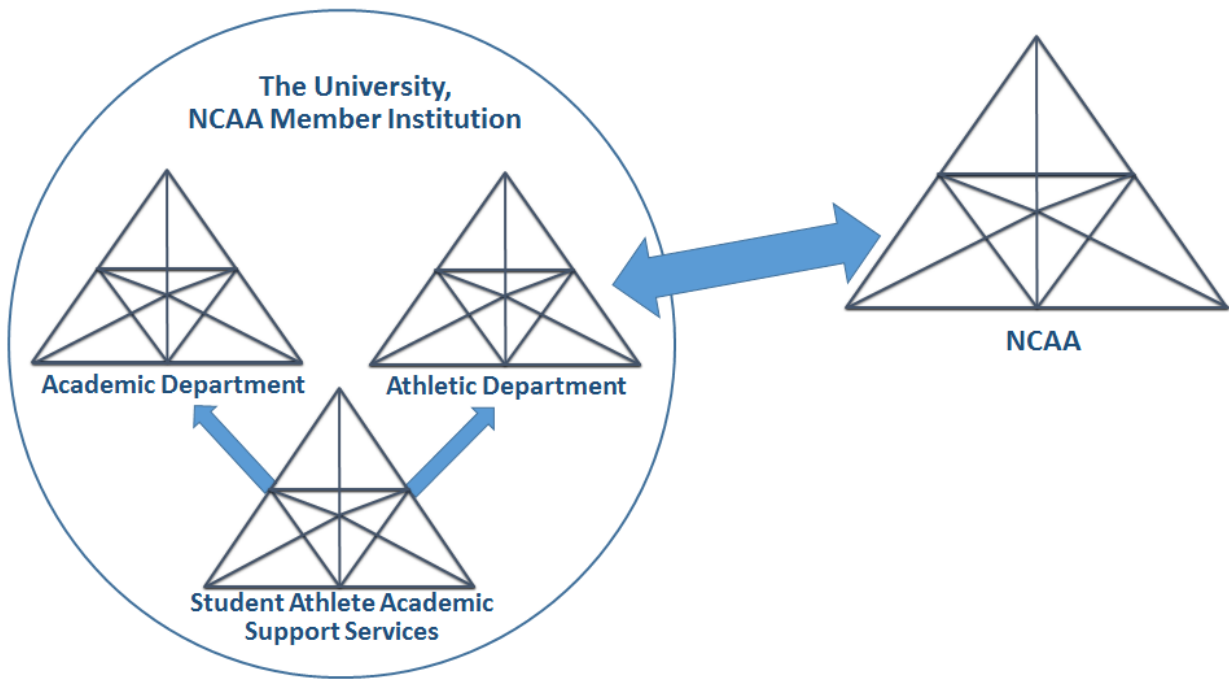
In the figure above, the academic departments of the university (typically under the Provost), the

athletic department (typically under an Athletic Director), and the NCAA-mandated academic

support programs for athletes are represented as interacting activity systems within the larger

entity of the university. The NCAA is represented as interacting with, but outside of, the

university with a two-way arrow indicating how policy influences the systems at the university,

and how, as a member institution, the university can influence the NCAA. The academic support

center for athletes, as in the case of the UNC scandal, is often embedded in the athletic

department at a university. Many institutions establish reporting lines for their athlete academic

support into both the academic departments and athletic department. However, athletes do not

experience college in terms of reporting lines and regulations. They experience different worlds

in which they have different roles and are met with different expectations. The world of their

sport bumps up against and sometimes overlaps with their academic world; such worlds are not cleanly defined and contained. The figure below shows how the activity systems above are experienced by athletes.

Figure 3.7: Activity systems experienced as Figured Worlds
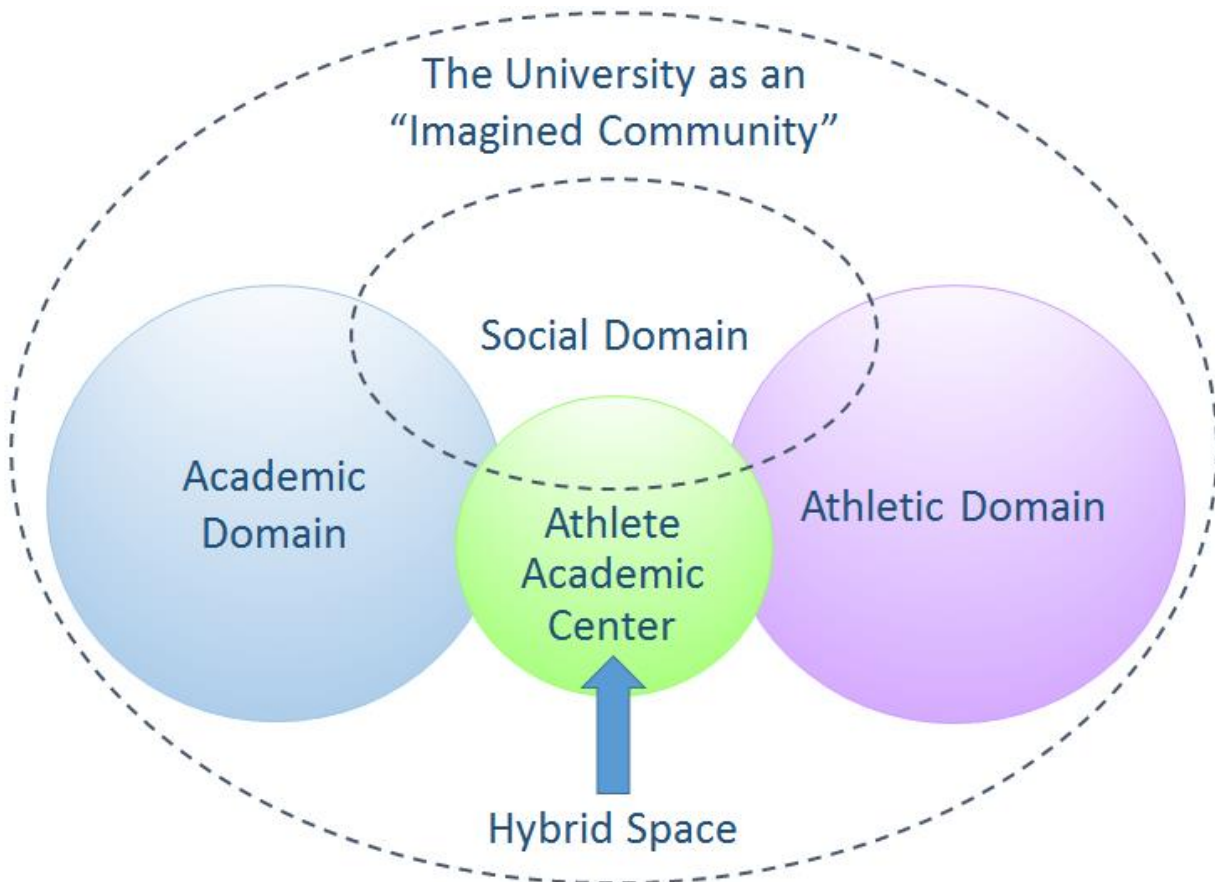
Figure 3.7 shows the overlap of the three major areas of identity and role development (academic, athletic, and social) that Adler and Adler (1985, 1991) include in their foundational study. While I will not focus on individuals as Adler and Adler do, the three major roles they analyzed map onto the worlds athletes inhabit while in college. I have left the social sphere dotted since I will focus on it insofar as it affects athletes' academic performance. Such themes from the social sphere will include parental influence over major selection, persistence to earn a degree, and desire to play professionally. The domains depicted above are preliminary based on

previous research. I will look for emergent domains from the data I collect, observing which domains tend to connect, and which ones athletes experience as separate.

Hybrid Spaces

Figure 3.7 includes a separate sphere for academic support as an entity overlapping both with athletics and academics, effectively functioning as a bridge between the two worlds for the athletes. The study-center-as-bridge can be described as a hybrid space. Hybrid or "third" spaces represent flexible zones of proximal development that accept the "counterscript" – student behaviors and learning that might not be accepted in formal Figured Worlds (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejeda 1999). While Gutierrez et al. present the concept of the hybrid space as a method for students to connect unofficial spaces, e.g., home life, with formal spaces, e.g., classrooms, my research analyzes academic support centers for athletes as hybrid spaces connecting two formal Figured Worlds. The acceptance of the counterscript within the hybrid space allows an athlete access to the domain of academic content without having the same background knowledge base as his or her peers within the academic Figured World. Significantly, the hybrid space forces athletes to carry both identities – student and athlete – simultaneously. The forced acknowledgement of the dual "student athlete" identity has been shown to trigger stereotype threat associated with the "dumb jock" identity, resulting in subsequent dips in academic performance on standardized tests (Stone, Harrison & Mottley, in press).

While hybrid spaces can provide environments for transformative learning (Gutierrez et al., 1999), in the case of athletes, the salience of the dual nature of their identities may impair their academic engagement within the academic support centers. However, while the "student athlete" identity may be problematic, hybrid or "third" spaces are less likely to foster opposition

from potentially resistant students, as such spaces allow for a broader definition of competent participation, in contrast with formal Figured Worlds which may have polarizing participation structures (Hand, 2009).

Figured Worlds Imagined and Defined

If academic support centers are hybrid spaces between more formal worlds, what do these worlds look like? How are they bounded and defined? While I have discussed the utility of Figured Worlds as a framework separate from Activity Theory, I will now turn my attention to unpacking what Holland and colleagues mean by Figured Worlds, the components of these worlds, and how identities are formed and developed within the different contexts or domains of Figured Worlds. Figured Worlds are cultural realms in which values, meaning, and identities are constructed by the contexts and actors, and collectively realized within the domain "as if" the collective vision is reality (Holland, 2010). Within the Figured World of academia, we write and read dissertations as a key step toward earning and granting doctoral status – as if such credentials carry weight worth sacrificing years of one's life to earn. One important feature of this perspective is that members must see themselves as contributing members to the worlds; they must be invested (Holland et al., 2010). Figured Worlds are shaped by their own unique culture, what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) would frame as "webs of meaning" that hold together the actions of the actors within the culture.

Looking at the origins of humans imagining reality, Vygotsky (1978) studied children's play and use of tools and symbols within their games. He observed how children would suspend the everyday meaning of an object and assign it a new meaning within the world of the game. A broom would become a horse, the area under the dining table transforms into a hideout, etc. A child would "pivot" between the everyday into the imagined world of the game through the use

of the tool, e.g., broom, table, etc. as a mediating device (Vygotsky, 1978). The imagined worlds of adults rely more on rules and less on physical tools to navigate play. However, it is this training in inventing and imagining alternative realities that allow us as adults to navigate the different cultural or Figured Worlds we inhabit and develop (Holland, 2010).

While athletes do not see or feel the activity systems interacting as outlined in Figure 3.6, they are heavily influenced by the relations and regulations built into the systems. Instead, college athletes experience Figured Worlds of athletics and academics and utilize the academic support center as a hybrid space for learning how to transition or "pivot" between one Figured World and the other (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998). Figured Worlds, as conceived by anthropologist Dorothy Holland (2010) are "symbolic spaces made meaningful by cultural narratives" in which "participants are socially positioned, form subjectivities, and develop identities that both motivate and constrain their actions and ultimately their life trajectories" (p. 269). In a Figured World, actors meet societal expectations that they can accept or reject in forming their identities.

Holland et al. (1998) identify two types of identities that subjects inhabit within Figured Worlds: figurative and positional identities. Figurative identities are "about signs that evoke storylines or plots among generic characters" which for the athlete arriving on campus translate into the often used tropes of the 'jock,' 'dumb jock,' 'meat head,' 'football player,' 'baller,' and less charged, but by no means benign, 'student athlete' (p. 128). The historical storylines of these figurative identities function to constrain athletes' (and disproportionately academically underprepared males' in high profile sports) access to the academic domain. Positional identities are "about acts that constitute relations of hierarchy, distance, or perhaps affiliation" which translate into notions of relative power and ability for athletes (1998, p. 128). A subject's

affiliation with athletics affects his or her social position within the imagined community of the University.[17] The athlete may find him or herself with a relatively high social position in certain contexts of the university, e.g., the field of play, gyms, fraternities or sororities, dorm space, etc., but he or she may experience a lower social position within the Figured World of academics, e.g., lecture halls, seminars, labs, libraries (Simons et al., 2007).

Signithia Fordham's (1993) study of students at Capitol Hill School in Washington, D.C. shows how African-American women's sense of their relative social position leads "to them silencing themselves within the Figured World of school" (as cited in Holland et al., 1998, p. 132). Rather than trying to pass as holding alternate identities in order to conform to the model of a good student, the women in Fordham's study took an oppositional stance. Holland et al. argue that these positional identities are built over the "long term…through day-to-day encounters…that newcomers gradually learn to identify and then possibly identify themselves with – either positively or negatively, through either acceptance of rejection" (1998, p. 133). The oppositional stance women in Fordham's study take toward academics mirrors the "pragmatic detachment" of the high profile male athletes in Adler and Adler (1985, 1991) and Benson's (2000) studies. My research follows athletes from their point of entry into a university to look at whether and how the day-to-day interactions around academic support centers lead athletes to form positional identities, and significantly – whether those identities are accepted or rejected.

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[17] The concept of the "imagined community" comes from Benedict Anderson (1983). While Anderson used the concept to explain the rise of modern nationalism, the concept explains the sense of unity felt by members of a group despite the lack of even indirect interaction. While academics and athletics function as Figured Worlds, I argue that they are embedded within the imagined community of the larger university.

The figurative and positional identities that an athlete carries into a classroom can affect how they are taught and how and what they learn. Holland et al. (1998) outline how in a situation where a student is admitted into the "arena of learning" or academic domain of a university, learning itself is "unevenly distributed in its specifics" (p. 135). The uneven distribution stems from the figurative and positional identities of the learner: if an athlete who is likely to be both identifiable in the classroom and highly stigmatized based on their race, sport of choice, and sex, then they may be read by faculty and teaching assistants as "unlikely or even improper students of a particular subject" (1998, p. 135). Through such a system, the narrative of the dumb jock plays out in the classroom not as a reflection of the ability of the athlete, but as a reflection of the assumptions of the academic domain based on cultural storylines and relatively weak position of the athlete within in the domain. Even though university admissions grant athletes entry to the academic domain through acceptance letters, learning within the academic domain may be restricted for athletes based on their figurative and positional identities.

Looking back at Figure 9, the Figured Worlds or domains overlap and run into each other. The overlap is intended to show that the worlds we inhabit are not clearly defined. The inclusion of a hybrid space gives recognition to the fact that Figured Worlds are not purely distinct from one another. A subject never inhabits a single world; as such, identities and worlds interact with each other. Paying homage to Mikhail Bakhtin, Holland et al. describe "the space of freedom that is the space of play between these [Figured Worlds as] the space of the author" (1998, p. 238). Based on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, the world questions and must be answered. Therefore, "authorship is not a choice – but the form of the answer is not predetermined" (Holland et.al., 1998, p. 272). Agency lies with the subject to determine how to respond to the figurative identities presented to him or her, and how to respond to the day-to-day

interactions that inform his or her perceived positionality. The subject makes him or herself into an actor within each Figured World. Such space of agency and authorship explains why some athletes thrive academically despite entering universities with low credentials and others who are relatively well prepared move toward pragmatic detachment. The activity systems surrounding an athlete may constrain his or her movements, but the agency afforded the athlete at the intersections of the Figured Worlds they inhabit allows him or her to author his or her path. This notion of agency aligns with Benson's (2000) findings in which she argues for a need to move away from a deficit model when looking at athletes, but that the athletes are a part of what either perpetuates or challenges the cultural narrative of the "dumb jock" in college sports.

As a hybrid space, academic support centers for college athletes function in two possible ways: first, they can "laminate" two Figured Worlds together so that the college athlete inhabits multiple worlds simultaneously, and second, the hybrid space can be used as a tool to "pivot" from one Figured World into the other. The concept of lamination comes from Goffman's frame analysis (1974) and has been translated into the realm of Figured Worlds by Jurow (2005) who utilizes the concept to look at engagement patterns of students in a project-based learning task in a math classroom. Though special admit high profile college athletes navigate academic and athletic Figured Worlds, they may remain "anchored" in their athletics as their "primary framework" (Goffman, 1977; Adler &Adler, 1991). Academic support centers may help college athletes pivot from the athletic domain into the academic domain. As discussed above in the example of the child playing with a broom, Vygotsky (1978) originally conceived of pivots as tools to shift the frame of an activity; however, in Figured Worlds, pivots are used to shift between or gain access to domains.

In addition to affording a look into the culture of athletics and academics for college athletes, the Figured Worlds framework facilitates a discussion of identity from a situative perspective. Since situative frames look at systems or worlds as their unit of analysis, identity becomes linked to context as well. Holland et al. (1998) provide an understanding of identity as "identity in practice," outlining four contexts in which identities are practiced: the Figured World, positionality, the space of authoring, and making worlds (p. 271-272). While I have written at length above about figurative and positional identities and the notion of agency in a space of authorship, I have not touched on the latter context to discuss how worlds are created. Like the child with the broom-turned-horse, new worlds are fashioned through play. However, the "serious play" of adults leads to the creation and codification of new worlds (Holland et al., 1998, p. 272). For instance, what started with an intercollegiate boat race and grew into autumns filled with bloody football games created a Figured World of college sports – a world that operated as if the score of a Saturday football game should determine the collective campus joy or sorrow for the week to come. The growth of enthusiasm over intercollegiate football games and the concern over the welfare of athletes who put their bodies on the line grew into the creation of governance and rules – eventually, the NCAA.

The activity systems and Figured Worlds I will analyze are all part of the same narrative of college sports, incorporating shared histories and shedding light on the same tensions between the desire to win and the need to keep athletes eligible. Ultimately, both frameworks can be used as unique tools for unpacking what scholars see as systematic academic underperformance by college athletes in high profile sports. While much current scholarship remains either detached from the experience of athletes by utilizing only quantitative data sets, or limited by focusing on only a handful of individual experiences, my use of Activity Theory and Figured Worlds will

provide new insight into the field of research on athletics through a systems-level analysis of

athlete experiences that is tied to the cultural worlds they inhabit. The research questions and

use of these two frameworks will drive the qualitative methodology I outline in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Methodology

One of my goals in undertaking this research is to expand on the qualitative research in the area focusing on college athletes by capturing athletes' experiences over the course of their first year, highlighting both change over time and the shifting nature of affordances and constraints acting on athletes based on their academic and athletic performance. To capture the shift, I have completed 18 months of field observations; six of preliminary research; then 12 following a cohort of students through their first year. In order to provide the community of researchers looking at the intersection of athletics and academics in higher education with a strong systems-level analysis that brings in both the multi-voicedness of the athletes and staff who support them in the hybrid space of the academic support center.

The purpose of my research is to explore why "special admit" athletes underperform relative to their entry credentials despite high levels of institutional support. While the term "special admit" is not universally used by institutions of higher education, it is representative of an array of such terms used to label students who arrive close to the NCAA's measure of initial eligibility and well below the average level of the students at large. The objective is to observe athletes' negotiation of athletic and academic domains from within the system of institutional support provided by the academic support center for college athletes. Specifically, this study will seek to understand how this complex system, including external governance by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), shapes academic and athletic pathways for college athletes.

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methods

The research question designed to address the problem articulated above is broadly

focused on college athlete academic achievement. The qualitative data collection is driven by

hypotheses formed during research using a Grounded Theory approach. Specifically, I am

utilizing participant observation and interviews to gain insight into a specific context of

academic support for athletes. As David Berliner (2002) points out in discussing a study of

student anxiety, it is insufficient to simply rely on a data set to understand academic achievement

among athletes, as much of the prior research on athletes has done. Berliner observed 93

classroom contexts which revealed 93 different patterns of relationships between the variables of

interest; the complexity and particularities of the classrooms that would be missed in such

generalized quantitative analysis can be found through individualized case studies. By using

fieldwork to develop a case study of the phenomenon, I take a constructivist approach to

understanding and detailing the multiple "subjective realities" within the context of my study

(Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 16). In developing my case study, I use a purposive sample

through convenient recruitment and critical case sampling to increase inference quality (Kemper,

Springfield, Teddie, 2003).

Audience for the Work

While this study focuses on relatively underprepared college athletes' academic

performance within and access to the academic domain, the research can help educators learn

how to aid in the development of improved frameworks to promote students' growth as

independent learners. The results of this study, while not generalizable to all college athletes,

may provide insight into other special populations of students who enter higher education with

relatively low levels of academic preparation and who are recipients of academic and social

support programs. Ultimately, with a goal of "ecological validity," practitioners of academic

support for college athletes at peer institutions – other Division I Football Bowl Subdivision

(FBS) schools – may find the research results generalizable to their institutional settings

(Kemper, Stringfield and Teddie, 2003, p. 277).

Conceptualization

The study is a qualitative exploration of athlete academic performance during the

transition into higher education, in which field notes from participant observations and interview

transcripts will be collected from athletes and staff at my case study institution. From this initial

exploration, the qualitative findings will be used to develop themes of interest. The flow of the

data collection, analysis, and interpretation is outlined below.

Figure 4.1: Process flow of qualitative methods research design

Qualitative Data Collection

Procedure:
» Participant observation over one year at field site in classroom, tutoring, advising and computer lab contexts.
» Sampling: Convenient recruitment and critical case sample (n=7) for one on one semi-structured interviews with college athletes; critical case sample of staff at academic centers for one on one interviews (n=12)

Products:
» Field notes
» Transcripts

Qualitative Data Analysis

Procedure:
» Coding : open, axial and selective
» Constant comparison
» Thematic development
» Re-code data into second and third generation activity theory
» Re-code into themes on figurative and positional identities

Products:
» Coded texts
» Core categories as central phenomenon
» Memos
» Triangular maps of activity theory

Interpretation and Findings

Procedure:
» Integrate data analysis using Figured Worlds and Activity Theory
» Develop core categories central to the phenomena
» Complementarity analysis

Products:
» Findings from qualitative data analysis
» Expanded Activity Theory findings; complete systems analysis
» Combined findings on how systems affect figured worlds
» Compare case study to past literature for historical perspective and policy implications
» Recommendations on future research and data collection

The first phase of the qualitative data collection includes both participant observation and semi-

structured interviews with critical case athletes and staff within the academic support center.

The selection of the critical cases develops from the literature which emphasizes that athletes

competing in high profile sports receive the biggest admissions advantage and are most different

from institutions' students at large. As a result, the semi-structured interviews focus on special

admit athletes in high profile sports (football specifically) and the staff at the academic support

center who work with them.

Synopsis of the Qualitative Method Components

Participant observations were conducted at my field site, an academic study center at a

large, predominantly Caucasian, public university on the west coast of the United States with a

highly ranked, Division I FBS football program. Because of the greater potential for recognition

of the institution's basketball players or special admits on other teams due to their relatively

small numbers and team size, I focus my research on football players. Observations took place

over the course of an entire year, beginning with a summer transition program called "Bridge"

which helps all special admits and a mix of other athletes become "writing ready" for college,

and ending with participants completion of their first academic year. Participants selected for the

study represent a sample of college football players enrolled in the summer Bridge course who

enter the university as "special admits" at the institution. I purposively invited all athletes

attending Bridge[18] to participate in the interview process because Bridge includes all incoming

special admits. Then I selected all football players who volunteered to be interviewed as my

sample. While nine football players indicated they were interested in participating in my

research during Bridge, when I contacted them to set up interviews after Bridge and before the

start of school, seven replied to my request.

The Bridge course intentionally mixes men, women, regular admit and special admit

students. My participant observations took in the broad experiences of athletes as they enter the

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[18] During the summer I observed Bridge, 41 athletes (26 male, 15 female) attended. Since all entering football players must attend Bridge, they made up the majority (58 %) of participants.

university and receive academic support, but my interviews focused on high profile special admit football players. I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with the seven participants at several points throughout the year as a method of triangulation to validate participant observations and to illuminate changes over time (Bloor, 1997). Three forty-five-minute interviews with six special admit football players (one participant completed the first two interviews, but did not reply to requests for a final end-of-year interview though he did stay enrolled at the University) were conducted at different time points during the year: early fall, mid-winter and late spring. In addition, I conducted one interview with 12 staff – both hourly tutors and full-time salaried professionals – who work with special admits. Interviews with the athletes ranged from 25 minutes to over an hour. Interviews with staff members ranged from one to two hours. All athlete participants were asked questions investigating their high-school background, transition into academics and athletics at the university, experiences interacting with various members of the university community, and experiences with academic support. I utilized a sequential interviewing technique in which each interview informed the next with the goal of saturation of themes (Small, 2009). I also interviewed the staff members who work with athletes to gain an understanding of the divisions of labor in the activity systems and how the rules and norms of the system affect the ways staff interact with the athletes. This multi-voiced approach is unique within the literature and allows me to build a systems-level understanding of athletes' experiences.

Because of my own experience as a two-sport college athlete, and my work in academic support for athletes and students at large, I recognize that I am entering my field site carrying my own history and notions of how college athletics functions. In order to avoid layering my field research on top of my preconceived notions, I attempted to set aside my own experiences and

empirical understandings by "defocusing" (Douglas, 1976) as I entered my field site. In order to

try to see my field site with fresh eyes, I discussed my observations with friends and colleagues

to see what they reacted to, what meaning they inferred from actions, etc. In a sense, I did both

member checks with the staff and athletes embedded in the system and non-member checks with

people who were not connected to the site. I did have reactions to what the athletes and staff

shared with me in interviews and to what I observed within the Athlete Academic Center, but I

tried to note my feelings in my field notes and ask how the people embedded in the Center were

making sense of what they shared with me. My observations utilized a Grounded Theory

approach to data collection and field note data analysis. In using a Grounded Theory approach to

observations, I started by collecting a broad spectrum of activities and interactions. As I coded

my field notes and start to develop themes, my observations became more honed on the

dominant themes that emerged. Importantly, using a Grounded Theory approach means that I

did not go into the field looking for specific themes – I allowed them to develop based on what

was actually happening in my field site. In contrast to cognitive approaches that focus on

individual perspectives often gathered from self-reported data, situative approaches to

understanding are "interested in making claims about aspects of activity – primarily,

participation and negotiation of meaning" (Nolen & Ward, 2008, 446). Charmaz (1995) presents

Grounded Theory as a way of building theoretical analysis on what I discovered within the

Figured Worlds and activity systems I studied. Using Charmaz's model, I analyzed my data and

developed memoranda while in the collection phase of research. The themes developed emerged

from the data itself and not from hypotheses made before entering the field. The data gathered

became increasingly focused through the process of analyzing data while I continued research.

In my data analysis, I utilized open coding, axial coding, and selective coding in sequence to develop a coding paradigm or theoretical model (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). During open coding of my data, I developed categories of information gathered. I used a constant comparative approach by memo writing to compare my codes against other cases in my data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). I also used Nvivo coding to check that my codes are grounded in my data through the language of my participants. During axial coding, I applied constructs to the codes emerging from the data in order to connect the categories generated during open coding. Lastly, I used selective coding to group less developed themes with more salient themes, or labeled them as less salient (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Selective coding allows a researcher to build a storyline that connects the categories that lead to theoretical propositions. Through selective coding, I isolated core categories as central to the phenomenon I studied.

Significantly, one's role as a researcher has implications for the social organizations being studied within the situative perspective. As Nolen and Ward argue, "Interviews are not simply ways to get inside individuals' heads; they are contexts for the co-construction and negotiation of meaning and identity" (2008, p. 447). I attempted to account for my role in co-constructing the environment I studied in my data analysis and written products by discussing the major themes and observed actions with members of the community. Such member-checking increases the validity of my qualitative findings by making sure that my data make sense to the members of the Figured Worlds and activity systems that I studied.

Data Sources

I used field notes from observations of the summer Bridge course and the mandatory study halls, tutoring sessions and academic advising sessions held during the school year to

generate themes from the notes by coding based on thematic categories, including both positive

and negative incidences related to each category to move from description to analysis of the data.

I utilized negative cases, or evidence contradicting current explanations, to refine theories and

hone semi-structured interview questions. Qualitative data includes participant observations and

interviews with college athletes and staff to assess the functions of the activity system, the nature

of the academic and athletic Figured Worlds, and the role the academic support center plays in

the lives of the athletes.

Description of Field Site

At my field site, the Athlete Academic Center is an attractive modern building built

within the last 15 years. Coaching staff and the athletic department utilize the center and its

services as a marketing tool in the recruitment of athletes. Significantly, the building is located

within the athletic facilities on the periphery of campus, about a 15-minute walk from the central

academic buildings. The physical separation from the academic heart of campus is mirrored in

the reporting lines of the center staff. Though "dotted" reporting lines exist into a high-level

academic administrator, the solid lines of reporting are connected into the upper levels of the

athletic administration. The center itself is a multi-use space housing some athletic team locker

rooms and workout facilities, the dining hall for "training table" meals and the academic center

itself. The center is broken into four primary spaces:

- A large study space with a central area divided by tables and chairs where one-on-one

  tutoring takes place, and where athletes wait for appointments with advisers and learning

  specialists whose offices line the study space. The study space also has a secondary open

  room which is usually less occupied and quieter where student athletes tend to study

  alone. The center also has four breakout study rooms where groups of students meet with

a single tutor. The breakout rooms can be reserved by tutors and occasionally house one-on-one tutoring sessions.

- The second space is a computer lab located on the first floor of the center separated from all professional staff offices. As such, the computer lab is a largely unsupervised space. The expectations for behavior within the lab (regarding not bringing in food or drink, noise levels, printing rules, etc.) are publically stated on posters around the room and on notes taped to the computer screens.

- The third space is a large auditorium on the first floor across the building entry way from the computer lab. The auditorium seats up to 60 people in a tiered stadium seating layout and serves several functions for the center. Bridge classes, mandatory study halls, and overflow tutoring sessions take place in the auditorium.

- The fourth space is a lobby off of the entry to the building on the first floor. The lobby is a completely unregulated space and has a relatively formal appearance, including nice couches and seats for athletes to lounge in. The focal point of the seating is aimed at a large flat screen TV. The lounge becomes a place to look for athletes when tutors and staff are trying to track them down.

Discussion of Integration

This study integrates qualitative data as it is analyzed using two theoretical frameworks. Analyzing the data through the lens of Activity Theory provides insight into large systems and the role of policy, while analysis through a Figured Worlds framework helps develop an understanding of the transitions between the overlaps of the structural systems and cultural domains surrounding college athletes. I used Activity Theory to develop nuanced questions and used Figured Worlds to develop narrative explanations based on the data. Using the two

frameworks in tandem allowed me to follow the path of seven special admit football players for a year, develop a narrative of their experiences within the changing contexts of their first year in college, and be able to make connections between conflicting activity systems and perpetuations of figurative and positional identities. Ultimately, the analysis of the data using both frameworks allowed for a narrative product with a unique level of depth.

Chapter 5

Findings in Grounded Theory

This chapter explains the use of Grounded Theory within the context of my research. I will present the initial selection of the athletes I interviewed through the summer Bridge program, and then I will present the narratives of the seven athletes I followed for the year. As part of what makes this research unique, I will then put the narrative experiences of the athletes into context by layering on the data from interviews with 12 staff members and my own participant observations. To create the context for the narratives, I will explain the use of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding of the data collected along with the results at each phase of analysis. Based on the inductive process of Grounded Theory, I will present the central paradigm or theoretical model to visually display the interrelationships of the coding upon which a central phenomenon is identified. This central phenomenon will be embedded in the affordances and constraints (Chapter 6) acting on the athletes identified through the coding process and discussed at length in Chapter 7.

Summer Bridge: The Point of Entry

The Bridge program served 41 (26 male, 15 female) students during the summer. All special admit college athletes are required to take summer Bridge as a contingency of their admission. As a staff member pointed out, "They do not just attend, they actually have to pass Bridge, and their admission is contingent on their performance in the program." In addition to the special admits, "Football is…mandatory, women's soccer…then other sports," meaning that football players who are not special admits also attend Bridge along with a large number of women who, are rarely special admits to achieve "gender balance"; as another staff member pointed out, "It's nice to have not just guys in the class." The women's soccer team participates

in Bridge as a way to bring athletes onto campus mid-summer before their fall competition season. Since the University admits up to 30 special admits each year, the 41-participant enrollment in Bridge means that roughly 75% of the attendees are special admits. Thus, across the 41 students, there is a wide range of skill levels.

Bridge's stated functions are to "assist the transition for freshman student-athletes into a four-year institution," "set expectations for college," and "increase academic identity" while "accessing academic study skills and academic habits."[19] The main goals of Bridge include "immersion into academic culture," "preparation for writing composition," and developing an awareness of skills and resources. During the period in which I observed the program, it included two separate classes that took place in different spheres of campus. A two-and-a-half hour morning English class was housed in a central academic building on campus and was taught by graduate students from the English Department. In contrast to the morning session, the one-and-a-half hour afternoon class was run by full time professional staff members from the Athlete Academic Center and met in an auditorium in the building that houses the Athlete Academic Center and the main athlete dining hall. The same building serves as a locker room and training facility for two of the University's teams. The afternoon class included guest speakers from across the athletic department, general information on campus resources, and time dedicated to reading the material assigned in the morning class and writing essays for class with the support of tutors. The main academic buildings and the athletic complex are divided by a bridge across a major roadway, signifying a physical break between the athletic and academic worlds. Most athletes attending Bridge began each day with a team workout before the morning class. Football, which contributed 24 athletes, or 58%, of the Bridge students, held practice each

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[19] The director of Bridge presented the functions, goal, and outcomes of the summer Bridge Program to an intercollegiate advisory committee on October 10, 2012.

morning at 6 a.m., which meant that players like Clarence woke up at 5 a.m. and trained "for a couple hours" before showering. They would then typically "try to get something to eat real quick and then go to class."

To gain entry into the worlds of the specially admitted athletes in high profile sports, I joined the team of staff supporting Bridge as a tutor. Along with about a half dozen other graduate students, I acted as a participant observer in the morning class and served as a tutor, both in groups and in one-on-one sessions, during the afternoon class. At the beginning of Bridge, I announced my research and notified the groups of my observations. About three quarters of the way through Bridge, I requested that athletes willing to participate in my research over the year (through three interviews) contact me via email or to come talk to me in person. Thirteen athletes responded, including nine men and four women. Of the respondents, I selected all of the athletes participating in high profile sports. I followed up with the nine men, all football players, and of that group, seven participated in my research interviews. All seven of the athletes interviewed were identified as special admits by the staff during the weekly athlete assessment process, whereby staff members place athletes into different levels of composition courses and decide the amount of oversight and tracking they will require during the school year based on the academic skill set and non-cognitive variables they exhibit during Bridge.

Athlete Narratives

I ultimately followed the paths of these seven special admit first year football players from their arrival at Bridge during the summer through the end of their first year at the University in the spring. Their narratives are remarkably unique. I interviewed the seven athletes three times during the school year: after Bridge finished and before school started for the fall, in the middle of the winter, and at the end of the spring. The first interview focused on each

athlete's background, academic and athletic preparation, experiences with Bridge, and initial

expectations and goals for the year. The winter interview focused on a reflection on the football

season, fall classes, and experiences on various parts of campus. The spring interview focused

on the athletes' academic and athletic trajectories over the year and perceptions of systems in

which they were operating.[20] One of the seven athletes only completed two of the intended three

interviews, which left me with a total of 20 athlete interviews.[21] Each interview built on the last,

as I transcribed and coded each series of interviews before conducting the next round, using the

individual responses to develop the next set of questions. Though researchers occasionally treat

high profile special admit athletes as a single entity with a common set of experiences, my

research shows that the seven athletes I followed had remarkably different experiences in their

first year at the University. Because the stories of the athletes themselves are powerful as a

whole, I will present the data gathered from the athletes as narratives charting their experiences

over the course of the year. This narrative, or *in vivo*, presentation of the athletes will allow their

individual stories to be understood in light of the findings discussed in later chapters.

Athlete Demographics

Of the athletes I followed, three identified as black or African American, three identified

as mixed race including African descent, and one identified as mixed race but predominantly

white and without African heritage. Their respective family educational backgrounds varied

with two identifying as having parents who finished schooling at the end of high school, two

with parents who completed some college, one with a parent completing college, one with a

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[20] All three sets of interview questions are located in the appendix along with the staff interview questions and observation protocol. Since the interviews were semi-structured, I allowed the athletes' responses to help direct the flow of the interviews.

[21] Clayton, whose narrative I will introduce below, did not respond to three text messages requesting to find a time to meet for a final interview.

single parent attaining an advanced degree, and one from whom I did not collect data on family background.

Injuries played a role in the trajectories of several of the athletes. One entered with an injury from high school that required most of the year to rehabilitate, two received injuries during the year that necessitated surgery and rehabilitation, and four did not sustain substantial injuries. All of the seven athletes were attending the University from out of state, with five from the southwest and two representing other regions.[22] Several of the players shifted their athletic field position multiple times, learning multiple roles on the field while coaches found where they best fit. The remaining four identified themselves as playing the same position all year without any fluctuation. Of the seven, only one played as a "true" freshman while the remainder redshirted[23] their first year. Significantly, not all of the athletes redshirting knew that they would redshirt when they showed up for camp. Several expressed that redshirting was counter to their discussions with coaches during the recruitment process. Academically, the group ended the year with a combined cumulative grade point average of 2.59, all staying eligible to play, but none reaching their academic grade-based targets. The seven had earned a collective 3.43 grade point average during Bridge, which may have set them up for unrealistic academic expectations over the year; at the same time, Bridge had provided them with a strategic academic buffer against ineligibility, buying them opportunities to take academic risks during the year. Though their academic trajectories ranged from ending their first year with a 2.14 to a 2.79 cumulative grade point average, the common narrative was a transition from competitive intended majors

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[22] Recruitment of athletes from Southwest is typical across many sports at the University, including football. Mentioning the specific state from which other athletes were recruited may make them identifiable; therefore, I will limit my dissection of out-of-state residency to southwest and non-southwest.

[23] Athletes can redshirt a season during their time at the University and transfer a year of eligibility forward by agreeing not to play during the entire season. This most often happened for freshmen who took a year to acclimate to the school, team, and rigor of college athletics. For the best athletes, they play as "true" freshmen and are not asked to defer starting their eligibility. Redshirting has become the norm of college football.

(business, psychology, engineering) toward more accessible majors with lower if any

requirements (communications, American Indian studies, anthropology). The similarities and

differences will be explored as themes in the next chapter, but I will first introduce each athlete

and his background and trajectory through his first year at the University.

Forced Out - Darnell

Darnell is the youngest of seven children in his family. He identifies as African

American, grew up in a large southwestern city, and benefitted from attending a "very, very

good" private high school that focused on college preparation across the curriculum. As a result,

he felt very prepared for Bridge, mentioning that during Bridge, his teammates would ask him

for help on papers. He lived primarily with his mother while his father stayed in a different

nearby city. His father started working right out of high school, while his mother earned a

master's degree and is in the process of working on her doctorate. I think that Darnell may have

volunteered to work with me in part because he understood research through his mother's work

in education and her current position as a school principal. Darnell would often ask me

questions about my research at the end of interviews.

In order to attend his private high school, Darnell had to commute 35 to 40 minutes each

way. The burden of his commute weighed heavily on his mother, and during his senior year,

Darnell stayed with one of his friends closer to their school. When looking at colleges, Darnell's

primary goal was to "just get away from home." In fact, all of the universities to which Darnell

took recruiting trips were located outside of his southwestern state. Darnell was swayed to

attend the University during the recruiting process by the head coach, who won him over with a

holistic recruiting method in which the coach got to know Darnell and his story, and spoke to

him about topics far beyond just football; this made Darnell feel like the coach truly cared about

him as a person.

During his recruiting trip, Darnell "didn't go to any classes" but was shown "the campus

and the buildings, stuff like that" in addition to having a chance to talk with a representative of

the School of Business, his intended major. Darnell was impressed to find "out how good the

business school is here" and to hear about the how the University is "top notch." While Darnell

was initially interested in majoring in business, he was also concerned about his math ability and

saw communications as a strong backup as long as he can focus on marketing and get a minor in

entrepreneurship, "'cause like that's what I want to do, run or at least manage some type of

business of my own or someone else's, just be the boss."

Darnell started his academic career after Bridge by taking an online environment course,

a course affectionately known on campus as "Rocks for Jocks" and a general studies freshman

seminar course specifically for athletes. Based on the rigor of his high school, he felt very well

prepared for his fall classes, finishing the quarter above a 3.0. Darnell focused on making sure

his work "wasn't just B.S., that it was actually something that you could turn in and be proud

of." He felt that he has the "capability of being that 4.0 student" but that his down fall was that

he will occasionally "just get lazy." Despite feeling as though he was sometimes lazy, Darnell

felt accountable to himself for his success and failure. He was frustrated by the connection

between athletics and academics, specifically in the oversight of the athletic department of his

time spent in class. He found the practice of checking athlete attendance in classes "really

annoying", stating, "I feel like if you're gonna call us adults, or treat us like an adult, then don't

have someone come in and check our classes." While he recognized that some of his teammates

may not have chosen to attend class if there were not "checkers," he argued that "that's

ultimately their decision if they don't [go to class]…what a privilege that they were given of a free education, then that's on them." He viewed the class checking system as a "reason to have [the dumb jock] stereotype. Like if they need someone to come in and check [athletes] off if they're here or they're awake." Darnell understood the challenge of being a "student athlete" as being able to "balance two things and still do it really well." As athletes, he voiced that "nothing is given to us," counter to what he felt was a common misconception.

The fall was a challenge for Darnell athletically. He came in as a defensive back,[24] but was switched to another defensive position immediately. He was then shifted back to his original position and then tried at a third option. He saw the transitions as an opportunity to be "more valuable to the team, more useful." During the fall quarter, Darnell sustained an injury that required surgery and a lengthy recovery period; his goal was to be able to return for the end of spring ball. He reacted by becoming a student of the game and "dedicating [himself] to the playbook" knowing that the coaches will "play the people who know what they are supposed to do rather than the people who are big and fast."

Reflecting on his fall academically, Darnell just missed "making the Dean's list…my goal for the fall." However, he had mixed opinions of his courses. His online course dealing with the environment was "memorization more than anything." Though he received a good grade in the course, "I still couldn't tell you about the trees and stuff like that" but thought he completed about half the readings. His "Rocks for Jocks" course was different in that he learned a great deal in the course. He attended class regularly, but said "Honestly, I don't think I even opened my book." However, the tutor he worked with through the Athlete Academic Center was

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[24] I will make reference to positions in this paper. In order to protect the identities of the athletes, I will be intentionally vague about their specific roles. An understanding of the workings of the football position is not important; however, the shifts between positions are significant for understanding the lack of stability athletes can face in their athletic roles.

"the best tutor I ever had." The tutor "really made it easy…that's the best way to put it. Like she would…she went out of her way to do a lot of the things that you wouldn't think…like she made us flash cards, like dumbed it down, drew pictures so we could understand it. Gave us stuff to help us remember the terms, she had a lot of review sessions for us to come to so she, she was really good." In contrast, his tutor for his online class mainly helped by having Darnell and other athletes submit their assignments to her first to check the quality before having them submit the assignment officially.

Darnell takes notes only on "certain days…just when I'm not tired." That fatigue is directly related to the stress of training. "Before we started working out I was taking notes every day and now it kind of…notes that would be two to four pages are now like one and a half to barely two…like I kind of see when I'm tired, like it's not good but I try to focus on what he's talking about that I feel is important and I should know and then I write that down. As far as when I'm not [tired], I write everything down. Just to stay alert." Even a strong student like Darnell found that the rigor of football and course work led to his reliance on tutoring support.

Darnell was aware of how athletes stood out on campus as "usually bigger, louder" and felt like "there's kind of always eyes watching you." He actively worked against being viewed as "just another athlete, just another football player" because "there's not really good things associated with the football team in academics." On campus, Darnell tried to avoid wearing team issued gear, explaining, "I'll wear my regular jeans or something that doesn't associate me with the team. Although I'm with them still, you just give off a different persona when you're not dressed in…your sweats and athletic attire. You just look more normal, I guess you could say. Just like a regular student." When I asked him why he wanted to avoid being connected to

his team in academic settings, he said, "you don't want to necessarily always be…a football player, 'cause that's not who I am, it's just what I like to do, it's just the sport that I like to play."

When I sat down with Darnell at the end of spring, there was a lot to catch up on. As we sat down, he told me, "I'm transferring, just to let you know." Although he felt one 100% recovered from his injury, he was still getting his strength back and weight up. In the spring meetings, the head coach and position coach informed Darnell that they "decided to go in different directions…for my position, bigger guys to fill the role, basically." Darnell felt that not being able to have full contact[25] during spring ball was his "downfall." He felt like the evaluation was "B.S." because he did not "have a real opportunity of showing you what I could do." At first, Darnell was going to refuse to leave, but after several meetings both collectively and individually with the head coach, defensive coordinator, and his position coach, he was finally convinced that it "made more sense…to not stay." When I asked Darnell why the coaches were working so hard to convince him to leave, he told me that the coaching staff had committed a "recruiting error," overselling their allotment of scholarships to a future class.

> Basically they had like nine people sign a letter of intent, like they have a scholarship when they didn't have the scholarship to give them in the first place. So they're betting on people to either leave, like just because they didn't want to, or put people in my situation to kind of force them to leave. Like, they didn't, they never said, 'We're gonna kick you off, we're gonna take your scholarship,' but they told me, 'You'll never play.' So it's like, you know, why stay somewhere, work your ass off, to…not get a reward for it?

As a result, Darnell was released from the University and thrown into a transfer recruitment process. The football coaches from the University helped Darnell make connections since it was in their best interest to help him find a scholarship at another school quickly and efficiently.

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[25] In football, full contact means that the athletes are wearing pads and coming into contact with each other at speeds that simulate the play of the game. Due to concerns about potential head and spinal injuries, football allows for full contact during practice only for limited periods of time each year.

When I talked to Darnell about transferring, he mentioned being hopeful that he could pursue business at a different institution. After getting off to a strong start, he took a communications course in the winter that he did not like, and in which he did not receive a grade that would put him on a path toward majoring in communications. He did, however, take an anthropology course that he enjoyed and in which he was very successful. During the spring, Darnell continued with anthropology, an economics course as a business requirement, and took an American Indian studies course because, "my academic adviser, just kind of…keep my GPA high, depending on…how the other two classes were." At the end of the quarter, Darnell was able to successfully transfer to another institution, albeit in a lower division, in his home state in the southwest.. He was not successful in his economics course, but performed well enough in his other two classes to hold one of the highest grade point averages of all the athletes I interviewed. Darnell struck me as incredibly insightful. He made an effort to spend time with "just normal students," but found that there was a disconnect on campus. Reflecting on how athletes are perceived on campus, he mentioned a "stigma that athletes think they're, you know, hot shit." He went on to talk about high profile athletes trying to integrate into upper campus life, saying:

> I feel like when you go on Greek row, just like on a Saturday, you'll have on let's say [a current star player's] jersey, cheering for him, you want his autograph, you want to take a picture with him after the game, but then on a normal Thursday night, when he wants to come to your frat, you won't let him in because he's on the football team.

In this statement, Darnell succinctly articulates the relative positional power of athletes across domains on campus. Darnell's narrative is one of an athlete forced out of an institution against his will, and forced to return to a state that he was working to escape. He was a strong academic and an all-around good person. I am sad to know that he is no longer at the University.

Not Released - Clarence

Clarence grew up in a large city in the southwest. One of his parents attended junior college, and he has one cousin who is completing a degree at a four-year institution. He identifies as African American and is one of four children; one was finishing high school during Clarence's first year of college, another older sibling was doing "not much," and tragically, one of Clarence's brothers was killed during the spring. When I talked with Clarence afterward, he told me, "Yeah. I'm doing all right. I'm just dealing with it, you know. Kind of like…you know, you never know what's gonna happen, you just…living and making the best out of what you have."

Clarence felt like his high school had prepared him well for college writing due to the rigor of his English course, which he described as "pretty tough." Though he was in the "normal class," he thought it was harder than the advanced placement (AP) class offered at his high school. Test taking has been a challenge for Clarence. He "would know the information, but I wouldn't like get it out." However, he admitted that, "I know the information, so I don't study. But when that happens, I don't remember every single detail."

The University was not Clarence's first choice. He had been committed to another university in a neighboring state, but when the coach who had recruited him left for a different job, Clarence decided to give the University a chance. The academic reputation of the University impressed Clarence, and he believed the football team was becoming "top tier." Clarence did not have a very good recruiting trip to the University. Though it was the first time he had ever seen snow, the weather was so bad that the recruits were just driven on a bus around campus, but "didn't get out and couldn't really see" and remained in the Athlete Academic

Center for the majority of the time. Despite the mediocre recruiting trip, Clarence decided to

sign a letter of intent to attend the University.

Though Clarence felt that he had had a great English teacher in high school, he really

benefited from Bridge. He said, "I think I became a better writer in that little span of time than I

did all throughout high school." The tutors at Bridge helped him "break down reading" whereas

before "I was just reading, looking at words…I knew what they were saying, but I couldn't really

see the deeper meaning." Bridge gave Clarence confidence to enter the school year with the

"normal students" because he thought Bridge left him "just as prepared as them." While

Clarence was redshirting his first football season and training as a defensive back, he enrolled in

an American ethnic studies course, an English composition course, and a general studies

freshman seminar for athletes. He wanted to pursue majoring in psychology, but admitted that

"I'm interested in [psychology], that's not the problem. But it's about what can I do with that

degree? Where do I go from there once I obtain it?"

Clarence understood being a student athlete meant competing not just on the field, "you

also compete in the classroom. Just making it by to be eligible isn't good enough." His

academic goals of being a "three-time academic All-American" were mirrored by his desire to be

the "best corner in the nation" bound for the National Football League (NFL). Clarence finished

the fall with a strong academic performance, earning above a 3.0 grade point average. He felt

like his English course was relatively easy following the rigor of the Bridge program. He also

benefitted from the tutoring support offered be the Athlete Academic Center. When his teacher

lectured too quickly in class, his tutor was able to "break [the content] down so it made sense to

us." Clarence waited until winter to enroll in an introductory psychology class – a notoriously

difficult multiple-choice test-based class.

When I talked with Clarence during the winter, his tone had changed. He informed me that he was planning to leave at the end of winter because "[I'm] just not feelin' it, you know, just not happy here." Though he had mentioned he was redshirting when I spoke to him in the fall, the experience of redshirting left much to be desired, "I mean I didn't even really practice, I just watched practice." When he arrived at camp over the summer, he had a "feeling like they were already gonna redshirt me" but during the recruitment process, "I was told that I'd have an opportunity to play… and that was exactly the opposite of what happened." Though Clarence felt he had been able to climb his way up in practice and that "they're expecting big things from me next year," he felt misled and wanted to leave. "I don't blame [the coaches], 'cause it's technically a business, you know what I'm saying? If there is not a need for someone to play right away…then it's best to just keep them for as long as you can, you know?" Despite his resolve in wanting to leave, when I asked Clarence about where he was planning to go, he told me, "I don't really have a good idea because I'm not able to talk to anyone, because…I haven't gotten released yet." He walked me through the process of requesting a release from the coaches, after which coaches must grant the release, and then send information to compliance to grant an athlete a "full release so schools can contact you." Clarence was starting to worry that his release might not come since other freshman players had been released. He understood that the coaches were "trying to keep me here for…because they see potential in me." That understanding of football as business extended to his impression of the NCAA. After losing a coach at the school he initially signed with, then believing coaches misled had him in the recruitment process at the University, Clarence viewed the NCAA as being against the interests of the players:

> I just think they're a bunch of people that just make rules, you know, and don't
> really think about things from the players' side of the field. Like for instance,

> when you can have…a player go to a school and then a coach just up and leave with no restrictions…and that's something that a player can't do, and now they're stuck in a program, and another coach comes and brings his own players, I mean recruits his own different style. I mean like for a player to transfer, he'd probably have to sit out like a year, and if he wanted to go in-conference, he'd probably have to sit out two years. So it's just, it's just like…it can mess up people's careers. I feel like if… a player is doing well enough in school to transfer, then he should be able to go wherever he wanted without like, being penalized.

Clarence returned for spring having never been granted a release. That "uncertainty of where I would go if I left" because "I wasn't able to talk to anybody" along with the support of his teammates kept him enrolled at the University. He viewed the coaches denying him the release as "a good thing…in the time where they're telling people *to* leave." Following spring practices, Clarence felt that "if we were to play a game today, I would be the starter."

Although Clarence felt much better about football at the end of his first year, the recent loss of his brother and a downward academic trend were evident. He struggled with his first psychology course and barely received credit for a course on the environment because he received zero points on a major paper for failing to meet the length requirement after the teaching assistant grading the paper reset the margins and font. In psychology, Clarence's old concerns over test taking and remembering the details surfaced despite feeling like he "really understood the material." Clarence took another psychology course in spring along with an anthropology course and "Rocks for Jocks." He mentioned frustration at having to select classes around his football schedule, saying that there had been classes he tried to register for, but could not due to football. After difficulty with psychology, Clarence said, "Yeah, I don't think psych is where I'm headed. I'm probably gonna lean toward anthropology."

In his first year at the University, Clarence's high expectations were met with a harsh reality. Classes were more difficult to succeed in than he anticipated. Football coaches he trusted in the recruiting process changed their messaging once camp began. The business of

football kept him at the University when he wanted to leave. While Clarence connected with his

teammates, he only wore non-athletic gear to classes once, though he thought it would be "a lot

easier to talk to people when I'm in normal clothes." Clarence's first year experiences highlight

many of the difficulties in transitioning into the University, including the challenge of staying

engaged when life at home continues without you.

The Future Star – Clayton

Clayton came to the University from out of state, but not from the southwest. As a result

of only completing two interviews with Clayton, I do not know as much about his family

background as the other athletes'. He identifies as multiethnic with African heritage. Clayton

cited two main reasons for attending the University – the first being the head coach and style of

offense the team is known for, the second being the emphasis on academic support that he saw

demonstrated on his recruiting trip: "They just showed me like the tutors they had for like every

single class." During his recruiting trip, Clayton felt that the team had a "family vibe." Clayton

knew he would redshirt his first year since the University had a dominant player in his position

finishing his third year of eligibility. Clayton entered the team more as an apprentice to a master

craftsman than as a competitor for a position. The dynamic allowed him to relax and learn more

than the other athletes I interviewed.

Clayton's high school was the "top in the state." His football team won the state

championships several times and he was a successful sprinter on the track team as well. Because

of his academic preparation, he did not find Bridge difficult. The biggest challenge was staying

alert in class after being exhausted from morning practice. During Bridge, practices started at 6

a.m., which meant many of the football players were up at 5 a.m. Clayton did not mind the

morning class for Bridge, but felt that the afternoon class was "just like a study hall really." He

found himself wasting time in the afternoon class, distracted by his teammates and classmates. He ultimately felt that Bridge "wasn't really a college class" because the "support was a lot…it came in great numbers."

When registering for fall quarter, he worked with his adviser to stay "away from being in a class with like a bunch of athletes and football players…so I could focus more and kind of break away from the group." He feared that if he was with people he knew, he would not "focus" and might "slack off." His goal of breaking from the group was more than simply being able to focus; it had more to do with how others saw him. After stating his concern that clinging to a known group too tightly would limit his "desire to meet new people," he said, "I don't really want to be perceived like that, you know?" Unlike the other athletes, Clayton had no idea what he wanted to major in, though he wanted to find something he could be "passionate about." While athletically he wanted to be ready to play as a back-up in his position and heir apparent in his third year at the University, he intended to wait until the end of his eligibility before starting his rookie season in the NFL. Clayton's goal was to complete his degree in three and a half years so he could "be done and focus on ball."

Unlike several of the athletes who felt distance from the coaches, Clayton said that the football offices were one of the places he felt most comfortable. In contrast, he felt least comfortable on the main square on campus and in the academic buildings. Even though Clayton felt like he learned the plays and coaching style in the fall, in winter he realized that "football never stops." Academically, Clayton felt that his first quarter courses were easy, which he "took for granted" and had to "play catch up." Overall, he just fell short of achieving his goal of earning a 3.0. In the fall, he felt his grade overrepresented what he had learned in his American ethnic studies course. The professor was "Chinese or Asian, and just talked really fast…and she

had an Asian accent," which led him to not like the class and claim that he "learned close to nothing." His online environment class was enjoyable and "more in [his] range." He mentioned enjoying his seminar on sports psychology so that he actually did some of the reading, but otherwise mentioned, "I'm really not a good reader…the only thing I read in the whole quarter was a little bit for the life skills class." Clayton credited the tutoring as the "whole reason I got the grade I got." In contrast, when Clayton started classes in the fall, "I was actually in the front row with, with a buddy of mine 'cause it is kind of more a textbook…first class of college…but…that lasted probably three days." When asked what happened after those three days taking notes in the front of the class, Clayton said, "I don't know! Like it was a lot, it was a lot of material that was really uninteresting to me. Like history, you know…and the teacher…I didn't really like how she taught, I mean, so eventually I kind of just stopped...and our tutor kind of feels the same a lot, a lot of the time, so…it was…I found it…better to just stop." Despite Clayton's attempt to break away from other athletes in his classes, "I had athletes in every one."

During winter, Clayton enrolled in African American studies, a communications course, and an English composition course. Although he liked his communications and English courses, his African American studies course was the one "I don't feel prepared for…'cause [the instructor] is an English major, so…the way she talks is…really high education." He added that, "she's not like Asian or nothing, and like talks weird…fast, she's just very intelligent, and…she expects a lot out of her students." Intimidated by classmates who respond to her questions "like seniors and PhDs," he felt the dialogue was "above me…I'm not really at that level." Clayton felt alienated from the conversation in class when the instructor analyzed the content of a film or reading: "She just goes way too…really deep, and I just, I don't even really pay attention when

she, when she really goes into that." Clayton did mention his interest in communications as a potential major since he "been hearin' people majoring in it and it sounds modern."

On campus Clayton "dressed in athletic wear" and "usually have my headphones in," knowing that he played into many of the stereotypes which he identified as being "cocky" and hard to talk to. On campus, he felt the presence of his coaches and the athletic department. Classes with a high athlete enrollment, like Clayton's American ethnic studies course, are "checked" for attendance by Sam, a representative of the Athlete Academic Center. For some classes, Sam does not check the attendance because the athletic department has a tutor who sits in on the class. For Clayton's African American studies class, his tutor attended class daily to "[take] roll of the football players" and then report to the professional staff in the academic center who passed on the information to the strength coach or head coach. The coaches would then issue "hard lessons," difficult physical workouts in addition to the athletes' training that involved "a lot of running and throwing up." Though Clayton had never received hard lessons, he saw a couple of teammates after the strength coach gave them hard lessons and "they weren't looking too hot. So I don't wanna experience that, you know?" The threat of hard lessons kept Clayton, and others, attending classes, even when they felt that the content was beyond them.

The Downward Trajectory – Rob

Rob grew up in a southwestern state and attended an average public high school. While he was heavily recruited at several schools, he chose the University because they stayed in close contact with him after he sustained a serious injury in high school that would require a full year of rehabilitation. That loyalty and "I'm there for you" response was a "real big factor" for Rob. Because of his injury, Rob planned on redshirting his first year at the University and focused on learning as much about the lineman positions as possible. Rob considers himself multiethnic,

identifying as black and Japanese. In addition to football in high school, Rob played rugby, took

Japanese, and was a member of the "Young Black Scholars" which at first he "thought…was a

joke," but ended up having "learned a lot from it."

Unlike most of the athletes that go through Bridge, Rob was able to finish high school in

the previous January and enter the University for spring classes prior to attending Bridge. Rob's

perspective is different in that he entered Bridge having experienced "real" college classes.

Rather than appreciating the support offered through Bridge, Rob commented, "It felt like you

were just holding our hands through the whole process. You didn't like set us loose and learn by

ourselves, like college students do." Though Rob felt his skills improved during Bridge, he saw

a clear divide between the support and oversight provided in Bridge in contrast to his spring

classes.

During the spring, Rob took classes that his academic adviser selected for him because he

did not arrive on campus until the day before classes began, and most courses were already filled

with students. As a result, he took an American ethnic studies class, a class on the environment,

and a 300-level course in sociology on race and ethnicity. While Rob felt that some of his

classes were easy, "you didn't even have to open the book on [the environment]," he felt

"challenged" by the sociology course, mentioning that the professor was "fun" and that

"everything I read was just so dense" and then discussed the diversity of ethnicities he has seen

represented on the University's campus. The course meant that Rob would, "have to really

think…critically think about how race and ethnicity revolves around you and how it revolves

around just your complete life." Rob enjoyed academic challenge and critical thinking when he

arrived on the University's campus. During the spring, Rob earned a GPA just under a 3.0, and

then set the goal for fall of a 3.3 with the intent of bringing it up to a 3.5 over time – enough to put him on the Dean's list.

By the time Rob and I had our first interview in September, he had already started eliminating majors as options. While he wanted "to be a business major," he had decided that "the prereqs are just too taxing on…a student athlete." He saw students as having to "be up all day and night because you have to get a 3.5" to enter the business major. Rob seemed conflicted between his academic inclinations and what he thought was feasible, explaining "I really didn't want to do a comm major because it's like the easy route. But it's the only way I could balance like my social life, football, and school completely." Communications became a livable compromise early on.

Rob understood football through an academic lens. While he was rehabilitating his injury, he studied football because he realized, "the playbook is the hardest thing you need to know, because if you don't know the playbook, you're not getting on the field." He understood college football to be "Hard. Fast. Quick…you have to be way smarter." The playbook is "dense" and a player has to understand "all of the variables." Rob succinctly summarized, "If we spend as much time as we do on our playbooks in the classroom, I think we could all pull off like 4.0s." Rob holds himself accountable for his academic work, and the fear of "hard lessons" means that he is five to ten minutes early for everything.

By winter, Rob felt tired, realizing that football, "it's really like a job." He was still rehabilitating his injury from high school and was working to keep his spirits up. For him, the winter was going to be "the hardest time of the whole season." He was in the process of trying to meet his weight goals, which included losing some weight overall, and then building it back up with muscle by spring ball.

On campus, Rob felt like he "walked around like a regular student" even though he often wore team-issued gear. He felt that people on campus could identify him as an athlete "basically if you're big, tall, and athletic looking with sweats on…and you have the over-the head headphones," you are identifiable as an athlete. However, Rob did not feel that there was a stigma or stereotype associated with being an athlete. To him, being an athlete was being a normal student.

Reflecting on the fall, Rob was one of two athletes in a history class which required "two hundred pages…every week" of which he estimated he read about 70%, and a problem set due for the class as well. The course proved "too demanding for my schedule." Though he learned to "procrastinate way less," his near 2.0 grade "destroyed my whole, like, GPA." The course used take home exams with lengthy essay questions with "so many answers you could put in each question," the course required much more than memorization. Rob felt like he learned much more than his grade indicated. Significantly, Rob did not "click" with his tutor for his history course. The tutor "didn't know the class" but had earned a PhD in English and was "just qualified with his credentials." The tutor only knew "as much as I was telling him." The tutor supported Rob's work in the course, but was not able to teach him the material from scratch, counter to many of the tutoring dynamics that athletes experienced. In contrast, his course on the environment "was extremely easy." Though he got below a 3.0 in the course, "if I would have put all of my effort into it, I could have easily got a 4.0."

Winter was Rob's, and other football players', chance to take a "heavy class schedule." Having signed up for two communications classes and a drama class, Rob thought the winter had "less reading, but you have to do more with your speaking in comparison." Though Rob thought his classes presented some challenge, he advocated for less tutoring and wished he could "just be

at home doing [homework]" rather than stuck in a mandatory Study Table. Sam, the class

checker, did not bother Rob, who felt he would "be on top of [attending class]" without Sam

coming into take attendance.

When I asked Rob about being compensated as an athlete at the University and the role of

the NCAA, he was animated in his response. He viewed the football team as bringing in a lot of

money to the University, and the $1250 per month that players have to live off of means that

each month, some have trouble covering their basic needs, such as rent, food, and heat. Rob saw

the NCAA as "oppressing" because in the mornings the players could have bagels, but "could

not have them toasted or with cream cheese" as the addition of such luxuries would constitute a

meal, and thus, an additional benefit. After the interview, Rob asked about my stance on paying

college football players; we discussed my response and the use of athletes' likenesses in video

games for quite a while.

At the end of spring, Rob had managed to fully recover from his injury, but had "got

dinged up" in spring ball and learned that he still had to be "cautious." Rob had become

disenchanted with athletics and academics at the University. When discussing an inter-squad

competition the football team tried out during the winter to keep everyone competitive, Rob felt

like the team was "just cliquing it up even more" and explained that he had "kind of gained

animosity toward the whole team structure." Due to his sub-team being "called out" for having

dirty lockers on several occasions and having missed an appointment with an adviser, Rob was

forced to do hard lessons at 5:30 a.m. before practice three times. Rob wanted distance from his

teammates and was looking to rent an apartment on his own if he could afford it for the summer

and following year.

Academically, Rob had shifted his gaze from business to communications thinking he was taking an "easy" route. Though he had a goal of earning a 3.2 during the winter quarter, he "didn't meet it at all," blaming the tough practice, class, tutoring, weight training, and homework schedule, which left him "just tired." Both grades in his communications classes were below the 2.5 GPA bar for admission to the major. Though Rob had initially wanted classes that challenged him, by the end of the academic year, he found himself seeking the path of least resistance. Though he is part Japanese and studied Japanese in high school, he signed up to take Swahili to fulfill his language requirement in his second year. When asked if he really wanted to learn Swahili, he initially said, "Uh…no. I just need something [laughs], like 'cause I want to get back to learning Japanese but…I'd rather take Rosetta Stone than get a grade on it!" Since he usually got Bs and Cs in his high school Japanese classes, he was too concerned about what taking Japanese would mean for his GPA. He justified his choice saying, "I could take Swahili, learn something about a different culture…and get more background and hopefully visit the country that speaks Swahili one day, and then I could learn Japanese later on in life when I have more time." By the end of his first year, Rob reflected on his preparation for the University and gave himself a "C+ to C," noting that "I thought I was good enough, but it could have been better." For the spring, Rob decided to continue on with communications, take another drama class, and a course on dinosaurs. Despite enrolling in courses that his fellow athletes had deemed relatively easy, Rob earned about a 2.5 GPA.

Rob's focus had shifted away from academics and into athletics. He stated that "the reason I came here [was] to go to the NFL." While he felt supported in his classes on campus by faculty and in the Athlete Academic Center, he felt his football coaches "care about how much you're in your playbook." Coaches cared about academic learning, too, "'cause you're not

learning anything, that means that you're not making grades, and if you're not making grades…that means you're just a waste of space 'cause you can't be used." Rob was critical of the support he received from his coaches, "It's a business! It's definitely more they're…using you. They *want* you to learn so you can compete. That's the only reason they want you to learn."

By the end of the year, the desire to learn independently and think critically about academic work Rob had described in early fall had dissipated. The courses he thought would be easy were not. He submitted papers that he thought might earn A's or B's, and they were returned to him with failing grades. While some athletes fall into line accepting the academic support provided through the center and passively make the most of it, Rob tried to limit his tutoring even while he was struggling academically. His decision to take Swahili rather than continue Japanese marked a shift from showing a desire to learn to taking the path of least resistance and protecting his eligibility.

The Forgetful Misfit – Ricky

Ricky grew up in an affluent suburb of a large southwestern city with his sister and parents, who attended "some college." Ricky identifies as multi-ethnic, both Caucasian and Middle Eastern. After starting in the public school system in his southwestern state, he attended a private high school with very rigorous academics. Ricky just wanted to focus on football in high school, but after an awful first year academically, he realized that "I had to get better if I wanted to play football in college." Football provided him the motivation to improve his grades over the next several years. In the recruiting process, Ricky was interested in a number of teams who had coaching transitions, leaving him out of a number of promised official visits. He ended up at the University after having attended a football camp at the institution the previous summer.

He did not sign his letter of intent until January of his senior year, but he did receive a full scholarship to the University, which made him feel like had "lucked out" in the end. Ricky arrived at camp knowing he was going to redshirt his first year and learn the offensive line positions.

Ricky really enjoyed the Bridge program. Despite coming from a good high school, he felt that writing was one of his weaknesses. He especially liked having help from the tutors affiliated with Bridge because, "I just can't focus in class and…I'll forget a lot of stuff, so when I am with tutors they remind me and just help me out." Ricky learned hard lessons early on during Bridge. During one of the morning classes, I saw him wincing at his desk, looking at his badly cut up hands. Ricky told me that he had just completed hard lessons involving bear crawling[26] a long distance across concrete. Unlike many of the athletes I spoke to who were able to manage their time and belongings to largely avoid hard lessons, Ricky accepted them as a part of his existence as a member of the team. He mentioned that in high school he had "reminders" – physical punishments associated with being late to practice, but admitted that the college hard lessons are "a lot harder." Ricky had hard lessons every day for two weeks after he "lost my iPad for like three weeks…I lose a lot of stuff…it always comes back to me eventually." After forgetting that he had placed the iPad holding the team's playbook in a "bottom locker," he thought it had been stolen. When the coaches found out, they gave him two weeks of hard lessons to be completed after practices "so you're already tired, and you just get more tired." Unlike many of the other athletes I talked to who started the fall thinking that they would hold themselves accountable for their own academic performance, Ricky saw the "the coaches" as the mechanism of accountability from the beginning. He stated, "You just feel like everywhere you

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[26] Bear crawling involves walking on one's hands and feet, bent over like a bear. The unusual amount of weight-bearing on one's hands makes it a difficult upper body exercise.

do, everything you do, you're just like…are the coaches going to find this out, are they going to be on my back about this?"

By the time I talked to Ricky in the fall, he was eager for classes to begin. After his first summer camp, he already felt like "we basically signed our lives away to football." Football was different from what he expected, "I figured it would be a lot more fun. But… going from the star of your high school to being thrown into a bunch of prime athletes, not being the best at all, it's kind of a shock…You really question if it's what you want to do and if you really love the sport, [if you] really want to do it for the next five years of your life." Though Ricky, like all of the other athletes I interviewed, wanted to play in the NFL, he was more realistic, saying, "just playing would be fun." As a redshirt freshman, Ricky struggled, "it's kind of hard to get through because you're just kinda sitting back. You're on the scout team, just getting your ass beat every day."

Ricky felt like his fall classes would be "pretty easy" since he was taking a geology class, English, and a freshman seminar. In contrast, Ricky planned on majoring in civil engineering or architecture because he had always enjoyed math. When I asked how he chose the classes he was enrolled in for fall, he told me, "the counselor…she, um, chose them." Those easy classes led to Ricky earning over a 3.0 in the fall, although he slept through an important day in his seminar – when they announced that the "big project" would be due in the next class, "So I forgot to do that project, that it was due, so I didn't pass." By winter, Ricky had had so many hard lessons he could not even remember what punishment he received for failing a class. When I asked him if he thought his grades reflected what he learned in his fall classes, he told me had "probably forgot it all by now." Ricky had not completed the reading for any of his classes. He relied on the tutoring provided by the Athlete Academic Center, stating that, "I learned more in

my like, tutoring, I want to say, than just sitting in the class." He managed to study from "test files" the hour before his geology final exam. His English tutor also proved valuable. As he explained, "I would get the assignment and I would just do it with her and she would just guide me through it." Ricky did take some lecture notes, but he largely just annotated the printed out PowerPoint slides that he received in advance from his tutor. In classes with a large number of athletes, the Center will have someone sit in class and "take notes for the tutors and stuff, and we always sit like, we have to say hi to her to check in." The presence of the in-class note taker meant that athletes did not need to take notes themselves.

For athletes like Ricky, Sam's role as a classroom attendance taker is seen as "good." Ricky acknowledged that he would skip class if he were not forced to go. However, he was asleep in class when Sam checked and he "got in trouble for that. It sucked." Recalling his long list of accumulated hard lessons, rolling twice the length of the football field was by far the worst.

In contrast to his fall course load, Ricky's winter quarter classes were very challenging. He enrolled in math and economics, along with a literature course. Ricky was the only athlete in his math and economics courses, about which he remarked, "it's kind of interesting. Everyone's a lot smaller." Ricky was excited to take a math course and start on his work toward his intended engineering major, but he felt pretty rusty. He requested to bump up his tutoring to three hours a week, and the Center staff obliged him.

When Ricky met up with me for his spring interview, the sides of his head were shaved, leaving only a long Mohawk. He had grown his hair out to his shoulders over the year, but his teammates and the coaching staff did not approve of his style choice, especially when he put his long hair in braids, mimicking the style in which Clayton was wearing his hair for the spring.

Because his hair was deemed ridiculous, his offensive line team mates held him down and shaved the sides off against his will. Over the course of our conversation, the trigger for the head shaving came back to the head coach who Ricky had lost respect for saying, "I hate him…he's just a dick." When asked why, Ricky said, "He will just cuss us, like, he saw my hair and he starts cussing me out…He does it to a lot of people. I don't think a lot of people really like him." When I asked Ricky what the head coach had specifically said about his braids, he told me, "He's just like, 'You look like a fucking idiot. Like, go shave right now.' And then like, I'm just lifting in the weight room and he's just yelling it to everyone, like how big of a fucking idiot I look. I just laughed, 'cause I hate him so much I don't care what he says." When I asked Ricky if it was okay for Clayton to wear braids, he replied, "Yeah, just because he's black." After the head coach's outburst in the weight room, Ricky's teammates shaved the sides of his head. He was not upset when talking about his teammates' actions, unlike his feelings for the head coach, "It's funny, I mean I can't really get mad at them 'cause I would do the same thing to someone else." At the end of the conversation when I was asking Ricky about his best and worst moments of his first year, he mentioned that he loved the team bonding over all, but that the head shaving felt different, "I was so mad, like I wasn't mad when it happened, I just got really sad. Like they saw, too, 'cause like, I was freaking out, like, 'Don't cut my hair!' And then it happened, it was like, oh my god. And later that night I was like, they really cut my hair, and I got mad." Ricky seemed hesitant to say that what he experienced was hazing – saying "haz-" and cutting himself off before settling on, "it's like funny hazing in a way, I guess."

Academically, Ricky struggled in his classes during the winter. He failed his math course which shifted him off the path toward engineering. When asked about his performance in the class, he said, "I didn't give my full effort to like pass the class." He entered the University

thinking that math was his academic strength, but upon reflection, Ricky said, "My senior year of

high school…I had my coach as my math teacher…So I got away with a little too much."

Economics also proved to be a big challenge and Ricky finished with under a 2.0. Basically,

Ricky felt like he "screwed [himself] by taking Econ and math at the same time." After taking

some academic risks in winter, Ricky shifted back toward a more conservative schedule

including American Indian studies, a communications course and a sociology course, courses he

chose because, "everyone says it's super easy." Because of the support he received from his

tutors, "Like I'm probably a 4.0 in my [American Indian studies] class and I haven't opened the

book." Ricky, like four of the seven athletes I interviewed, decided to pursue a communications

major after struggling academically in other disciplines. Similarly, when selecting courses for

the fall, Ricky decided to take Swahili because "it's the easiest. I hate languages…It's either that

or Sign Language." Other languages, like Spanish and German, were taken by "business majors

and…freaks." Average football players were not expected to succeed in languages other than

Swahili and American Sign Language.

Reflecting on his first year, Ricky discussed how a number of the guys who entered

Bridge with him were already gone or on their way out, "I mean like they try to push people out,

like if you're not living up to it, to like, getting the job done, which is…understandable to an

extent." He then told me about how his roommate and best friend was already gone. He

mentioned Darnell being forced out, adding, "They treated him like shit. I don't know, it's

messed up how they treat us…It's a business…To win. That's all that matters." Even after the

head shaving and loss of his best friend, when I asked him at the end of the year how happy he

was to be at the University from an athletics perspective, he responded, "At first I was like, 'Get

me out of here,' but it's cool now." Ricky ultimately finished the spring with a low grade in his

communications course, which will mean another round of picking a major that he can be accepted into at the University.

The True Freshman – Kevin

Kevin ran track in high school for his first two years before turning his focus solely to football. He attended a large public high school in region outside of the southwest. Kevin felt that his high school was very strong, both academically with college prep courses, and athletically as state champions in football. Kevin comes from a very close-knit family with a mother who completed high school, a father who has a college degree, and a couple of brothers, one of whom is a recent college graduate. His parents joined him on his recruiting visit and brought him to campus to drop him off for Bridge. He identifies himself as "mixed" ethnicity stating that, "it just kind of depends on who I am talking to I guess…to be like socially accepted." Kevin went on to describe how he consciously switches how he presents himself depending on his context.

Kevin's greatest advantage over the other athletes I spoke with was his big brother, who had recently graduated from another university and now plays professionally. His brother's experiences gave him a very realistic view of what to expect athletically and academically from college. Kevin arrived at the University having watched college practices and having seen how a path through higher education into a professional football career played out. With the goal for of following in his brother's footsteps, Kevin wanted to play in the NFL, and would even consider leaving college before graduating if he was likely to be picked in the top 15 in his draft class.[27]

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[27] Most of the other athletes I spoke to about their NFL aspirations thought that they would leave college for the draft early if they were likely to be selected in the 3rd to 4th round or higher. Kevin's claim that he would only leave early if he was likely to go in the top 15 of the first round is bold. The claim reflects his confidence in his ability as a true-freshman starter.

Kevin was heavily recruited, but the University "just outdid every other" having been the first school to start recruiting him. He felt at home with the coaches at the University and the style of practice and offense they ran. Kevin alternated between two different positions offense throughout his first year. He started in two games before I talked to him for his fall interview, and had already scored his first collegiate touchdown. Kevin's status as a true freshman and starter affected how he perceived the coaches and the staff. Kevin saw the coaches as caring about his future beyond playing football: "They're always on top of balancing school and football and things like that. And obviously with the tutors and things they set up for us, that kind of shows [they care] as well." To Kevin, the tutoring support he received was tied to athletics and specifically to the coaching staff.

During Bridge, Kevin viewed himself as, "outgoing…I like to talk…group stuff…was fun, 'cause I got to voice my opinion." He enjoyed Bridge and saw it as chance to acclimate to college academics, but Kevin's self-perception ran counter to my field notes, in which I saw him as distracted and often disengaged from the main activity of the class. I noted on several occasions he wore a t-shirt that read "skills, drills, and dollar bills" which seemed to complement his high level of athletic investment and desire to just get by academically with minimal effort. Kevin mentioned, "I'm not the most, like, thrilled about school, but I know it's important and I need to graduate, so as long as…I put an effort for [sic] to graduate." As most of the other athletes, Kevin felt that "If I really tried, I'd probably do really well." But he actively withheld academic effort, stating, "I just make sure I pass or make sure I get enough to where I'm happy." During Kevin's fall at the University, he took a low level English class, an online course on the environment, and two non-graded undergraduate seminars taught through the athletic

department. He told me that he wanted to become a business major and that his academic adviser recommended the schedule based on his intended major.

When I talked with Kevin during the winter and asked him to reflect on his fall courses, he thought that the non-graded courses were "pretty simple" and that his English class "was pretty much the same as" Bridge. He struggled with his course on the environment, but was "glad I had a tutor because a lot of it probably wouldn't have made sense." When I asked Kevin how much he was able to read for each of his classes, he replied, "Reading? Uh, our tutor usually went through the lecture stuff and just told us what we, you know main points or key terms and things, so reading-wise I never really read too much, but obviously she read it to us." While Kevin started with a relatively easy course load in the fall, his winter classes reflected his goals of studying business. In addition to taking the continuation of his low-level English course, he took and African American studies class and microeconomics. Although he was "excited for econ," his winter classes took a toll on his GPA.

In contrast to how he viewed himself in that academic sphere, "I'm not an overachiever," Kevin has high expectations for himself in football. Reflecting on his first season, Kevin thought it was a "humbling experience" having always been a "star player." He saw the need to "gain speed" and pay more "attention to detail." He was challenged by a mid-season shift form from receiver to running back. He had to learn a new position and felt very challenged, like "everybody else already knew what was going on." He was always catching up and "figuring out things on the fly." As a player who was seeing a lot of action during the games, Kevin had an additional layer of work. Football practices are filmed every day. A player like Kevin generated 15-20 clips of film per day that he had to analyze himself, and then together with coaches in position meetings. The film clips helped Kevin analyze his performance as he shifted

between positions, "You can just sit there and watch it and say, like, 'Did I go full effort, or did I do the right thing?' and it just…helps you understand, or see something that you think you did, but you didn't…a mistake." Kevin's position coach usually spent 30 minutes to an hour breaking down film with the group each day during the season. Even in the winter with the hectic pace of the season behind him, Kevin was concerned that "there's just almost too much time spent on football…we don't really have like, a college life, it's more like a…football business."

When I talked with Kevin after spring ball, the formal football offseason practices, he had been shifted from receiver back to running back because of some injuries, but was planning to compete for a spot as a receiver for the following football season. Between the shifting of positions and some changes on the coaching staff, Kevin was feeling a bit more disconnected from the coaches in the spring than he had been in the fall. However, because of his status or rank within the team, his position coach would still call him, "just asking about classes and making sure, um, I was up on everything." When I followed up by asking Kevin if he thought his coach cared if he was learning, he replied, "If you're learning, no. If you're eligible, yes!"

The winter was tough on Kevin academically. His African American studies class was "crazy…I was just glad that I passed and got it over with [laughs]." Despite also earning below a 2.0 in his economics class, Kevin was determined to continue toward his goal of studying business by taking Macro Economics in the spring. He also enrolled in a music course and psychology course in the spring for which he claimed, "you just gotta be a doctor to know that one." Although Kevin had a strong start to fall, his grades deteriorated when he started taking more challenging coursework. In spring, he passed only ten credits and finished well below a 2.0 in his music class – not known for its rigor. By spring, Kevin relied completely on his

tutoring time for learning non-lecture content. For instance in "music class, we just go through

the book, me and my tutor, and she just highlights the important information, so you don't have

to really read, read too much." Kevin was facing the disconnect between his desire to major in

business and the reality of his limited academic investment.

Throughout the year, Kevin wanted "to be like, feel normal, or feel just like a student" by

not wearing his athletic gear and dressing "more like a student." He understood the stigma of

athletes and "especially for football and basketball and kind of higher sports" to be negative;

something he actively had to disprove by his actions and appearance. Kevin's approach to

beating the stigma was "to dress nice, just 'cause I mean obviously I already stick out enough to,

with the physical stature, so…I try to wear nice clothes or…not sweats that are all…basically

athlete give-outs." Although he liked taking classes with athletes and spent a lot of time with

fellow football players, he ultimately decided at the urging of his parents to not live with football

players the following year. Concerned that it would be stressful to live with guys who he was

competing against for a position and playing time, he joined a couple of the men from the

basketball team to find housing together.

The Fish out of Water – King

King attended high school in a notoriously tough city in the southwest; a school with "a

lot of violence… gangs, drugs, all that stuff." Athletics participation was the way he avoided

getting sucked into the violence surrounding him. As he explained, "You can come and play

football or you can come and do bad. So I'm more on the football side of things." King is a first

generation college student who identifies as black. His high school did not prepare him well for

the University. Though he entered Bridge thinking he was prepared, after the first week he

realized "that's a huge gap from my high school." King credits Bridge for being the place where

he "learned how to write. I wasn't taught that in high school, unfortunately, but I learned how to write essays. I learned how to really annotate and read and it made reading more fun to me, actually." During Bridge, King relied heavily on the tutors to help him craft his essays. Most afternoon sessions were spent working one on one with one of the Bridge staff. Ultimately, Bridge gave King the false sense of being as or even more academically prepared than students at large.

In contrast to his academic preparation, King felt athletically prepared to compete for a spot on the team. He had been an offensive player in high school and was shifting into playing defense. During the recruiting process, King was led to believe he would be playing his first year, but he ultimately was redshirted. King had expected football at the University to be harder than it was. The big difference he identified between high school and college was, "everybody's just smarter, actually, on the football field. There's not that big of a difference athletic-wise." He chose to come to the University because of football and because so many southwestern players attend the University; it felt like home. Even by the early fall, King thought that the coaches' offices were the place he felt least comfortable at the University, commenting, "I just feel like they just want you to be out of there before they say something bad to you or something." Recalling his recruiting trip, he remembered fancy seafood dinners, but the only academic component was a presentation done at the Athlete Academic Center where he learned that the University is a prestigious academic institution.

During the fall, King enrolled in a low level English course, and online environment course and two freshman seminars for athletes specifically. As school was beginning for the year, King identified that he wanted to major in communications. His academic goal was to turn in all of his assignments. Though he wanted to excel academically, battling fatigue from football

he realized that, "some days you're just like real tired. You just don't want to do anything."

King's fall classes were the same as those of four other freshman football players. His online

course on the environment had 15 or more athletes. Overall, King did not take notes during class

and estimated that he read about 10 to 20% of his readings for his fall classes, except for one of

his seminars on sports psychology. Because he was interested in the content, he read the whole

book.

After a decent academic and athletic fall, winter was tough on King. When we met, he

had undergone surgery on one of his legs. With his injury, he felt like, "I'm just a regular

student now…boring. It's like, I need some motivation or something." He had shifted away

from training in his primary position and finished the season learning to fill a different role

before his injury. King felt disappointed in his first season, "I wanted to play as a true freshman,

not redshirt…I feel like I have more to prove next year, so it makes me want to work harder."

His injury also affected his academics. During the winter, King took an American Indian studies

course, the continuation of his low-level English class, and a communications course. Although

communications was his intended major, by mid-winter, he realized, "my public speaking class, I

wasn't prepared for, that…shook me." King had anticipated the class would be easy, but found

himself unprepared to give his speeches, "if you don't know what you're talking about you're

gonna be embarrassed." King barely received credit for the class, but learned the valuable lesson

of following his syllabus so that he knew when he had speeches due.

On campus and in classrooms, King felt as though he was perceived, "As a football

player. Not just an athlete." King said that he only wears football team issued gear on campus

and that he would not wear clothing without the University's football logo. King's point was, "I

think [people] are gonna perceive you a certain way, even no matter what you're wearing." In

his English class, having felt prepared from Bridge, he was fairly talkative and would

occasionally correct the responses of a woman who he claimed was on an academic scholarship.

King felt like she and the rest of the class were shocked when he knew something. He enjoyed

bantering with her, teasing her saying, "I'm smarter than you. If I had put my time into school

like you did, I'd be on academic scholarship too." King enjoyed competing in the classroom

when he felt he understood the game.

Because of King's low academic profile and poor preparation in high school, the staff at

the Athlete Academic Center was concerned about his academic progress. As a result, King had

two hours a week of tutoring in all of his classes and his mandatory study table hours were

served in the office of a learning specialist for an additional three hours per week. King did not

seem able to work independently of the tutors and staff. Of his learning specialist, King said,

"she kind of makes me do homework or something, maybe make me find some work to do for

about an hour." Study table was wasted time for King, he would, "would just sit there for an

hour and do nothing." He understood that Sam required athletes to sign in and sign out of study

table, but that their objective sheets were never seen by anyone else. King believed that the

sheets were just part of Sam and the other Study Table monitors' jobs. Most of the athletes

completed the sheets with little complaint, simply going through the motions and waiting to be

able to leave. King initially resented the oversight of the learning specialist, "'Cause when I first

got here, she's saying like, 'you need to do this, you need to do this,' and I'm like, 'I'm just

trying to like breathe or something.'" But, by the end of the year, King realized that "[his

learning specialist] really just wanted to make sure I was doing my work."

By spring, King had turned a corner with football. Though he did not feel like his

connections to the coaches were as strong as when he was being recruited, a good performance

in the spring game helped him put his surgery in the past. King had learned that the coaches care about "your performance on the field…It's a business, so…they don't get hired because… at their last school, the team GPA was 3.5. They get hired 'cause at their last school, they went 10 and 2 or something like that." King understood that the bottom line for the coaches was, "They just need you to be eligible, basically." Academically, King had highs and lows in the spring. Although he has stopped reading for any of his classes, he did well, earning over a 3.0 in his creative thinking class and geology "Rocks for Jocks" class. But, he did not earn credit for his communications class. Reflecting on the year, the informal conversations he had with other players were what led him to communications, "I asked them like, 'What class did you take?' or 'What did you major in?' And I'll say, 'I'll take comm; comm is pretty easy!'…I was thinking well if comm was easy and a pretty good major, then I might as well take that. It ain't easy though." By the end of the year, King decided to set his sights on being an English major since his writing classes were the only ones in which he was earning over 3.0 during the year. Because of his struggles with communications, King finished with the lowest GPA of the athletes I followed, barely above the needed 2.0 to be eligible to play in the fall. All football players take a summer course so that they can be on campus training and so they can supplement their GPAs by taking a single class for which they tend to earn grades higher than their cumulative GPA. King's high 2 in a summer Sociology course bought him a bit of an eligibility buffer going into the following fall.

Putting the Narratives in Context

In addition to interviewing the seven athletes above, I spent the year as a participant observer within the Athlete Academic Center and I interviewed 12 staff members from the athletic department. As a participant observer, I tutored athletes during Bridge and sat in on their

classes. During the school year, I took on the role of Study Table monitor and observed tutoring

sessions, advising sessions, and sessions with learning specialists. In order to select which of the

staff I would request to interview, I used a theoretical sampling approach that led me to interview

staff members vertically within the athletic department. As a result, this research data spans the

spectrum of staff from hourly tutors[28] to upper-level athletic administrators, giving my research

important layers of depth. While some staff members inhabit multiple roles, the following is the

breakdown of the types of roles the staff I interviewed fulfill: two tutors, three Study Table

monitors, two athletic department administrators, two learning specialists, three advisers, two

academic coordinators, two class checkers. Unlike the presentation of the narratives of the

athletes' stories above, here I have analyzed the data from the staff interviews and participant

observations as a whole in order to develop a comprehensive, multi-voiced understanding of the

context in which the athlete narratives are played out. In Grounded Theory, a multi-voiced

approach is represented as dimensionalizing the codes developed through the researcher's

analysis.

Open Coding

As discussed in the methods section (Chapter 3), I am using Grounded Theory and the

sequence of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify the central theme of my

data. In the sections that follow, I outline the process of each coding sequence along with the

results at each level. The goal of Grounded Theory is to take an inductive approach to the data,

one which allows the categories or themes to emerge from the data itself rather than from

preconceived notions about the subject being studied. During the data collection process, I

transcribed interviews and coded my field notes so that each interview and day in the field could

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[28] Hourly tutors are not professional staff. They are compensated by the athletic department for the hours they spend either monitoring Study Table, tutoring athletes, or taking notes and attending classes.

be informed by the past. At the end of the data collection sequence, I entered all 12 transcribed

staff interviews and all of my field notes from my participant observations into a qualitative data

analysis software called Nvivo 10. In the open coding phase, I recoded all of the collected data

into categories, creating new categories for an original occurrence of a theme that did not fit

within the existing categories. Because the data collection phase of my research was complete

and I wanted to think about my data relative to constructs in my theoretical frameworks, e.g.,

roles, figurative identities, domains, etc., I included those constructs in my coding categories.

Below is a table of categories developed through open coding. The results show 53 different

salient categories. Of those, "accountability" was referenced 111 times in 19 different source

documents.

Figure 5.1: Salient Categories Developed During Open Coding

Name of Code	Sources Linked to Code	Total # References
Accountability	19	111
Advising	12	86
Tutoring	15	81
Behavior	15	74
Study table	9	70
Coaches	16	62
Relative preparation	13	56
Eligibility	15	55
Schedule	11	54
Figurative identities	17	52
Major selection	15	41
Athletic and academic domains overlap	13	40
Athletic department	10	38
Bridge	10	37
Learning specialists	12	35
NCAA rules	9	34
Learning	11	33
Hybrid	9	31
Reporting lines	14	30
Class checking	9	28
Degree attainment	11	28

Race	9	28
Business	11	26
Leave early	8	23
Positional identity	9	22
Grades	10	21
Academic coordinator	2	19
Relationships	10	19
Take their shot	8	19
Class clustering	11	18
Goals	7	18
Recruitment	12	18
Resistance	6	17
AAC	11	16
NCAA	6	15
Cheerleading	9	14
Effort	6	13
Faculty	7	13
Recommended class list	5	12
Beat the system	7	11
Clothing	6	11
Filter	7	10
Learning disabilities	3	8
Athletic hierarchy	6	7
Drug use	4	7
Hard lessons	5	7
Socioeconomic	6	7
Protection - staff of students	3	5
Motivation	3	4
Religion	2	4
University	4	4
Legitimacy	3	3
Redshirt	2	2

During the open coding process, I compared the information under each code to draw

connections between the codes and the data. In order to develop a theoretical elaboration for

each code, I concluded the open coding phase by generating a memo for each code with the

exception of "religion" and "legitimacy," which were not deemed significant. I strategically

started writing memos for the categories with the fewest references and worked toward the

categories with the most references while tracking what smaller categories were parts of the

larger themes. Although the significance of each category is not limited simply to the number of

times it is referenced in the data, accountability did emerge as a central construct to which all

other codes related.

Axial Coding

The second phase of Grounded Theory involves axial coding, whereby the researcher

investigates the relationships between the categories, and makes connections between them. The

map below is the result of axial coding, by which I took all of the salient codes from the open

coding phase and mapped them in relation to each other around the central theme of

accountability. Before I continue, I want to define accountability as I have coded for it in the

data. Accountability is the obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for

one's actions, and significant to this research, it is also the absence of accountability – or what

high profile special admit athletes are not being held accountable for in the systems and worlds

that surround them.

Figure 5.2: Map of Axial Coding
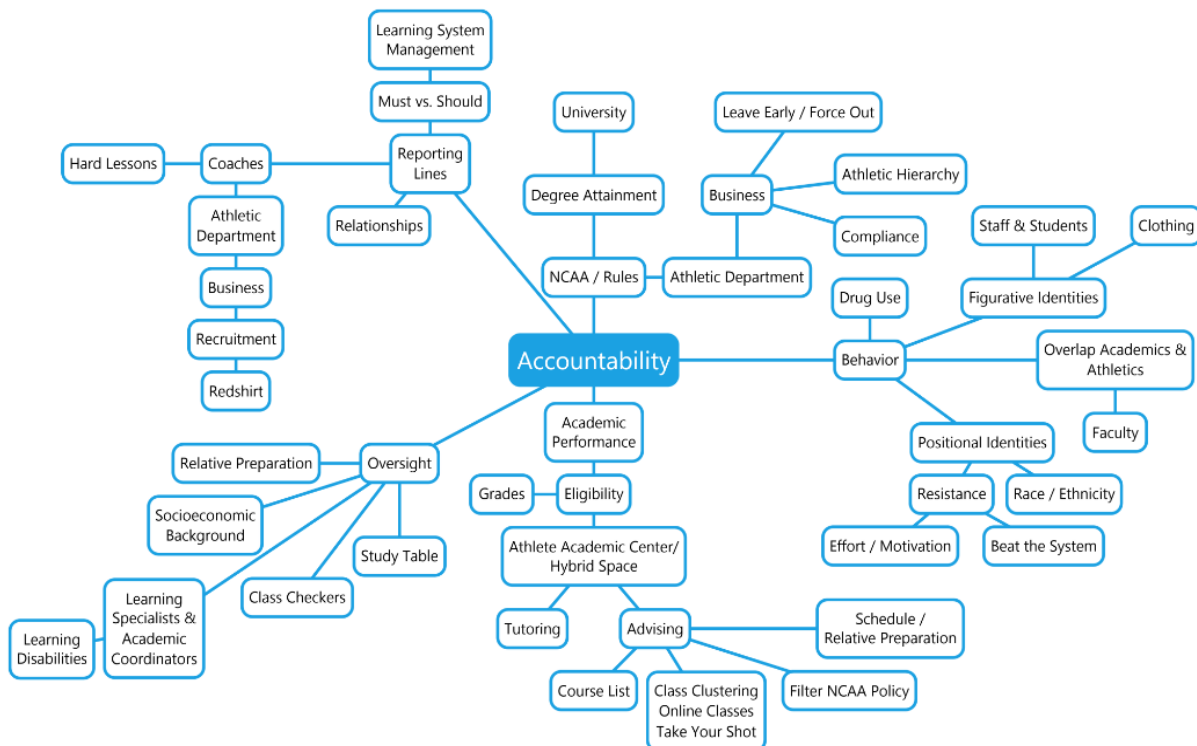
Based on the axial coding, the branches stemming from the central category of accountability fall into four major categories: constraints, affordances, academic performance, and behavior / identities. These major categories will shape the content of the following chapters.

Selective Coding

During selective coding, a researcher identifies a single category as the central phenomenon and then works to construct a storyline around the core category while systematically relating all other salient categories to the central phenomenon to refine one's understanding. As I mention above, the incidence of accountability and lack thereof rose from my data as the central phenomenon. As a revised version of the inclusive code map I created during the axial coding phase, during selective coding, I developed a coding paradigm or theoretical model to visually represent the interrelationships found during axial coding. Below is a map of the central phenomena of accountability within the selective coding paradigm.

Figure 5.3 Map of Coding Paradigm around Central Phenomenon
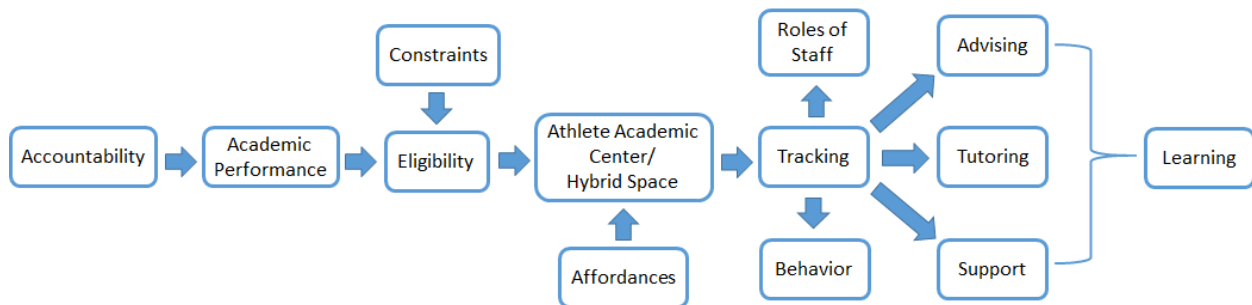
As a result of selective coding, the storyline of accountability will run through an understanding of athletes' academic performance as influenced by the constraints acting on the system. The affordances largely are represented through the work of the Athlete Academic Center, however, the constraints acting on the roles within the Athlete Academic Center lead to oversight and tracking of athletes that affects the way they are advised and tutored, and ultimately how they learn.

What follows is a building of layers of understanding of the context in which support for high profile special admit athletes operates. Before I present the advising, tutoring, and learning, I will discuss the roles of the staff and the tracking they must do as part of the eligibility maintenance that drives the system enforced by the constraints acting upon it. The next chapter will outline the constraints of the systems, many of which have been articulated in the narratives of the athletes, and which will be illuminated further by the staff members and my observations. I will then outline the affordances of the system which are largely centered on the work of the Athlete Academic Center. After establishing the context of affordances and constraints, I will use Chapter 7 to look in detail at the relationships between academic performance, eligibility, tracking, and the direct work with students: advising and tutoring – ultimately with an eye toward how the outcomes of learning and degree attainment fit within our understanding of accountability. Chapter 8 will then explore the themes of behavior and identity, major salient themes from the axial coding phase, through the lens of Figured Worlds and athletic and academic domains and will provide a broader systems-level analysis of the data by looking at the affordances and constraints across the various systems athletes are affected by, using Activity Theory. Chapter 9 will conclude with an analysis of the utility of the theoretical frameworks and an analysis of the findings from the Grounded Theory applied to the athlete narratives presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6

Affordances and Constraints

The question driving my research has focused on identifying the affordances and constraints acting on the athletes whose narratives appeared in the last chapter. This chapter will offer an in-depth look at the dominant constraints that exist within their environments, and will then set the stage to help the reader understand, at a high level, the affordances which will be analyzed in detail in the following chapter. The reason for presenting the constraints first is that the athletes' environment is driven or dictated by the constraints, and the affordances are largely adaptations to make the system work, i.e., to make viable the existence of the high profile special admit athlete at the University. While constraints are largely perpetuated by the athletic domain, the affordances are mostly provided by the programs and staff of the Athlete Academic Center (AAC). Because of this dynamic between the athletic domain and the Athlete Academic Center, the Center and its staff are largely accountable to the athletic domain in the form of reporting lines to coaches on athletes' academic progress. The constraints drive the blurring of the lines between athletics and academics in the world of the athletes.

Constraints

The narratives presented in the last chapter provided examples of many of the constraints acting on the athletes. One of the most consistently mentioned constraints is that of the football program operating as a business. One adviser summarized the system as, "a pro-sport operation with all the same approaches as any pro franchise. Academics are kind of attached on somewhere with this pro-franchise." The business of football drives the push to enroll top athletes regardless of their academic preparation, pushes the need to keep those athletes eligible to play, and at the same time constricts the time they have available for academic work by the

primacy of training hours, needed punishments, and required athletic based learning, e.g., film

study and position meetings. The dominant themes connected to the constraint of the business

model for the football program are football's hierarchy within the department; the recruitment

and redshirting of athletes; athletes leaving early or being retained; and eligibility as navigating

NCAA rules and reporting lines to the coaches. Within the work of the Athlete Academic

Center, the staff manages the eligibility of athletes. For the special admit football players, the

two major constraints that affect their academic pathways are their relative academic preparation

and their schedules as restricted by football commitments. In the following sections, I will

explore each constraint in depth before transitioning into a discussion of the affordances acting

on the athlete.

The Business of Football

The business of football extends beyond the bounds of the team. Within the hierarchy of

the athletic department, football sits at the top. A staff member summed up the role of football

as, "Football runs this program. We all eat when football is well." Simply stated, the revenue

from the football team funds many of the University's other athletic teams as well as the staff

positions in the athletics department. The health and wealth of the department as a whole depend

on how successful the football program is as a business, and that success is anchored in winning

games. When responding to my questions about the goals of the football program, many staff

and students alluded to winning and attaining a national championship title. To win, the

economics of scholarship dollars and relative performance of the athletes comes into play.

While winning is the goal, a staff member noted, "Money runs this football program and we as a

staff have to understand that…it's about winning and having students here to put us in that

situation to win." Having the right athletes on the field to potentially win a national championship begins with recruitment.

Recruitment and Redshirting

How do coaches convince a dominant high school football player to attend the University? Often, the coaches will tell the athlete what he wants to hear. Most often, those promises will be about playing as a freshman (being a "true freshman"), the potential for them to study within a nationally highly-ranked institution, to receive a high degree of academic support, and to be able to turn their eventual degree into a profitable position within the marketplace after their professional football career concludes. On recruiting trips, the athletes I interviewed went out for fancy dinners at local landmarks, heard about the academic support provided through the Athlete Academic Center, and got to meet faculty from their intended major, often business. However, none of the athletes I interviewed attended an academic class while on their recruiting trip. The version of the University presented through recruitment is therefore quite different from the one athletes experience once they arrive. For instance, during his recruiting visit Darnell was able to have breakfast with faculty from the Business School and was told about how highly ranked the business program is nationally, but based on the constraints acting on Darnell, he had to wait until spring quarter to take an economics class that he failed. The accessibility of faculty and competitive majors presented during the recruiting process is misleading.

During the fall as I was working at Study Table, I heard two athletes and a staff member discussing the recruitment process. One athlete was convinced that everything he was told in the recruitment process was false, "recruitment is fake," while the other athlete, Kevin, thought that the coaches were looking out for players. The Study Table monitor stressed that they should

look out for themselves and get as much as possible out of the time they have at the University. Kevin's impression of the validity of the recruiting process was colored by the fact that he was playing and scoring touchdowns as a true freshman and had not yet learned that the opportunity to study business that had been described to him during the recruiting process would not be possible. Others, like Clarence and King, who were sold on playing as freshmen, but redshirted when they arrived on campus, expressed frustration and distrust of the system as a result, justified only by the understanding that football is a business. As Clarence put it, "I was told I would have an opportunity to play…and that's exactly the opposite of what happened." But Clarence added, "I don't blame [the coaches], 'cause it is technically a business." The staff sees what happens to these athletes. In discussing Clarence's redshirt status and desire to leave, a staff member stated, "[Clarence] will come here as a freshman and the coaches told him he's all that and he has some success in high school. And he gets here and looks around at the roster, and see, he don't even play. You look at that and go, 'He's huge, he looks like a grown man, what happened to him?'" And as a result, players like Clarence, "it spooks them. 'I ain't feeling this, I'm out of here, I just don't trust them, they're not going to do right by me.'" However, if an athlete like Clarence is too valuable to liberate, the football program and athletic department will refuse to release him. The football program has to think in terms of making the best use of its assets over four years of eligibility. Even if Clarence will likely develop into a starter for the next three or four years, if the team has strong depth at his position while he is a freshman, it is better to use up the eligibility of the existing players on the roster before burning the new player's eligibility. Ultimately, the coaches have control of who gets to play and when.

The athletic department supports the business model of the football program. Like it does for the rest of the department, the revenue generated by football pays the salaries of the

administrative staff as well. As a result, the administrators of the department support the recruitment of athletes with low academic profiles who can make an impact on the athletic field. The Academic Progress Report score for the football team at the University has been fairly high relative to the rest of the conference, but the football team's performance on the field has been average. High level athletic administrators recognizing the need to improve the football team's record suggested that the University take more risk on special admit athletes with even lower profiles until we "stub our toe" by admitting athletes who cannot make it through the system and thus lose the team one or both APR points. "That's stubbing our toe when we're…we see these kids on more than a casual one-or two-off level not making it here and being successful. Then we know we have a problem or we know we have the beginning of a problem hopefully." The administrator's remarks reflect a need to push the academic support system to its limits in order to chase more wins without crossing the tipping point of losing their high GSR and APR ratings.

Forced Out

While athletes can lose APR points by losing eligibility, they can also lose points by not being retained at the University and transferring out with less than a 2.6 cumulative GPA. However, if an athlete is not living up to his recruited potential on the field, the football program will try to push the athlete to leave in order to open up his scholarship for another, potentially better, athlete. While first year players usually get time to develop and prove themselves, this year was an exception. The football program recruited an athletically very strong class, and unexpectedly, nine more athletes than anticipated signed a letter of intent to come to the University. Darnell knew that the situation was an anomaly; "It doesn't usually happen that often, because recruiting never really gets messed up this bad." While staff saw the football program as "bringing guys in who they think [are]…this potential national championship team,"

there was an understanding that there were not enough scholarships to go around. As a staff

member and former player commented, "I've played the game and there were bodies.[29] Coaches

look at that big picture and say this is going to be a great class. What nine guys would you get

rid of? Everybody vote." The staff member went on to add that the players that were

determined to be "dead weight" would be subject to drug tests. Since the coaches cannot

eliminate scholarships unless rules are broken, catching athletes with a positive drug test is an

easy way to catch them in violation of their scholarship requirements[30]. In Darnell's case, he

never mentioned being drug tested, and he likely was spared such tactics to move him out of the

program because of his positive reputation.

Instead, coaches used a tactic of exploiting Darnell's identity as a football player to get

him to transfer out. By telling Darnell and others that they would never play football at the

University, the athletes were then forced to find other institutions to play at, or stay and risk

being placed in the coaches' "hate bucket." A staff member who also previously played football

discussed how the coaches added athletes to their "hate bucket" or "hate list" and made their

experience so uncomfortable on the team that the athlete would leave of his own accord. The

former athlete and staff member presented the coaches as "abusive," "people were getting called

'wastes of scholarships'…you know, we would get called expletives left and right. We would be

dehumanized. It was very verbally abusive coaching and everyone knew…it ticked me off to

where I didn't even want to be part of the team anymore." Although the athletes saw the

treatment of themselves and especially the athletes that were being forced out as problematic,

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[29] The reference to "bodies" indicates that some athletes were caught as collateral damage in the pursuit of winning. Some athletes left the team because of injury, some because of academic ineligibility, and others were forced out because of underperformance in the athletic arena.

[30] The University has shifted its drug policy since this interview was conducted. Athletes who test positive for drug use now go on probation and receive support to end their drug use. The athletic department does not condone the use of NCAA banned substances, including drugs. However, there is an understanding that some drug use does occur by athletes.

they had little or no recourse within the system. They endured the discomfort because the coaches "control your scholarship and they're dangling that across your head. They control your dreams, basically, if you want to go to the NFL." Part of the injustice of the system is that athletes are very limited in their mobility and options once arriving on campus, but the coaches are seen as having "no loyalty" and are free to leave at any time for a better contract. While the constraints on the athletes put them in an often unwelcoming environment, as one staff member put it, "When a kid leaves crime-ridden LA to come to this, in the back of their mind, 'I guess I can't complain.'" While a lot of research discusses high profile athletes as successful within the athletic domain and struggling in the academic domain, my research into the constraints affecting athletes shows just how precarious their position in the athletic domain can be as well. While a few athletes, like Kevin, feel comfortable and supported from the start, most enter their career at the University with a disappointing event – redshirting when they thought they would play. Unless they are able to fight for a playing role on the team, they might find their position becoming even more precarious with coaches pressuring them to leave in order to make room for the next set of recruits. The athletes who find themselves struggling to perform in both athletic and academic domains are the real casualties in the system.

Eligibility

Whereas the sections above relate to an athlete's athletic performance, eligibility relates to an athlete's academic performance and the requirements to meet certain benchmarks outlined by the NCAA in order to be able to take the field. Eligibility is the primary point of intersection between athletics and academics. An athlete is only as valuable to the business as his ability to play on the field yields. When viewed through this lens of utility, athletes' grades matter only insofar as they stay above the minimum requirements. By the spring of their first year, several

athletes mentioned how football operates as a business, and by extension, how eligibility is the key concern of the coaches regarding athletes' academic success. This need for athletes to be eligible drives academic decisions such as course selection and choice of major. In the next chapter, I will go into detail on how eligibility factors into the work of the staff of the Athlete Academic Center; significantly, eligibility goes beyond student welfare and progress toward a degree – maintenance of eligibility is a pressure staff feel in order to make sure the University fields a successful football team. One staff member reflected on working with younger players who were not starters as providing a "margin of error" if "something doesn't go right." But, working with starters is different because if "so-and-so is ineligible, that could be bad." As a result, the staff member checked with the athletes who were starters more often, "or being a little bit more like, 'hey, are you doing this right now?'…it's still holding them accountable, but I want to feel like I am more in control." This "internal pressure" is not generated purely by the concern of the head coach being upset at a potential starter not being able to play, the pressure is based on the staff member's concern over the performance of the football team, "because, crap, if he doesn't play…our backup isn't so great…we're gonna get our asses kicked." While several staff members spoke about intentionally distancing themselves from the athletes' athletic performance, an affordance, some staff members were highly invested in the team's performance.

The discussion of eligibility permeates academic advising and athlete support. Even when staff members want athletes to find their passion and develop into independent learners, the low bar of eligibility shifts the conversation toward minimum requirements. One adviser stated, "I tell students…'you don't need to worry about your eligibility, you need to just worry about passing your classes. If you pass your classes, that part will take care of itself'…As an

adviser, my job is to make sure you are eligible and I know the rules.'" The adviser tries not to get into too much detail with the athletes about the "rules" or NCAA requirements, but will stress that, "you've got to pass two classes every quarter" in order to stay eligible to compete. The language of "passing" shifts what athletes are held accountable for in their coursework, much less, what they are encouraged to achieve.

The rules the adviser alluded to above are part of the constraints imposed by the NCAA on the system of eligibility maintenance. Athletes must pass six credits per quarter and at least 27 during the academic year. The six credits must be applicable toward the athlete's degree, meaning that credits not within major or core requirements for graduation do not count. Along with the required percentage toward completion: 40, 60, and 80% by the end of the second, third and fourth years respectively,[31] academic advisers are forced to micro manage athletes' academic pathways. One adviser mentioned that the pressure is less about maintaining the eligibility of the athlete and more about accurately reporting the certification of eligibility, claiming that the certification process is the "most stressful part of my year."

While the NCAA rules are aimed at making sure athletes are moving toward earning a diploma, an affordance, the NCAA regulations have unintended consequences of catching the most high-achieving athletes, constraining their pathways by requiring them to meet the six credit rule while trying to double major or major in the humanities while pursuing pre-health course work. Thus, a history major planning to attend medical school cannot stay on sequence with the pre-medicine science track because he or she would be required to take at least two of three classes toward his or her history major. The result of taking math, chemistry and a history course would be the athlete's ineligibility given the current constraints of the NCAA rules. Even when the NCAA realizes that there are unintended consequences to their policies, they are

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[31] For an extended review of NCAA policy and rules, please see Chapter 2.

constrained by their own inability to change. The NCAA is made up of member institutions all

concerned over their own competitive advantage. While athletes struggle to live on their

stipends, moves to increase athlete compensation meet gridlock as member institutions that

cannot afford the extra dollars going toward athlete scholarships paralyze the process for those

institutions that can afford and would like to increase the compensation to athletes. The result of

the institutional governance model of the NCAA is that it is hard to make changes, even when

there is a general consensus that the current rules do not make sense. The NCAA ship often

proves too large to steer.

While the staff of the Athlete Academic Centers is tasked with overseeing athlete

eligibility, the coaches' need for athletes to be able to play results in a formalized flow of

information from the staff members to the coaches. The information boils down to issues of

eligibility and discipline for the athletes. Staff members meet with football position coaches and

basketball coaches weekly to report out on the academic progress of the athletes determined to

be at the most risk and requiring the most aggressive tracking. Because of the nature of these

conversations, at the athlete graduation during the year of my field work, a coach stood up and

praised a graduating senior for "never slipping up" and never "[getting] on warning" while

failing to mention from which the department the athlete received his degree. The informational

reporting lines from staff to coaches come with the goal of "no surprises." Staff members

document every infraction an athlete commits so that if and when he is ineligible, the staff

members can show the process by which the athlete fell through the safety net provided by the

system. As a result, staff may feel like a "snitch" for passing on reports on missing classes,

tutoring, etc. These reporting lines place the enforcement of consequences, such as hard lessons,

within the hands of the coaches. The AAC staff lack the authority to impose consequences on

the athletes themselves. As mentioned earlier, since the coaches hold the athletes' scholarships

and NFL dreams in their hands, they are the ones to whom the athletes must answer.

Concerns of the Athlete Academic Center Staff

With the business of football and the need for athletes to be eligible driving the

constraints outlined above, what does accountability look like for athletes if the staff members

cannot let athletes fail academically? The next two major constraints on athlete pathways are

identified as the most concerning to the staff of the AAC: the relative academic preparation

levels of the athletes and their schedules as bounded by their athletic participation. In trying to

understand how the staff can hold high profile special admits accountable for their academics

given their relative preparation and schedule constraints, one adviser said, "I don't know what

you do with somebody who has struggled through high school academically and then you throw

them onto a campus where everybody is A students out of high school, give them a full time job

and say, 'Go get your degree.'" For many of the special admits, the preparation and scheduling

constraints quickly start to limit their academic paths. One staff member argued, "Our number

one thing is about student athlete welfare, and we want to make sure that they're attaining the

education that they want. Unfortunately sometimes based off of schedules…it doesn't always

work out." The staff member went on to draw out the tension athletes feel with the limited

number of hours in the day, "because of the amount of time that they spend in athletics doesn't

allow them the amount of time they want to spend studying…they make the decision…should I

give up my academic goals because I want to focus more athletically?" The quote above

indicates a faith that if the athlete had time to devote academically, that he could succeed in his

academic goals. The reality, however, is that many athletes enter the institution with academic

credentials that do not set them up for a pathway into their intended major, but do allow them a

path toward a degree.

Relative Preparation

In Chapter 1, I outlined what it means to be a "special admit" athlete at places like the

University. At a moderately selective institution such as this one, the special admits are at a

significant academic preparation disadvantage compared to their student at large peers. Within

the University, the departmental majors are tagged with different levels of admissions criteria.

Some departments are open to all students who want to declare their affiliation while others are

highly competitive. The business program at the institution is an example of a highly

competitive major. With staff estimating that 75 to 80% of athletes entering the institution want

to major in business, the competitiveness of the major is not discussed during the recruitment

process, nor during the faculty meet-and-greet during recruiting trips, leaving most athletes to

learn about this second tier of admissions when they start registering for classes during their first

year. Many advisers understand that "they all want to do pre-med and business, but really, you

know, typically they don't have the skills to compete or even pass the prerequisites and all that."

Ultimately, the special admit athletes do not know how far behind they are academically and the

staff have to nuance the conversation around course and major selection in directions that better

suit each athlete's preparation and ability.

While AAC staff work with athletes on course selection, navigating the landscape of

eligibility, the administration understands bringing in athletes with low profiles for reasons

beyond their utility on the field. One athletic administrator mentioned, "We're willing to take a

risk on an academically deficient type of kid from a poor background because that is who we are.

We're a state university. We take these risks." The same administrator stresses a rhetoric that

has permeated the athletic department, the belief that an athlete from a disadvantaged

background will find himself better off for every day spent at the University, even if he does not

complete a degree. As a staff member reflecting on the experience of one former athlete from a

neighborhood in LA known as "the Jungle" said, "everyday he was here and safe and having his

eyes opened to other possibilities than what life was like in the Jungle was a victory."

The University takes risks on special admit athletes, whether it is to serve the social good

of the community, to open up the athlete's eyes to other opportunities, or to win games – the

discussion of what level of preparation is needed to earn a degree is prevalent in discussions by

administrators who want to push the limits until the University "stubs [its] toe" on a low APR

score. Interestingly, most staff members thought that no athlete could have credentials too low

to succeed if they were willing to work hard, "Yeah, I think [the AAC] can get anybody through

to a degree." One learning specialist whose job involves supporting some of the athletes with the

highest needs said that over her time at the institution, she had encountered only three athletes

who she did not think had the skills or the capacity to develop the skills to graduate, and "two of

them proved me wrong." These athletes that graduate against all expectations become part of a

narrative of the department, "remember [name of athlete], he made it," the "kid from Compton"

who eventually earned a master's degree, that points to outliers to justify their current practices.

While athletes with very low academic skill sets earn diplomas, what is the cost to the institution

and athletic department? To understand the effect of special admit athletes in terms of costs and

benefits, it is important to recognize that recruitment is about speculation; it is difficult to

anticipate the athlete's level of academic need (cost) and hard to anticipate which "puppies" will

develop into "good hunting dogs"[32] and help win games (benefit). Because the AAC staff have a

high success rate when it comes to graduating special admit athletes, the group faces increasing

pressure to take on more and more athletes with low levels of preparation who may make

significant contributions on the field of play.[33] As a constraint, the level of academic preparation

prohibits such athletes from a broad exploration of majors, as will be further discussed in the

following chapter.

Schedule Constraints

The push to win football games in increasingly competitive conferences drives coaches to

increase the number of hours athletes spend lifting weights, watching film, practicing, and

preparing for the season all year around. As Clayton put it, "Football never stops." Hours

required for football are scheduled, and then all other activities in the athletes' lives are

scheduled around them. For the staff at the AAC, this means scheduling advising appointments,

tutoring, Study Table, and meetings with learning specialists all around the athletes' football

schedules. For the advisers, the scheduling extends into their navigation of class registration for

the athletes. When an adviser meets with an athlete, he or she must simultaneously calculate the

athlete's relative academic preparation and ability to pass classes to remain eligible, the athlete's

path toward meeting NCAA degree progress requirements, and the athlete's small window of

availability to take classes. When the academic side of universities and other entities express

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[32] An athletic administrator, while acknowledging that it is a "bad metaphor" explained weighing the potential value of players as, "Everyone tells them they're like puppies. You don't know until they go hunt if they're good hunting dogs."

[33] The AAC provided data on the special admit population for my research. The most recent data provided covered a four-year cohort including special admits who entered the University from the 2008-2009 academic year through the 2011-2012 academic year. For the cohort, 12% had attained a degree and 60% remained at the University in good standing which made 72% of the University's special admits on a path toward graduating from the institution. Of the remainder, 18% transferred for athletic reasons, 4% went pro, and 2% withdrew or were dismissed by their team. Most significantly, none were reported to have been dismissed from the University for athletic reasons. Also striking, the% of athletes who transfer out of the University averages about 30% by their junior and senior years. Those high percentages of transfers are reported as leaving for athletic reasons. The nuances of why athletes transfer for athletic reasons should be examined in more depth in future research.

concern over the tendency of athletes to cluster in certain majors, the schedule of the athletes and

the times or format in which the classes are offered should not be overlooked. In one such

instance, all entry-level communications classes conflicted with the football practice schedule for

a part of the year. As a result, athletes who wanted to explore communications were blocked

from starting the major. Because of NCAA progress toward degree requirements, losing an

academic quarter of exploration of a major may eliminate that major as a viable pursuit for an

athlete. Ultimately, finding 15 credits that will 1) fit an athlete's schedule, 2) be passable, and 3)

meet the eligibility requirements for progress toward a degree is incredibly difficult. Ricky

complained that his advising sessions took "forever, 'cause all the classes I wanted I couldn't get

'cause of the times." Most athletes ended up taking at least one online course, even if they were

reluctant to do so. More advanced students also used independent study credits, which often

manifested as credits added onto a course they were currently taking with a faculty member in

exchange for an additional paper or project. As seen with the controversy around "paper classes"

at UNC-Chapel Hill described in Chapter 2, maintaining the rigor of independent studies course

work is difficult to do.

During my field work, I observed a number of advising sessions throughout the academic

year. During winter quarter, the registration for spring courses had to be shaped around "spring

ball," the roughly one month long period during the spring in which football is allowed to

practice with full gear and physical contact. Coaches traditionally travel to visit prospective

athletes after spring ball. The coaches, however, felt they would be at a recruiting disadvantage

to wait until this time. Therefore, they shifted the practice schedule up two weeks so that one of

the most intense training periods of the year overlapped with preparation time for final exams.

Spring ball then only extended into spring quarter for three weeks, with practices held on

Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. To make room for the six weekday practices of spring ball, the advisers and players scheduled all classes to begin after 11:30 a.m. on those days. I observed that most athletes choose not to take the classes in which they were most interested in out of deference to the football schedule. Significantly, the blocking of intended classes was not limited to mornings when formalized practice was held:

> Athlete: So no football Monday, Wednesday, Friday?
>
> Adviser: That's what they are saying.
>
> Athlete: So probably film?
>
> Adviser: Yeah.

Athletes and advisers understood that even on the days that practice was not scheduled, they still should not plan any classes before 10:30 a.m. because football coaches would likely schedule position meetings to review film. The NCAA's 20 Hour Rule states that during peak training times, like fall season or spring ball, athletes can train up to 20 hours per week. In theory, they should be limited to practicing only eight hours per week the rest of the year. One staff member argued that the NCAA's 20 Hour Rule never gets enforced and, "if [the NCAA] is about student welfare, why aren't the athletes getting protected?" Even if the coaches manage to stay close to the 20 hour limit of scheduled practice and meeting time, the constraint on the athletes' schedules is much further reaching if they have to protect large sections of their time in case a coach calls a meeting.

The schedule of the football team and collegiate athletics in general has changed over time. Current football players at the University expect to spend only a few days at home during winter break depending on what bowl game the team qualifies to compete in. During spring break, the athletes get another week off in the middle of spring ball. After final exams conclude

for the year, athletes have about a week before they have to return to train for the next season and participate in summer course work. The outcome is that the players only have only a few weeks per year when they are not being scheduled by the coaches for training. Thinking back to their own careers, staff members who played sports at the University remembered always having the month of May off, "it was voluntary workouts, but it wasn't as intense…we'll do our own workouts, I think because coaches had trust in us." That trust came with responsibility to prepare for training camp, "your job is not secure, so everybody had that responsibility." In an era when the University's football team was very successful, the coaches held athletes accountable for their own training and preparation, and as a result, "we all self-regulated, which is crazy." The staff member also expressed a deeper concern of how the schedule affects the athletes: "Man, I had more fun back then. I don't know if these guys are having fun here, you know the college experience." Looking at the constraints on athletes' schedules prompts the question, how much is too much football? When does the system start to yield diminishing returns? The constraints, taken in sum, leave the athletes little margin of error or room for exploration within their academics. Beyond the effect on their academic pursuits, the layers of constraints may have a more fundamental effect of limiting athletes' growth toward being independent learners and self-regulating adults.

Affordances and a Matter of Perspective

Many of the affordances that benefit the athletes are developed as strategic responses to the constraints discussed above. Yet, some of the constraints can also be viewed as affordances when seen from an alternate person's perspective. For instance, the pressure the football team experiences to generate revenue for the department also affords them a position at the top of the athletic hierarchy. An athletic administrator stressed that the heightened place of high profile

sports within the department was widely understood, "If football and men's basketball are successful, that means the economics of this place and the revenue of this place is successful, which means you can invest in other sports…Our other coaches and our other student athletes understand it. They're not resentful." The athletes on high profile teams are afforded every level of support necessary to remain enrolled and graduate from the institution. Based on the support provided through the AAC, one adviser stated, "I think they got everything here academically and athletically to succeed. So…for me, it always comes down to the kid." The high profile athletes are seen by the staff as having ample support to be successful, as long as they are willing to take advantage of the support offered. I will present issues of athlete resistance to support in the following chapter. Similar to the constraint of the pressure to win and the affordance of the resources to be successful, the athletic department as a whole was seen both by administrators and staff as having the goal of winning, but also as caring deeply for the welfare of the athletes. One AAC staff member, in reflecting on the goals of the athletic department, started his response with, "to raise money." But, the staff member went on to say, "I also believe [the goal is] to have happy, successful student athletes." The messages of student welfare being balanced with those of running an economically dependent business were echoed by many respondents.

The NCAA regulations, the reporting of Graduation Success Rates and Academic Progress Reports, along with the eligibility requirements of the percentage progress toward a degree, all come from the desire to ensure that the athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics are on pathways toward graduation, toward earning that piece of paper. As mentioned in the literature review, many of the regulations are reactions to systems that created teams like the one Adler and Adler followed in the 1980's, when there were no mandated pathways for athletes to work toward degrees. While I present the regulations of the NCAA as constraints in

many contexts, the broad context of the regulations is to pressure schools to support athletes' academic progress. While I do not believe that broad context should excuse the unchecked unintended consequences of eligibility micromanagement, I do believe that the NCAA operates both as a constraint and an affordance within the pathways of intercollegiate athletes.

The Athlete Academic Center as an Affordance

Broadly, the work that occurs within the AAC is built to serve as a filter or buffer for many of the constraints acting on the athletes. Specifically, staff members provide athletes with unconditional support through cheerleading their academic efforts, protecting them from the consequences of their actions (or inactions), and advisers work to allow athletes academic opportunities without feeling the limitations of their relative preparation or constraints on their eligibility as regulated by the NCAA and University. Advisers work to ensure that athletes remain eligible while still allowing them to take highly regulated academic risks, or to "take their shot" as the staff frame the exploration of a major in which they are not sure the athlete has the potential to be successful.

The staff members of the AAC serve as cheerleaders for the athletes. Significantly, they support the athletes regardless of their athletic performances or injury status. In comparison with the support they receive within the football program, which is highly based on performance, the support of the AAC staff is seen as unconditional. In discussing the strengths of the AAC, one staff member said, "I think…really being encouraging and safe for the students…really valuing them for something other than their sport. I wish there were more of that." The staff member went on to say:

> I care about [the athletes] and, um, if they are injured, I still care about them. If they're medically retired, I still care about them. I think the folks around here…are really good at that. Just caring…and it doesn't matter if you're not able to play your sport anymore. It doesn't matter if you're not very good at your

sport anymore, we're still gonna care just as much about you even when the
coaches stop asking how you're doing.

The small successes are celebrated, and when the athletes doubt their abilities, regardless of

whether the doubts are athletic or academic, the staff encourages the athletes to focus on the goal

of graduation. One staff member keeps pictures of athletes at their graduation posted around the

office to point to when current athletes doubt themselves. By pointing to athletes with similar

backgrounds and struggles who successfully attained a degree, the staff member shows current

athletes that they too have a pathway forward at the University.

More controversially, some staff members are seen as protecting the athletes they work

with from the consequences of their actions. This practice of protecting athletes is not formally

sanctioned or universally accepted as a subversive practice. Basically, some staff members who

work closely with the same students over many years will start to "protect" the athletes from

punishments, such as hard lessons, for missing classes, for example. This method of protecting

athletes may be a form of exchange to gain their trust. It is also possible, however, that athletes

are exploiting long term relationships with certain staff members to beat the system by putting

out minimal effort and not conforming to all of the *musts*, such as going to class, while still

remaining eligible and avoiding hard lessons. For instance, the football coaches "were trying to

do something with [an athlete]; we're trying to make him great," but staff members covered for

the athlete, "because they like him." The affordance of protection may support the athletes'

growth in some areas, but hinder that growth in other areas.

One of the largest challenges the staff of the AAC face is allowing athletes to take risks

while strategically protecting their eligibility, both in the interests of the player and of the

institution. The basis for the controlled risk taking is that the staff wants the players to have the

opportunity to try out their intended academic path and not to feel as though they were held back

from the opportunity to try. As an adviser stated, "Of course you never take somebody who wants to go on a specific path and just say, 'Oh, you're not going to get in.' You've got to let them take their shot." Letting athletes take their shot has become a mantra around the AAC. But, the constraints of eligibility still dictate when and how that shot may be taken. The strategic thought process of an adviser is outlined below.

> If a student comes in as a football player as a freshman and says, "I want to major in business," if they are not the greatest on paper and I don't think it is a possibility for them – I'm saying that to myself. I'm not telling them what I am thinking…I am not putting them in a business classes in the fall. I am going to wait until they're out of season in the winter and let them take their shot and try it then. Then, go from there. So, I think I strategize just based on those different factors; their ability, whether they are in season, and things like that.

The winter is used as a place for athletes to 'take their shot' for multiple reasons. While it is theoretically the time of the year with the least amount of scheduled practice, it is also the only time of year that an athlete can become ineligible by not passing six credits and not face the repercussions that affect their time on the field. During the fall, ineligibility could cost the athlete an appearance in a bowl game, and the spring quarter directly affects the eligibility of the athlete for the fall season without an opportunity to make up mistakes or failures during the summer quarter. Basically, winter is the only time AAC staff can encourage athletes to take risks without the need to micromanage their eligibility.

One criticism of the affordance of risk taking is that it sets up the athlete for failure. There is a lack of transparency in how relatively underprepared the special admit athletes are for academics at the University. As one staff member put it, "Sadly, that's one of the hardest things is when somebody just really wants to do business or engineering, and they take that first class and bomb it. Or sometimes two or three before they give up, and then they go for their second major, and hopefully, that works." This process of wanting to major in a highly competitive area

and then having to shift to a less competitive major is not unique at the University. However, the relatively low level of academic preparation that distinguishes athletes as special admits leads them to have a uniquely low chance at majoring in highly competitive majors. The strategic risk taking of athletes operates to navigate them toward majors that they can be admitted to and graduate with. The potential casualty in the process is the athlete's loss of motivation to engage in academic material.

Bridge – Closing the Preparation Gap

The course offered to special admit athletes in the summer before attending the University is an affordance to their academic pathway in multiple ways. Bridge serves to provide athletes with "practice" for the academic rigor of the University. The format of balancing practices, morning classes, and afternoon study support serves as an acclimation tool to the experiences of being an athlete at the University. The rigor of the academic work during Bridge helps the athletes understand what will be expected of them in their courses to follow. Strategically, Bridge also serves to provide a GPA buffer for the athletes. This affordance allows athletes to "take their shot" without risking becoming academically ineligible with a low GPA. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, the average GPA of the athletes I interviewed during Bridge was 3.43. By the end of their first academic year at the University, with the GPA of Bridge still factored in, the athletes' GPAs dropped to an average of 2.59.[34] The institution mandates a 2.0 cumulative average to stay enrolled at the University. For some of the athletes I interviewed, the buffer of Bridge helped keep their head above the waters of ineligibility.

The most significant affordance provided by Bridge to students was the point of entry it provided into very difficult academic material. Within the framework of Figured Worlds,

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[34] I ran the cumulative GPAs of the athletes with and without Bridge factored in. The boost from Bridge amounted to a .1 GPA boost by the end of the academic year. The 2.59 average GPA of the athletes I interviewed drops to 2.49 without Bridge.

discussed in Chapter 4, Bridge and the AAC serve as a hybrid space for athletes by expanding

what counts as competent participation. Below are several accounts of how Bridge allowed

athletes a point of entry into academic material while validating their own experiences in

connection to the work.

During a tutor-led small group session in the morning class, the athletes discussed an

article on street smarts and academia. Everyone took turns sharing a main idea from the passage

and the evidence connected to it. A football player who initially appeared shy and reserved

became animated when he brought the hip hop artist The Notorious B.I.G. into the conversation,

telling the other students that 'Biggie Smalls' did not like school, but that "he sounds smart" and

has "street smarts and the ability to write poetry." The tutor then used the student's contribution

to talk about how the main point develops in the article, and asked the group if they thought the

author was trying to sell something. The football player replied, quoting song lyrics and

discussing rap culture before catching himself and saying "[I] don't think it has anything to do

with the story but…" The tutor offered the connection: "education is a hustle." The interaction

allowed the student to bring the course material into line with his frame of reference: Biggie

Smalls and rap. Even though the athlete became a bit lost in his tangent, the tutor was able to

help him connect his understanding of street smarts with the author's main argument. The

expanded notion of what counts as competent participation within Bridge allowed students to

utilize their personal experience to find points of entry into the academic material. Tutors and

instructors encouraged the use of students' empirical evidence to draw connections with the

author's main points. As a result, dense readings began to carry meaning in the students' day to

day lives.

Beyond the curriculum functioning as a hybrid space linking the informal lived experience and the formal academic domain, tutors and instructors made academia more accessible through the use of language. One set of instructors cursed frequently in front of the class to break with the formality of the space. The students responded favorably to the expanded use of language in an academic setting, showing that instructor relatability was a means of accessing a formal space.

In another instance, a tutor leading a reading group asked a student what he thought of a paragraph he just read aloud. The student replied that actions of a person in the paragraph represented a "dick move." Without missing a beat, the tutor responded, "Good. I am writing 'dick move' in the margin next to that section." The expansion of valued participation along with encouragement allowed students to take more risks. In a one-on-one tutoring session, a football player sat frozen in front of a blank computer screen and confessed to a tutor that, "I don't know big words." The tutor replied, "You don't need big words – this is rough draft time." The encouragement helped the student begin the daunting task of starting his close reading essay. Later, the tutor continued working with the student suggesting that he try to use Paulo Freire's language and "instead of using 'messed up' use 'oppressed'." The tutor used the student's informal language and helped to translate it into the formal language of academia, but the tutor did not allow the initial inability to write using academic terminology to deter the student from expressing his thoughts.

Broadly, Bridge classrooms were places of high expectations and expanded acceptance of behavior, as long as the action served academic goals. Sleeping students were roused and off-task students were nudged back into line, but walking across the classroom to point out an important passage to a friend was acceptable. To avoid creating oppositional behavior in the

class, students' comments that were not made in support of academic goals were ignored, but not reprimanded. Ultimately, a strength of Bridge is its ability to allow points of entry into difficult material.

The Affordance of Tutoring

Tutoring is one of the primary tools used by the AAC to bridge the gap in athlete academic preparation to level of sufficiency in course work. The AAC prides itself on providing tutoring for athletes across the full spectrum of academic preparation and ability. While the AAC provides tutoring for advanced courses on the pre-health track, the vast majority of the tutoring time and financial resources are dedicated to special admits. As expressed in the narratives of the athletes, there is a great appreciation for the academic performance that tutoring affords them. However, the problem lies in the growth of dependence on the tutoring system as a point of primary instruction, which I will unpack in detail in the next chapter. Overall, the affordances the AAC provides special admit athletes have the potential to produce the negative consequence of enabling athletes to turn the AAC into a "crutch," as one staff member put it, eliminating the need for athletes to engage in the academic domain outside of the AAC, and thereby allowing them to remain safely in the hybrid space.

The next chapter will place the affordances and constraints developed in this chapter onto the central paradigm or model for understanding accountability as the central theme emerging from the data. The constraints discussed above have profound limiting effects on the affordances offered by the AAC. Chapter 7 will look in depth at how the academic performance of high profile special admit athletes is mediated through the constraints and affordances acting on the systems which drive the activity within the AAC toward tracking athletes by way of the services

provided. Ultimately, the outcomes of the constraints and affordances acting on the system

determine the outcomes of accountability that help explain athlete academic underperformance.

Chapter 7

Accountability and the Central Paradigm

Applying Grounded Theory to the data reveals accountability as the core concept holding together the balance of the themes that emerged in the coding process described in Chapter 5. While accountability is conceptual and can be difficult to measure, this chapter will offer insights into the dynamics of accountability with respect to the central paradigm, as shown below. This chapter focuses on how the affordances developed for special admit high profile athletes in response to the constraints they face affect accountability and, ultimately, how understanding accountability within the systems can help us understand special admits' academic performance. The systems I refer to comprise all of the activity systems that the high profile special admit athletes are embedded in (e.g., the football team, the AAC, the athletic department, etc.).

Figure 7.1: The Central Paradigm
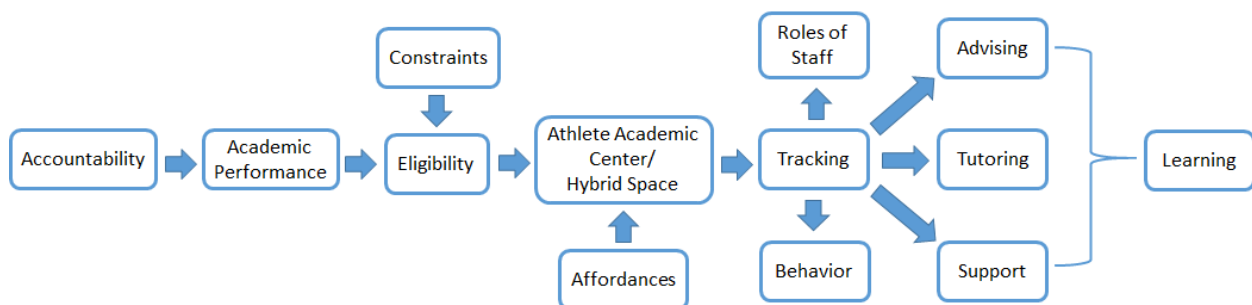
The figure above illustrates the connections between the athletes' academic performance and the outcomes of accountability produced by the systems in the model, shedding light on athletes' systematic academic underperformance relative to their entry credentials.

The academic performances of athletes are seen through the filter of eligibility as influenced by the constraints acting on the system outlined in the last chapter. The programming of the Athlete Academic Center (AAC), operating as a hybrid space, provides affordances to the athletes' pathways in response to the constraints. I will outline how athletes are tracked into

different levels of support with staff fulfilling different roles within the programming offered by the AAC. In the next chapter, I will delve further into other factors that affect this tracking system, namely, the identities and behaviors of the athletes themselves. I will then discuss the major interactions ACC staff members have with athletes including advising, working with learning specialists, academic coordinators, and tutoring. Finally, I will look at how the accountability of the athletes operates in the different programming provided, and ultimately, what insights into academic performance an understanding of accountability provides.

Tracking Athletes

By the time an incoming scholarship athlete signs a letter of intent to attend the University, the AAC staff members have a sense of what level of support he or she will need. However, while some athletes who arrive as special admits outperform what their entry credentials predict, others, identified as "priority admits"[35] may end up needing much more support than anticipated. The process of assessing athletes' actual academic abilities begins in Bridge. The staff, tutors, and instructors gather weekly to discuss each athlete's progress, determining which writing course(s) he or she should take, and whether he or she should work with a learning specialist or academic coordinator. The athletes are monitored throughout Bridge, and by the end, their academic level, motivation, and attitude determine how they will be tracked during the academic year.

During the school year, athletes are monitored in their classes, during study table, and by at least two members of the AAC staff in addition to their tutors. As a result, each athlete has a high number of people aware of his or her movements. While this high-touch monitoring can

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[35] The term "special admit" is widely recognized by institutions nationally, but the label provided for athletes admitted with credentials above those of special admits, but less than the university's average is less defined. The term "priority admit" is one that it is used to describe such a population. The term can also be applied to non-athlete applicants.

provide the athlete with a great deal of support from different angles, and serve as an early

warning system for any difficulties the athlete may be experiencing, having so many people

involved with each athlete also means that no single person has a complete picture of what is

happening. This scattered involvement makes it possible for athletes to take advantage of any

failures in communication to game the system and complete minimal requirements with few, if

any, consequences.

During their first quarter, all of the first-year members of the football team attend Study

Table. The stated goal of Study Table is to reserve time in the afternoons, usually 60 minutes,

for athletes to complete their academic course work. During the time I observed Study Table, I

found that it was run differently depending on who was monitoring the program on any given

day. Four core individuals worked the check-in system, which required athletes to swipe their

identification card, recording their arrival time. In addition to signing in, athletes filled out an

objective sheet, which included a list of the courses they worked on during Study Table, what

they accomplished for each course, and, if they worked with a tutor, the signature of that staff

member as well. At the end of the Study Table period, each athlete would be required to swipe

their card again to sign out and submit their objective sheet to be filed in the Study Table binder.

Almost none of the athletes fully completed and submitted their objective sheets, and the Study

Table monitors rarely checked the completeness of the sheets they did receive, neither did they

confirm the presence of a tutor's signature. Though one of the Study Table monitors attempted

to provide more accountability than the rest, athletes' default behavior during the 60-minute

period was to clock the time, and leave.

In general, Study Table operated more like detention than a study hall. Although athletes

began the year clocking time and submitting objective sheets, over the course of the year they

learned that there were no consequences for clocking out early or for failing to submit an

objective sheet. While the Study Table monitors thought that the check-in system sent reports to

the staff member in charge, the staff member assumed that the Study Table monitors would

inform the staff if an athlete did not show up, and would enforce that they would enforce time

requirement. As a result, many of the Study Table monitors were lenient, telling the athletes that

they would get in trouble if they checked out early, but not holding them accountable for staying.

By the second quarter, the athletes already knew what the staff member in charge of Study Table

explained to me, that the information from the swipe system goes "nowhere." Later in the year,

when some athletes had stopped bothering to check into Study Table, the monitors would walk

around the center to find the athletes and check them in manually on their behalf. Ultimately,

Study Table is a monitoring system established to provide athletes with structured study time,

but in reality, it adds an extra hour of scheduled detention onto the athletes' day.

Learning how to get out of Study Table became a primary objective of many of the

athletes. For instance, one football player pleaded with one of the monitors to let him leave half

an hour early because he did not have "anything to work on." Kevin, who had been playing with

his phone, piped up with, "Obviously I have nothing to do." Both athletes were able to

successfully talk or charm their way out of Study Table because the monitor saw that they were

"not working on anything." The athletes learned that sitting in the front and not engaging in

academic work could increase their chances of early dismissal. Sadly, this lesson reinforced

disengagement from academic work. With a single exception, I did not witness athletes

consistently attending and working on academic material at Study Table. Clayton went so far as

to say, "I've never really done work in like, the rows in Study Table." Athletes who requested to

spend their required hour in the computer lab working on a paper would often escape the Study

Table space only to spend the hour on Facebook or YouTube. In general, without a tutor present at the AAC, athletes completed very little work.

Though Study Table often had more than one monitor present, and monitors were supposed to be able to tutor and help the athletes with their homework, athletes typically talked with each other or with the staff, but not about academic topics. The monitors typically talked with each other in the front of the room, and rarely, if ever, asked athletes attending Study Table what they were working on and whether or not they would like help. I witnessed on many occasions that the monitors would typically default to completing their own academic work, surf the Internet on their own laptop or on the laptop used to check in athletes to Study Table, or talk with athletes in a casual manner without offering to work with them on their academic material.

Study Table functions as a tracking mechanism to ensure that athletes remain in the AAC during the afternoons, whether or not they were engaging in tutoring sessions. Ostensibly, the intention behind the objective sheets is to hold athletes accountable for working on academic material during their time at the AAC. However, since the monitors neither read the objective sheets carefully nor request that athletes produce the work they claim to have completed, the sheets are simply another hoop to jump through in the management of the system. Because the Study Table monitors' roles are at the bottom and periphery of the AAC hierarchy, they have little ability or desire to hold athletes accountable for their actions.

The tracking system is predominantly concerned with the movement of athletes, rather than their engagement or actions. Accordingly, a primary focus of the AAC tracking is oversight of class attendance. Sam, one of the main class checkers, can be seen all over campus peering into classroom windows or entering large lecture halls. Athletes are counted and, in theory, reported to the staff at the AAC. If they are missing, that information is then passed on to

coaches. Athletes' bodies in the classroom are tracked, but their actual engagement in the lecture remains unchecked. Sam, who also works occasionally as a Study Table monitor, commended an athlete who regularly attended class saying, "This man is always where he supposed to be…he's on the money." The same athlete then recounted how Sam managed to sneak up and surprise him in class while, "I was playing a game on my phone." Sam's praise of the athlete is independent of his disengagement from the lecture.

My interview with Sam at the end of the year contradicted much of what I had witnessed and discussed with him previously. Sam provided me with very calculated responses based on what he thought the staff of the AAC would want to hear. I learned from another staff member that Sam's role as a class checker was being evaluated because it had come to light that several athletes had figured out how to beat the class checking system. An athlete who was seated in class and saw Sam come to the door or into the classroom would then send a text to the absent athletes who, in turn, would text Sam to say that they were just running late and would be there shortly. Sam would cut the athletes some slack and not report them to the AAC staff. Though athletes were held accountable to being physically present in class, several found ways around class attendance. Class attendance was seen as the foundation of the athletes' education, especially for those who were less prepared and deemed more likely to struggle. Regardless of athletes' behavior or engagement in class, there was a sense that they would be able to learn simply by being present in the class. One staff member saw the attendance issue not just in terms of athletes' responsibility, but also in terms of what the University owes the athletes:

> [Sam's] ability and other class checkers' ability to actually go into class and make
> sure that they're there is keeping them accountable, keeping the University
> accountable, and really helping the [the athletes] to at least hear the material in
> class once so that they can have a fighting chance at doing well in the class,
> versus…I'll go to class whenever I can and do how I do; I just need to stay afloat.

All of the staff members stressed the need for athletes to attend class, but there was a sense that

the success of the current class checking and reporting system "is up for debate." Ultimately, the

class checking system compels most athletes to attend class regularly, but it limits their

accountability and fails to encourage athletes to actively engage, participate, or even be

conscious during class.

As discussed in the constraints sections of the last chapter, the tracking information

compiled by the AAC staff is shared with the coaches to keep them informed of athletes'

progress and behavior. The information gathered from the class checkers is reported and the data

of the objective sheets are retained "in our folder for the football program in case somebody

says, 'what did this person do that day?' The adviser can go right back to that binder and open it

and say, 'Oh, this is what he was doing that day and this was who he was doing it with.'" The

AAC's reporting to the coaches is in theory to make sure there are "no surprises," but in

actuality, the data compiled on athletes serves to defend the work of the AAC when an athlete

fails. The data show that the athlete did not fall through the cracks, the athlete failed because he

refused to use the resources of the system. The reporting serves primarily to defend the AAC

and its programs and to justify an athlete's failure to the coaching staff. The current system

includes a number of tracking programs that follow the athletes' movements, but are not able to

detect the athletes' engagement or learning.

Staff Roles

The staff members of the Athlete Academic Center have different roles and

responsibilities in the oversight and tracking of athletes. The athletes determined to have the

greatest need for academic support, and those who are navigating learning disabilities, are placed

with learning specialists. The AAC employs several such specialists who meet weekly with their

assigned caseload of athletes. If a student is determined to have less need for academic support, but a large need for behavior oversight due to their actions in Bridge, they are placed with an academic coordinator. The coordinators do not work with the athletes on academic material, rather, they teach an athlete "how to be a man." They discuss drug use, driving under the influence, relations with sexual partners, and an awareness of gang affiliations with the athletes to buffer them against making bad decisions that would jeopardize their place at the University and on the football team. The learning specialist and academic coordinator roles have the greatest amount of direct oversight of the special admit athletes and they both have contact with the coaches in weekly meetings.

The adviser role that I discussed in the last chapter tends to interact with athletes only once a quarter in advance of course registration. Most advisers take on roles as academic coordinators for entire teams whose athletes require less academic support and tracking. The advisers typically split up the low profile sports and meet with athletes on those teams as needed. The monitors at Study Table and the class checkers all fill roles that are at the periphery of the AAC. Similar to tutors, the monitors and Sam are paid hourly and have little voice to advocate for change within the system. The tutors find themselves in a difficult position. Depending on the courses they support and the athletes they work with, they may be asked to serve as the primary instructor for the course material. Athletes with low levels of academic preparation learn to be passive in the classroom and in their tutoring sessions. The quality and quantity of their tutoring may make their need to learn or engage in the classroom setting redundant. Therefore, as will be examined later in this chapter, tutoring may provide athletes with the support they need to actively disengage from the academic world and still remain eligible for athletic participation.

The athletic administrators operate out of a separate building close to the AAC. The administration building oversees the athletic complex, but based on the offices located in the building, there would be little reason for an athlete to ever enter the space. As a result, there is a separation between athletes' experience and their understanding of the athletic administration that mostly deals with coaches and attempts to provide a bridge to the broader University. The administrators are charged with the difficult task of maximizing the economic returns on their high profile sports while maintaining a sustainable level of needed academic support from the AAC. Making sure the system does not cross the tipping point of requiring more support than the staff can provide weighs on the minds of the athletic administrators.

Athlete Identities and Behaviors

Within the model above, the identities and behaviors of the athletes themselves play a role in how they are tracked by the University. In the following chapter, I will elaborate on the athletes' figurative and positional identities and discuss their navigation of the worlds they inhabit, by looking at the data as a whole within the framework of the Figured Worlds perspective. For now, I will ask the reader to understand that athletes' encounters with staff members affect athletes' learning of certain positional and figurative identities, and influence their relative levels of comfort in athletic and academic domains.

Assumptions and Accountability in Advising

The following sections will look at how the major functions of the AAC are carried out through the constraint of eligibility management and the necessity to track athletes' progress and behavior on an ongoing basis. I will first discuss the advising of athletes at greater length, then look at the support offered by learning specialists and, in contrast, the work of academic coordinators. Lastly, I will examine the role tutors play in the support and teaching of athletes.

In Chapter 6, I outlined how advisers navigate the major constraints acting on special admits, namely their relatively low levels of academic preparation and schedules dominated by their athletic obligations. I also showed how advisers provide an affordance to athletes through letting them "take their shot" at enrolling in challenging and competitive course work. Ultimately, advisers present athletes with a mixed message about persistence. They push athletes to perform in or at least pass their classes and stay on course toward graduation, but they also have to encourage athletes to abandon intended majors that the advisers deem too difficult for the athlete. The mixed messaging filters down to the level of individual class selection. An athlete meeting with an adviser asked for an "easy" class and was reprimanded by the adviser. But later in the session, the adviser encouraged the athlete to shift away from a challenging class toward one that athletes tend to perform well in.

Advisers also have to navigate external influences on the athletes' academic choices. Parental involvement in athletes' academic course selection can be supportive, but for most special admits, especially those who are first generation college students, the parental desire for someone like Ricky to major in engineering regardless of the athlete's academic ability and preparation creates a tension between parental desires and what is achievable by the athlete at the University. While many of the parental pressures are to major in something competitive with a strong financial future, the other significant force of external advising comes from peers, many of whom will recommend courses that require limited effort for decent grades. In Study Table, I overheard a more senior athlete on the team telling the first year students who were discussing taking a course on American Indians in film, "It's really easy – if you put thought into your papers you get a 4.0." Peer advising can backfire, such as in King's case, where he heard that communications was a good option that his teammates enjoyed, but he found himself

underprepared to succeed in his communications classes. While relatively easy pathways are outlined for peers, there is also an informal dialogue around what should be avoided. Again, a more senior teammate told first year athletes, "Don't take philosophy…unless you are really deep thinkers." The pause implied that the athletes discussing their course options were not likely to consider themselves deep thinkers.

As the advisers meet with athletes, they utilize different tools in order to steer athletes into classes that will help them maintain their eligibility and lead them toward attaining a degree. The advisers track which courses are deemed "generous" to their students and systematically move athletes toward them. They use the experiences of athletes they have worked with in the past to outline the course selection for their current athletes. One issue with this method is that it treats athletes as a group with similar credentials rather than as individuals with different aspirations, motivations, and preparation. In the case of Clarence wanting to study psychology, the lack of success by past athletes in the introductory class led his adviser to deter him from enrolling.

One way courses are evaluated and recommended to athletes is through a compiled list of recommended courses the advisers put together each quarter based on the professor's course evaluations and feedback from athletes. The list includes information such as grading criteria that allow athletes to select a course in part based on the likelihood of receiving a high grade. The list is not just an eligibility tool; it is also used by high-achieving athletes who want to apply to a very competitive major. The adviser will work with athletes using the list to select classes that score high on the grading criteria knowing that "she'll take one of these [classes from the list] and pull a high grade." What is significant, and debated, is the set of courses that are left off the list. While one adviser mentioned that there are no barriers to a course being put on the list,

another adviser indicated that the list is compiled based on historical markers: known faculty and experiences of past athletes correlated with course evaluations. Historically, the list had been compiled by an individual who ran the AAC based on "his opinion of the teachers," but "some of those professors didn't work out well for our students or our students didn't have the best experience with those professors." The current incarnation of the list is used to give athletes a digestible amount of classes to look at during an advising session to select courses toward their major and core requirements. However, the list also serves the purpose of giving athletes the choice of preselected classes with high ratings, both in general and vis-a-vis grading criteria.

In addition to using courses on the list, advisers also use Swahili and American Sign Language (ASL) when it comes to fulfilling the University's language requirement while being "generous" to the athletes in terms of the GPAs awarded within the classes. From the advising sessions I watched, only one athlete, a male in a low profile sport, discussed options for foreign languages other than Swahili and ASL. He ultimately enrolled in German and was asked by the adviser to report back on what he thought of the class. Some advisers in scheduling for the athletes' fall quarter of their second year simply asked, "When do you want to take Swahili?" Typically, white football players were offered the choice of ASL or Swahili, but more non-white football players were automatically directed toward Swahili, including Rob who had taken Japanese and identified as part Japanese. Because of the need to manage Rob's eligibility and academic risks, he was advised toward Swahili.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, two other tools used to work within the constraints of athletes' academic preparation levels and schedules are online courses and independent studies with faculty. I will expand briefly on the use of these two tools here. First, online course work is sold as a convenience. However, to track athletes enrolled in online classes, the AAC has

group tutoring sessions to supplement the readings, and group viewing of lectures the athletes are supposed to complete on their own. In reality, many of these online courses have tutors teaching the material to the athletes in what becomes essentially an athlete-only section of the course. This structure both ties the athletes' academic experiences to other athletes and anchors their learning in the AAC or hybrid space between the academic and athletic domains. Athletes do not tend to perform well in online courses, in part because they assume that the courses will be easy and are shocked when online classes carry the rigor of classes that meet in person. One athlete reviewing his academic performance with a learning specialist complained that his online dance class was "hard for no reason" and should be "easy." While the convenience of online courses make the athletes' schedules work, the courses tie athletes to the support of the Center more than courses that have an on-campus component and often produce mediocre grades.

In a similar manner, independent studies courses offer advisers a tool with which to navigate athletes' schedules. The faculty members who tend to work with athletes on independent studies often belong to the ethnic studies and anthropology departments – both departments that are seeing an increase in high profile athlete enrollments. One staff member tried to explain the draw to working with ethnic studies professors by saying, "I think some of it has to do with a lot of the professors can relate and look like [the athletes] or are minorities like them." The advisers suggest that athletes talk with professors they connect with and request independent study opportunities with them. Again, there is room for concern over the rigor of the independent study courses based on watching a learning specialist work with a reluctant student on creating interview questions for an independent study project three-quarters of the way through a quarter. The learning specialist did not express any concern that the athlete might not finish a project worthy of earning credit, despite the athlete's procrastination. However,

unlike the notorious "paper classes" at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that I discussed in the second chapter, the independent study classes at the University are not numerically graded; therefore, they cannot be used to prop up an athlete's GPA, only to help him hit the minimum six credits earned per quarter toward his major. As a result, I do not think the use of independent study courses warrants the same level of criticism of the University that "paper classes" brought onto the University of Carolina at Chapel Hill, but I do think the AAC should analyze how many athletes are using the courses, from which teams, and in what departments. The issues surrounding ensuring the level of rigor within independent studies courses extends beyond the athlete population at the University and well beyond the University itself. There is a desire to not police faculty offering independent study courses, but the rigor per credit offered should be examined in general.

Lastly, the advisers use crisis management tools for athletes who are at risk for becoming ineligible. Depending on how the adviser calculates the athletes' need to earn credits versus protecting their GPAs, the adviser can suggest that an athlete shift from taking a course for a numeric grade to taking it on a satisfactory / not satisfactory (S/NS) basis. Taking a not satisfactory (NS) grade is better than an athlete receiving a 0.0 in a class which would negatively impact his GPA. However, if a student needs to pass six credits in order to maintain eligibility, he may have to stay enrolled for a numeric grade and work to earn a 0.7, the lowest grade for which credit will be conferred. Such balancing acts of eligibility are not rare for special admits. Advisers will also recommend that athletes seek out support from faculty in the courses in which they are struggling, and that they request extra credit. The staff present the image of faculty members as embracing athletes' requests, stating, "At the end of the quarter, you can go back to the professor and say 'Hey, I am not doing well in your class, can I do extra credit?' and they

will say, 'Sure. You receive credits for coming in my office; it's called participation. You're not a zero in my class.'" Advising sessions include the strategy of talking with faculty about grade concerns:

> Adviser: [Asks about a dance class]
> Athlete: I messed up on my midterm.
> Adviser: Last quarter people didn't get good grades, but they passed.
> Athlete: If I get worried, I'll set up an office hours.
> Adviser: Yeah, you know what to do.

In the passage above, the adviser identified passing as the attainable benchmark for the class and the athlete, concerned about a poor performance on a midterm exam, already knew that concerns over passing should be addressed by visiting the professor for the course during office hours. Similarly, as early as Bridge, athletes heard the message that they should reach out to faculty when in difficulty. In the afternoon section, one of the AAC staff members announced, "I've had a student raise one whole letter grade by talking to their teacher." This narrative of the supportive faculty who are happy to forgive inconsistent performances throughout a course contrast with athletes' experiences: when one athlete was asked if he "want[ed] to talk to the professor" regarding whether he should make the shift to S/NS, he replied, "[The] professor show no interest in hearing what I have to say." While the tool of faculty communication may work in some scenarios, it seems it often puts athletes in a bad position and potentially reinforces negative stereotypes surrounding athletes. Based on how the system operates, as reports of faculty who are not interested in talking with athletes filter back to the advisers, the list of courses may be edited down to prevent similar negative interactions in the future.

Beyond course selection and the tools advisers use to guide athletes on their academic paths, advisers ultimately help athletes select majors within which they will hopefully earn a degree. Major selection, like class selection, is constrained by the athletes' preparation and

athletic schedules as previously discussed. Aiming athletes at a major that the adviser believes is attainable takes strategy. While advisers may want athletes to be able to take their shot and then self-select into a less competitive major, very difficult classes that are not likely to fit into the athletes' final majors are systematically deferred to future quarters, by which time the athletes will have hopefully shifted their focus toward a more realistic aim. Shifting Ricky away from taking physics or chemistry classes until he had completed his initial entry level math class was a strategy that ultimately retained his eligibility and redirected his focus onto communications. However, for athletes like Rob, being told to delay his intro to psychology class may ultimately block his entry into the major; unlike Ricky, he may have possessed the potential to be successful in his entry level course. The psychology major expects students to carry above a 3.2 GPA in several psychology courses to gain admission to the department. In Rob's case, his adviser likely took this factor into account when weighing the competitiveness of the major, and deterred him from enrolling. When discussing Rob's case, his adviser told me that only one athlete, in a low profile sport, had managed to major in psychology during the adviser's tenure at the University.

The issue of the competitiveness of majors on the University campus was an issue for the advisers in athletics and advisers at large. One adviser spoke of the distinction between earning a degree and academic success in a way that highlighted the tensions of ever increasing competitiveness of majors across the University:

> It's how you define success. Yeah, I think they can get anybody through to a degree, but is the fitting degree? Is it the degree that the kid really wants? But you look on campus and engineering is turning away half of their pre-engineering students every year and these are great students that are really achieving and could go through the program no problem. But they're weeding out half of those students and they're not getting the engineering degree that they want. So, what's success?

The adviser highlights a tension that transcends the divide between athletes and students at large. The competitiveness of majors on the University campus forces many students into majors that they did not intend to pursue initially. However, athletes who are special admits enter with credentials that put them at long odds to pass the introductory series of competitive majors, much less excel to where they can put together a competitive application for the major. In addition to looking at schedules when analyzing the issue of athletes clustering in majors, administrators should also take into consideration the competitiveness of majors across their campuses and realize how unlikely diversifying major selection is for special admits.

So what becomes the default major? Currently, ethnic studies has developed as a major in which that faculty are seen as being able to "feel for [the athletes]" and potentially identify with them as ethnic minorities in certain cases. However, the role of ethnic studies as the default undercuts the value of the degree to the athletes and potentially to the University at large. One concern is that the athletes do not intend to major in ethnic studies. As one staff member stated, "It's like you can't cut it for another major…they just end up [in ethnic studies] because of the way their schedule works out…they take a lot of [ethnic studies] classes." When the NCAA turns up the pressure to declare a major, "A lot of my students will [declare ethnic studies] even if they have no real intention of really majoring in [ethnic studies]" because "at least they've probably taken like two or three [classes in ethnic studies] over the course of the time that they're here." So as athletes take their shot at courses aimed at competitive majors, they also are taking ethnic studies to round out their schedules and make sure they are passing six credits per quarter. When the competitive course work does not result in further support from the adviser in pursuing more academic risks, the athletes declare ethnic studies as a major to meet the NCAA requirements. The advisers are aware of the problems this process creates:

> The lack of success is where the students is just saying, "Okay, I'll do ethnic studies and fall back." They have the instructors up there and it will get them a degree. But [the athletes] haven't really put the time to go through that self-discovery process and find out where their career path really lies. It's still, "I'm going to get the League and I'll have my degree."

The reality is that, advisers have very few potential pathways for special admit athletes. When they have athletes entering college significantly less academically prepared than the students at large and then factor in the context of the highly competitive admissions process for departmental majors, the result is an increasingly restrictive list of majors that can provide homes for special admits. Ethnic studies is still an open major, but other popular majors for special admits, like communications, are increasing their selectivity and soon will no longer provide a safe haven for special admits to explore their academic identities.[36]

The Role of Learning Specialists and Academic Coordinators

Though the athletes themselves have a hard time differentiating the roles of their advisers from their learning specialists or academic coordinators, the staff fills these differentiated roles strategically to support athletes with different academic and behavioral needs. Learning specialists work with athletes who are deemed to require the highest level of academic support, including all of the athletes who have diagnosed learning disabilities. There is a high correlation between athletes who are special admits and those who have identified learning disabilities. Therefore, most of the athletes who come through Bridge as special admits end up being assigned to work with a learning specialist. For the learning specialists, the non-cognitive variables of attitude and motivation are seen as having the greatest predictive ability on their academic success, even to overcome cognitive deficits.[37]

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[36] Between 2011 and 2013, the number of football players declaring an ethnic studies major more than doubled from about 13 to about 27. During the same time period, communications majors dropped by two-thirds.

[37] A learning specialist explained that some athletes who received the AAC's support in compensating for their learning disability performed at a very high level once the compensation (extra time, etc.) was in place. For

Some special admits who seem to have sufficient skill levels, but seem as though they will need to be heavily tracked to maintain their eligibility, are paired with academic coordinators. The approaches of the learning specialists and academic coordinators differ. Most of the learning specialists expressed having a "tight grip" on the athletes to whom they are assigned. One learning specialist also checks classes to observe assigned athletes' in-class behaviors so that the athletes "know that I am keeping an eye on them." The learning specialist also communicates with faculty in departments like ethnic studies that "deal with" a lot of her athletes. With pride, the learning specialist recalled how some of her most academically resistant students informed her that they would not attend class if it were not for her requiring their attendance. One stated, "I know you are going to make me go, so I go." Her athletes are directly accountable to her to attend class, though the consequences of not attending fall to the coaches to determine the punishment. The learning specialists view themselves as having to "choose [their] battles" with the athletes they support. Attendance of class and tutoring sessions, behavior in class, weekly meetings between athletes and learning specialists, and completing work on time are the priorities that the learning specialists view as worthy of going to battle.

The relationships that learning specialists develop with athletes run deeper than other relationships within the AAC. Several factors contribute to the strength of these relationships: first, athletes tend to work with the same learning specialist from the time they enter the University until they graduate. Secondly, athletes meet with their learning specialists one-on-one for weekly meetings. The learning specialists have charts posted on the wall of their offices listing the athletes they work with. Each week as the athletes come to see them, the athlete adds a sticker next to his or her name to show they have completed their weekly meeting. In addition

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athletes who have "cognitive deficits," the factors of attitude and motivation are essential to their survival at the University.

to tracking the athletes, the placing of the stickers on the charts is seen as giving the athletes a

"sense of accomplishment." However, if the athletes forget to place the sticker on the chart, the

learning specialist will put one up for them. In addition to the weekly meetings, athletes stop by

almost daily to check in with their assigned learning specialist. The culture of the AAC, with the

office doors left wide open, encourages athletes to be in constant contact with them. The last

reason for the development of close relationships between the athletes and learning specialists

has resulted from the downturn in the efficiency and effectiveness of Study Table. Because

learning specialists question the efficacy of Study Table, they will compel athletes who need the

most support to serve their Study Table hours in the staff member's office. One learning

specialist said, "I require the freshman football players on my caseload to do their Study Table in

[my office] if they are not with a tutor because I don't think our Study Table, as it's functioning

right now, is the place they're going to get work done." For instance, in lieu of attending Study

Table, King spent anywhere from 3 to 4.5 hours per week in his learning specialist's office.

This closeness of the relationships between learning specialists and athletes can be a seen

in different lights. On the positive side, learning specialists serve as cheerleaders who can rally a

broader community of support around an athlete when needed. When an athlete struggles to a

great degree academically, one learning specialist mentioned the approach of trying to "tie in

other support networks…I'll try to get their coach to encourage them. I'll call up their parent or

auntie or grandma, and say, 'He's actually really struggling now, just give him a word of

encouragement.'" The learning specialists act as advocates for the athlete to family, faculty,

coaches, tutors, and the University's Disability Resource Center. That advocacy can help keep

athletes with very low academic preparation levels eligible and moving toward graduation,

which is a major affordance. On the other hand, the closeness of the relationships can be

exploited by the athletes as the learning specialist may work to protect them from punishment as discussed earlier. One critique of the current system is that the learning specialists do not "give guys up." As the rest of the AAC staff hand off athletes to one another and graduate them onto less tracking and support over time, the learning specialists are seen as fighting to hang on to their athletes. When one of their athletes achieves at a very high level, the learning specialists become concerned that he or she might be shifted away from the higher level of support. As I was talking with a learning specialist during one of my observations, an athlete stopped into her office to check in. As the athlete left, the learning specialist told me, "He made the Dean's list last quarter" and that she was "afraid they will take him away from me," noting that as a first-year student, "He's just a baby," so that she was concerned about letting him go.

The time learning specialists spend with their athletes ultimately is about oversight and maintenance of all of the athletes' academic support. The content of the sessions varies from skill acquisition and learning disability compensations, to very informal conversations about who an athlete is choosing as his Valentine. The management aspect includes making sure the athletes are paired with "the tutor I think they'll be successful within each of their classes" as well as "helping them go through the syllabus of each of their classes" and identifying "what they might struggle with" during the quarter. In addition to providing management and oversight, learning specialists also work with decoding or "translating" complex assignments for athletes, when "the teachers are using vocabulary that the students won't understand." The learning specialists provide a structure for the athletes they support, and based on the structure of coordinated support, if an athlete is motivated to succeed academically, it is hard for him or her to fail. The function of the learning specialists is necessary for maintaining the eligibility of the most academically underprepared athletes, but the level of support and continuation of support

means that some athletes do not become more independent over time. The system of support for

the group with the highest need is being tested. While the athletic administration is pushing to

bring more talented football players on campus regardless of academic preparation, the role of

the learning specialists is becoming more strained, meaning that they carry larger caseloads with

athletes who exhibit higher levels of need. While more learning specialists may be hired within

the AAC, a broader tension persists over the role the current learning specialists play and how it

fits with the rest of the staff, especially the academic coordinators.

Athlete Accountability through Academic Coordination

The academic coordinators also track athletes and oversee their progress academically,

but they do not work as hands-on with the athletes on their academic material. Though the

academic coordinators appreciated the different approaches the AAC team brought to working

with athletes, the more hands-off approach presented by the coordinators showed a concern that

the learning specialists "do a little too much." One coordinator expressed a concern that the

learning specialists were too available, demonstrated by their willingness to immediately respond

to text messages from athletes very late at night. Such support by the learning specialists was

seen as enabling the athletes to avoid taking responsibility for their own actions, "I think [the

availability of the learning specialists] doesn't create independent learners because they are not

going to do things themselves because [the learning specialist] is going to do it. [The learning

specialist] will remind me…tell me." The structure provided by the learning specialists allows

athletes to avoid developing their own structures of self-regulation. In contrast, academic

coordinators, including academic advisers who also work as coordinators, wanted to hold

athletes accountable for their actions and inactions. Because the academic coordinators tend to

work with athletes who have a high level of academic preparation, the ability to self-regulate

one's academics and stay eligible was more likely for the population of athletes working with an academic coordinator. As an athlete's behavior showed signs of successful self-regulation, his assigned academic coordinator would pass him on to another academic coordinator. In a sense, the academic coordinators allow students to graduate from working with them in a way that is not paralleled by the learning specialists.

While the academic coordinator model sounds ideal, it is still subject to the constraints of the system. When an all-star NFL-bound football player required staff oversight because of his behavior, one academic coordinator discussed his role in working with the athlete as, "I was tracking [football player]; I need to know where he was at all times. If [football player] misses, I need to know about that. I don't cut any deals with him. Documentation like I told you earlier, you have to make sure it is documented." Even a coordinator who wants to be hands off with athletes has to have constant awareness of certain athletes' every move. The documentation for the coaches and the refusal to cut deals is part of what the academic coordinator sees as holding the athletes accountable.

The constraints of the system impose limits on how much an athlete can be accountable for and how much they have agency over their own path. An academic coordinator discussing athlete accountability for academics and athletics at the University stated:

> My philosophy is if you don't want to do it and you can't do it, go home. What is sad about the NCAA is that they're penalizing us if a kid decides to leave. He want to leave. Well, we'll dock you a point for that. To me that is defeating the purpose. I am creating independent learners. If he make a decision to say I want to leave he can't because he is a puppet, you treat him like a puppet.

The coordinator's quote above illustrates the frustration between having to navigate the constraints of the system while attempting to meet the AAC's goal of developing athletes into independent learners. Athlete accountability and agency are limited when you cannot allow an

athlete to fail or leave. Both learning specialists and academic coordinators have to support athletes' movement along a pathway toward staying eligible and attaining a degree at the University, sometimes against the wishes of the athletes themselves.

The Role of Tutoring

The academic support provided by the tutoring through the AAC is one of the greatest affordances high profile special admits receive at the University. Tutoring both supports athletes in their academic performance and adds a layer of tracking of an athletes' day-to-day progress in their course work. Tutors file reports on each of their sessions and alert AAC staff members if an athlete misses a session or is in a critical position where he or she may not pass a course. To the special admit athlete, tutoring provides a point of entry into difficult academic material. As mentioned in the discussion on affordances in Chapter 6, the tutoring provided by the AAC operates as a hybrid space that allows for an expansion of what constitutes competent participation. As expressed in the athletes' narratives, the tutors are largely seen as breaking down material that is inaccessible within the classroom setting and presenting it in a format that the special admit athletes can digest. The role of tutoring varies across the entire athlete population, but for the special admits, I will explore what the established norms of tutoring are and how those norms influence athlete accountability for academic learning.

I will start with an overview of the tutoring operations offered through the AAC. The tutoring support is a significant selling point in the recruitment process for athletes, especially for special admits who may have some concerns about shifting from high school to a moderately selective university. The AAC support is presented to sell athletes both on the high reputation of the University and on the support for their academic success, showing a successful pathway for

special admits to a prestigious degree. The tutoring support was cited as a deciding factor in Clayton's college selection process.

In my data collection on the tutoring at the AAC, I participated as a tutor and observed sessions during Bridge; and then, over the course of the academic year following Bridge, I observed sessions held in the Study Table space while I worked as a monitor, sessions in the computer lab, and in the main study space surrounded by the AAC staff. During my observations, I noted the characteristics of the tutors and athletes. Though there were plenty of exceptions, the majority of the tutors were white females and most of the athletes were non-white males. Athletes who participated in tutoring in the AAC were predominantly involved in high profile sports. While the size of the football team means that they tend to be highly represented in the AAC, the other large team sports, such as men's and women's rowing, were not comparably represented in the tutoring areas. My general observations confirmed that tutoring tends to focus on special admit populations from high profile sports, which are disproportionately comprised of men of color.

Though some tutors at the AAC are adults over 40 years of age, the majority are fellow undergraduates or graduate students in their 20s. As a result, there is banter between the male athletes and female tutors that is flirtatious and sometimes overtly sexualized. While the AAC has rules to prevent relationships between tutors and athletes, and therefore an increased risk for academic scandals, some athletes still hug tutors when they see each other for sessions and foster non-academic relationships with the their tutors. This non-academic relationship can be athletically based. I observed tutoring sessions in the fall in which the tutors debriefed football games with the athletes. Discussing athletics in a tutoring session is not necessarily bad; in fact, caring about athletics may be the way a tutor gains trust and connects with an athlete before

starting the academic work. However, I also witnessed a tutor requesting that her tutee sign a football for her. At the point that a tutor is requesting an athlete's signature, the tutor is shifting the dynamic of the session toward valuing the athlete for his athletic prowess rather than his academic prowess and significantly, the signature puts the tutor in debt to the athlete. Such an overlap of the athletic and academic domains in the hybrid space of the AAC can be potentially problematic.

In general, tutors seemed to understand their own value to the AAC through their assigned athletes. One tutor I spoke to was honored to be placed with a very high profile basketball player who needed a large amount of academic support. The tutor viewed the pairing as a vote of confidence from the learning specialists who trusted her to work with such a valuable asset. Through the work of the learning specialists, the top high profile athletes with the lowest academic credentials get paired with the best tutors. Top tutors understand the concerns over eligibility of the athletes and stay in direct contact with the learning specialists, and in one case, a tutor with a long tenure at the AAC was known to have the basketball coach's cell phone number and encouragement to call him directly if she had any problems with his players.

Among the tutoring I observed, there were problematic encounters between athletes and tutors, but they were outliers within the field notes I collected. Such problematic encounters included a tutor discussing getting alcohol for athletes, discussions about partying and drug use, which occurred infrequently, and on one occasion I witnessed an issue of accidental academic dishonesty. A few athletes began a tutoring session by confronting their tutor, "Wow [tutor] that was the same test. The questions were the same…Not the ones [the professor] posted, the ones you had." The tutor tried to calm down the athletes, and it was decided to not say anything about it. While old tests circulate around sororities, fraternities and other study centers, the AAC has

more at risk when they allow the practice of tutors teaching material from past tests since the eligibility of the athletes receiving the support could be jeopardized.

Tutor and Athlete Dynamics

Special admit athletes who struggle to understand the course readings and lectures independently of their tutoring form a dependent dynamic with the tutors. A learning specialist at the AAC is pushing to better define the expectations of tutors and athletes to make the athletes more responsible for completing reading and coursework outside of the tutoring sessions so that tutoring sessions are not "a replacement for their own learning and their own engagement with the materials," because the current system has set up the athletes to expect "to be spoon fed" the material "[they] need to be successful in this class without the student putting in their work." While the AAC wants special admit athletes to develop into independent learners, the athletes learn early in the summer Bridge program that it is easier to sit frozen at a computer and wait for a tutor to offer guidance than it is to try to complete the work independently. The efficiency of working with the tutors in Bridge meant that as early as the second week of class, most special admits would wait to have their turn with a tutor, with only their heading typed on a page. The tutoring support provided to athletes in Bridge prepared them for working with tutors throughout the academic year. It also set them up with the expectation that all of their tutors would attend lecture and would have completed all of the readings.

The AAC provides an initial context for the special admit athletes that establishes an expectation of support that allows athletes to "feel like they need to be sitting next to a tutor or [learning specialist] to do anything." While the staff try to "wean them off" constant one-on-one help, there is also a concern that the athletes have "anxiety issues" when it comes to completing work independently. Thus, the system in the AAC sets high tutoring expectations in Bridge, and

then perpetuates very high levels of academic support for fear of raising the anxiety levels of the athletes.

In contrast, the learned behavior of athletes as told through their narratives is a systematic lowering of work done outside of tutoring sessions, because of the expectation that tutors will break down lectures and readings, distill all of the material from the course into the most important details needed to be successful, and present that material to the athletes, either individually or in small groups. Note taking in class becomes redundant as most large lecture classes have a designated note taker. Reading becomes redundant because tutors provide athletes with their own outlines and key points. The outcome is that a special admit athlete can receive all the distilled information he needs to know to pass a five credit course in one to two hours of tutoring per week.

Inside Tutoring Sessions

Tutors take different approaches to working on course material with athletes. Some show remarkable talent for keeping on task an athlete who is actively trying to distract the focus of the session away from academics. Others take a much more transactional approach, focusing on the skills and requirements for the course and not making space for an engaged athlete to share his thoughts. Ultimately, athletes are held accountable for very little in sessions, except by a few tutors who are outliers and face resistance in tutoring sessions for running counter to the established norms. The following vignettes are examples of tutoring sessions I observed that highlight some aspects of accountability that I will address later in the chapter.

One example of a tutor working to tactically minimize distractions an athlete presented in a tutoring session took place between a white female tutor and a black male athlete. As the tutor brought out color coded flash cards, the athlete was mildly resistant stating, "some people may

like flash cards, others just like to look at their notes…[smiles]." The two then looked at the tutor's notes, but the athlete was quickly distracted by his phone, saying, "She emailed me back." The tutor answered, "Your little sister?" and also took an opportunity to look at her phone. After a pause, the athlete said, "Whew! That was a hot text message. I sent it to you." The tutor then checked her messages and indicated that the message was a picture of the athlete, but made no mention of its hotness or inappropriateness. The tutor was able to refocus the athlete's attention on the material discussing a local mountain range, but the athlete again distracted the session by turning his head to look out the window, "Is it raining?" The athlete continued the distraction by commenting on how a friend was supposed to bring him food. The tutor again redirected him to the work, discussing another set of mountains. The athlete told the tutor that the name of the mountain range matches that of a skating rink in Atlanta. He then asked the tutor if she has been to Atlanta, which she had not. Again she had to redirect the athlete to the material, and he added that he was not going to the mountains because they were too high and he was scared to look down from a roller coaster. The tutor in this case managed to continually redirect the athlete back to course material without directly confronting him about his constant distractions.

Importantly, the tutor in this scenario had already created flash cards to use with the athlete rather than having him make his own for the class. Also, when they studied the lecture notes, they followed her notes rather than his. The athlete was able to assert a small amount of agency in avoiding being quizzed by the tutor using flashcards. In the approximately 20 minutes I observed the interactions above, the tutor and athlete did cover a lot of course material, but the tutor had to bring the athlete back from external distractions at least four times. Not all tutors are as successful at keeping the focus of sessions aimed at the academic material. As I mention

above, discussions of athletics, social lives, and a host of other topics arise in tutoring sessions and often co-opt the hour.

In contrast to the example above where a tutor showed skill at returning an athlete to a discussion of the course material, other tutors had difficulty incorporating athletes' contributions and instead kept the session very transactional. I watched a session, again with a white female tutor and black male athlete, in which the athlete was sharing what he learned, "In class we are talking about slavery…" following with a specific account of an abolitionist discussed in lecture. The tutor did not engage the athlete around what he was sharing, and instead cut to questions about logistics and skills, "Does your professor have lecture notes online?" After the athlete replied in the affirmative, the tutor asked, "Is it easy for you to take notes in class?" The athlete then mentioned that the class has a note taker and that "she takes great notes" before adding, "I tend to just remember what I hear." This session took place in the winter as a new set of classes were beginning; therefore, the tutor and athlete may not yet have established a rapport. However, the de-emphasis on the athlete's contribution and engagement and a focus on logistics and skills shaped the expectation of the relationship moving forward. Upon hearing about the class note taker and the athlete's claim about remembering what he heard, the tutor did not recommend that the athlete be accountable for his own note taking to be supplemented by the AAC provided note taker.

Athletes must often navigate tutors who have very different expectations. While the tutor in the first vignette did not seem concerned when the athlete checked his phone, another tutor told an athlete to put his phone away during their session, asking, "Am I going to have to crack the whip? Or will you have done some of the reading before our sessions?" The athlete had left his book at home, limiting the work the two could complete during the tutoring session. The

tutor told the athlete that she expected more from him – a demand of athlete accountability that

stood out against the norm. Within tutoring sessions, the greatest lack of accountability for

students is that very few tutors require athletes to complete readings, or even attempt them,

outside of the tutoring sessions. The demanding tutor met with resistance from the student, who

both actively pulled out a cell phone during a session, and passively forgot his book at home and

handicapped the progress of the session.

The following vignettes look at issues of accountability for reading within tutoring

sessions. Importantly, there is a difference between athletes whose academic reading levels

make it very difficult for them to understand some of the dense course material, and others who

have the reading skills but who choose not to read. However, the outcome in tutoring sessions

looks the same: athletes not prepared to discuss the readings and instead needing the readings to

be taught to them. In one session I observed, a white female tutor working with a multi-ethnic

male engaged the athlete in a discussion about Charlemagne's reign. In preparation for writing a

paper on Charlemagne, the tutor asked the athlete, "How do you like to write essays?" The

athlete replied, "I like to outline. That will help me when you are not here and I am writing the

paper tonight at home." Then in discussing the outline, the tutor asked the athlete to provide

evidence for his arguments from the text. After a very long pause as the athlete flipped through

the pages, the tutor started to ask questions to lead the athlete toward thinking about the text and

lecture. Not knowing the text, the athlete interrupted the text search by asking, "Do you think we

should just head to the computer lab to start working on the introduction?" The tutor consented

and the attempt to outline the paper was abandoned. Though the athlete initially wanted to

outline the paper, his struggle to connect the argument to the text led to avoidance in the form of

moving to the computer lab to start writing.

Some athletes are more directly resistant to reading. One white female working with a white male asked the athlete if he had completed the reading, to which he replied that he was "basically done with the spark notes." The tutor, the same one who held a different athlete accountable for not using a cell phone during sessions, expressed her frustration with the athlete for only reading about 10% of the actual book. The athlete asked, "You have read this book?" The tutor replied, "Yes, I love this book." The athlete followed, "[I] never read. It's not important." Few athletes are as directly resistant as the one above, and few tutors are as demanding. The result was extreme frustration on the part of the tutor who debriefed her session with the Study Table monitors, including me. In the end, she felt like she at least made him work for the hour discussing the plot adding, "…and he thought he was going to charm his way out of it." In contrast, many tutors come prepared to supply the athletes with everything they need and do not have high expectations that they will complete any work independently.

In one such case, a white female tutor was working with two black male athletes for whom she made printed handouts discussing the key points of the readings. She asked if they did the readings and after a mumbled response, she said, "That was last week's work. This one [pointing to her handout] I put quotes in italics and then ask questions." They discussed some of the content and then she informed them that she would pull out the vocabulary for the next chapter before breaking down the meaning of a cartoon included in their reading, which they had not read. Though there was an exchange of ideas, the tutor was the one who had to clarify the meaning and connect the reading with lecture. She ended the session asking the athletes to read and respond to her handout questions by their following session and asked how their quizzes had gone. The athletes responded that they were earning 10 out of 10 on the quizzes and receiving 8.5 out of 9 possible points on the homework, which made the tutor very happy. The athletes got

very high grades without having to read any of the material independent of their tutoring sessions. In essence, a very strong tutor can master the distillation of a course and present all that is needed to be known for evaluation within hour long tutoring sessions. However, the stronger the tutor's distillation skills, the less likely the athletes are to grow to become independent learners.

Some tutors simply make the assumption that athletes do not read. One white female tutor and two black male athletes were discussing a reading on race and how it is a social construction. She began breaking down the reading, mentioning several professional athletes described in the article, and asked the tutees if they knew who any of them were. One athlete responded yes, because he already read the article. The tutor seemed surprised and said, "Oh, okay. Then you can break it down for us." The athlete then explained what he learned from the article, but the tutor jumped back in to further break down the article, and returned to dominating the conversation. Athletes are socialized to expect that they do not need to read. Those who do read have trouble finding a voice in tutoring sessions where the tutors have become accustomed to teaching the material rather than tutoring the athletes.

Outcomes of the Tutoring System

The tutoring provided for special admit athletes enables them to distance themselves from engagement in class and from reading outside of their tutoring sessions. In talking with tutors and staff at the AAC, I met several who had developed a reputation for holding athletes accountable for reading course material, but who were seen as outliers within the system. As a result, athletes learn that they can save their time and energy by focusing on their tutoring and still manage to remain academically eligible. With the context of affordances and constraints in

place, and having offered a deeper understanding of the tutoring system, I want to present

Clayton's reflection on his first quarter's academics one more time:

> "I'm really not a good reader…the only thing I read in the whole quarter was a
> little bit for the life skills class." Clayton credited the tutoring as the "whole
> reason I got the grade I got." In contrast, when Clayton started classes in the fall,
> "I was actually in the front row with, with a buddy of mine 'cause it is kind of
> more a textbook…first class of college…but…that lasted probably three days."
> When asked what happened after those three days taking notes in the front of the
> class, Clayton said, "I don't know! Like it was a lot, it was a lot of material that
> was really uninteresting to me. Like History, you know…and the teacher…I
> didn't really like how she taught, I mean, so eventually I kind of just stopped...and
> our tutor kind of feels the same a lot, a lot of the time, so…it was…I found
> it…better to just stop."

In light of this chapter's discussion on tutoring and accountability, one sees that Clayton's initial

eagerness to sit in the front row was thwarted by his low level of academic preparation and

trouble understanding the lectures. He moved from the front row toward the back and realized

that his tutor provided him with a replication of the lecture and reading in a more digestible form.

In thinking about expending effort outside of his tutoring, simply put, he found "it…better to just

stop." Clayton finished his first quarter at the University with close to a 3.0 GPA having only

completed a "little bit" of reading for one class, but taking full advantage of the tutoring

provided.

The tutors are also caught in a system in which it is easier to simply teach material than it

is to draw out responses from athletes who are not likely to have completed their assigned

reading, and who might not have a very thorough understanding of the material even if they

attempted the reading. The use of questioning or the Socratic Method fails in the current tutoring

structure because of the lack of athlete preparation for sessions. Ultimately, the AAC ideal of

developing independent learners is not realized in the tutoring program. The system runs counter

to what one staff member presented as the ideal: "I think that with tutoring you can't take that

same teaching approach – you're cheating the kid. It's about helping them develop those skills so they don't need you. You're trying to make yourself no longer useful." Instead, athletes' dependence on tutoring grows as they do not improve their reading, note taking, or study skills in part because the tutoring system enables them to remain passive.

Tutoring as the Locus of Learning

Tutoring sessions become the locus of learning for special admits. As they find themselves left out of many classroom conversations, effectively blocked from accessing the academic domain, athletes with the lowest academic profiles lean heavily on the support system of the AAC to provide them with the academic instruction required to remain eligible. As Darnell pointed out, "I learned more in tutoring sessions than in class." Although tutoring arranged through the AAC occurs in some academic buildings on the main campus, the bulk of tutoring for special admits takes place inside the AAC. Therefore, the center of academic learning for the athletes moves into a space within the athletic complex with the tracking systems and oversight that leads back to their coaches. Although staff expressed their wish to eliminate "tutoring as a substitute for studying on their own," the systems in place and unintentional pedagogy of the majority of tutors reinforce detachment from the academic domain.

Additionally, tutors of high profile athletes are aware of the constraints acting on the system insofar as they understand the need to pass courses and remain eligible. While the AAC staff attempt "to stress whether students pass or fail is not on you" to tutors during their orientation, there is an understanding that "there are tutors that feel pressure…nobody wants…the students you're working with to fail." Many tutors find themselves in the role of primary instructor in the subject area they support with the high stakes of eligibility as a subtle, but present, pressure on them and the athletes with whom they work.

In digging deeper into the patterns of reading and academic engagement of the athletes, I noticed an interesting trend. Athletes read much less for classes that they deemed "easy" and were encouraged to take to boost their GPA than they did for classes that they thought would be difficult. Darnell did not read at all for his ethnic studies class, but did read for his economics class. Similarly, Rob claimed to have read about "85%" in one of his challenging fall courses, but not at all in his online environment course. Athletes do not see a need to engage in classes that they falsely assume will be easy. As a result, they do not develop reading and critical thinking skills in more accessible coursework that then can then transfer to their more challenging classes. In a sense, the athletes are skipping crucial steps in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Rather than engaging at the level they are at and improving their skills incrementally, they disengage from course work that may be more accessible because it is "easy" and crucially – the readings and engagement are done for them through the tutorial services. When athletes then attempt to engage in very challenging readings, course discussions and paper writing as they "take their shot" at their intended competitive major, they find themselves underprepared to engage with the material as a result of not being held accountable for academic engagement in prior course work.

An Emergent Explanation for Academic Underperformance

The constraints and affordances determine how athletes are tracked by advisers, learning specialists and academic coordinators, and even their tutors. Through detailing how high profile special admit athletes interact with the branches of support offered by the AAC, the concept of accountability and athletes' realms of accountability are filtered through the constraint of eligibility. For advisers, schedules and academic preparation determine the amount of risk an athlete can take in their course work. Learning specialists and academic coordinators balance

between enabling the dependent behaviors of the athletes, the necessary oversight required for reporting to coaches, and a desire to hold athletes accountable for their own education choices. Lastly, the tutors learn that the athletes' lack of preparation for sessions, perpetuated by the difficulty understanding the material that results from their levels of academic preparation, places the tutors in the role of primary instructor for the athletes. As a result of this tracking and support, how do we make sense of athletes' academic underperformance? The answer lies in athletes' academic self-handicapping behaviors as revealed through inductive data analysis.

Self-handicapping refers to the undermining of one's own performance with the goal of impression management (Kloditz & Arkin, 1982). In the case of athletes, when they expect they might fail an exam or a class, they may engage in practices that actually increase their likelihood of failing, or lowering their achievement, so they have an excuse for the failure other than lack of ability. Since academic achievement reflects valued characteristics, such as intelligence, the fear of appearing unintelligent if one fails a test or a class may prompt one to engage in self-handicapping behaviors in order to protect one's image and ego. Examples of self-handicapping behaviors include procrastination, over scheduling one's self, not sleeping before an exam, etc. (Migley & Urdan, 2001). The behaviors can be active (e.g., getting drunk before an exam) or passive (e.g., failing to study for the exam); but to have the behavior count as self-handicapping, it must be purposeful so that the lack of studying was done so that the athlete would have a ready excuse for low performance on a test, aimed at influencing the judgment of others (Migley & Urdan, 2001).

Urdan and Migley (2003) argue that the greatest predictor of self-handicapping behavior is a history of low achievement. The cycle perpetuates underperformance as athletes develop the expectation of low achievement which causes them to self-handicap, in turn increasing their

likelihood of failing again. As a result, self-handicappers may gradually withdraw effort from academic work altogether, especially if the cause of their failure is linking to what they perceive to be stable and uncontrollable causes, such as lack of ability (Urdan & Midgley, 2003). For athletes who enter the University as special admits, their academic preparation relative to the students at large sets them up to struggle academically, especially in competitive fields. As athletes are advised to "take their shot" at a difficult major during their first year, the failure that is the most likely outcome sets in motion a trigger for self-handicapping behavior.

Many athletes start exhibiting self-handicapping behavior even before they take their shot in winter quarter. Self-handicapping behaviors function to protect the ego of the handicapper. Feick and Rhodewalt (1997) found that self-handicappers feel better about themselves after failure than students who do not handicap. Although their ego is shielded by self-handicapping, they often describe themselves as "lazy" or "shiftless," which if preferable to being seen as unintelligent (Covington, 1992). Several athletes I interviewed framed themselves as lazy when discussing their academic shortcomings. In talking with Darnell about his academic motivation before the school year began, he contended, "I just get lazy. 'Cause I know the importance of why I'm here…to get a degree…but then sometimes I just, I find myself not thinking about that and…just being lazy." In contrast, Darnell thought very highly of his academic ability, "I have the capability of being that 4.0 student. For me it's just not being lazy." Similarly, Kevin felt that, "If I tried, I'd probably do really well, um, but like I said, I just make sure I pass or make sure I get enough to where I'm happy with, so…I think I'd do fine." Ricky, too, expressed in the spring interview that his short comings came down to effort, "I just need to kick some of the laziness outta me. [Laughs.] Like, I just know I could work harder at school stuff and put in

even more effort." Some of the athletes, even at the start of the school year, had created a self-perception as lazy, but highly capable academically.

Strikingly, the athletes I interviewed tended to cite the reputation and "prestige" of the University as a "top notch school," "the [in the top 30] ranked school in the country," "the Business School is the best," all as reasons the athletes chose to enroll. Even Kevin who claimed to not worry about academics beyond passing his classes cited the "academics" of the University as a deciding factor in his college choice. Clarence set the bar for himself the highest stating that in three years he wanted "to be a three-time academic All-American." From this high level of respect for the academic prestige of the institution and high levels of individual academic goals for themselves, the athletes met with the reality of their relatively low levels of preparation coupled with low academic expectations generated through the constrains acting on them. Most of the athletes I interviewed, operating within the context of the AAC, had largely withdrawn their academic effort by the end of the year, especially in classes that were supposed to be "easy."

Advising athletes to take what are framed as "easy" or "generous" classes with high grade payoffs came across as a recommendation to take the path of least resistance, to withdraw focus and limit one's investment in academics. While some classes proved "easy," others required much more work than anticipated. This shift in expectation triggered self-handicapping as a response to save face in light of academic struggle in what constituted "easy" classes. While Rob had wanted to try his hand at business, he knew that working toward being a business major would be a stretch for a football player given his time commitments and the major's minimum 3.5 GPA requirement. Instead, Rob refocused on communications knowing that, "The requirement is just like a 2.5 which is easy to get…" In winter, however, Rob took two

communications courses, earning just above the 2.0 mark in one and just below in the other. In

spring, he took a third communications course, again earning around a 2.0. Athletes who are

planning to take an easy pathway and then struggle are forced with coming up with an alternative

explanation, other than their lack of ability, for their short comings. Rob admitted to not putting

in his full effort as a mode of self-handicapping himself and explaining his low grades in what

should be classes to help boost his GPA. In discussing his online environment class, he told me

it was "extremely easy." He received below a 3.0 in the class, but actively managed my

perception of his ability by telling me that, "If I would have put all my effort into it, I could have

easily got a 4.0." By reducing effort, the athletes in general were able to maintain confidence in

their academic abilities despite their academic performances being well below their goals.

While self-handicappers see themselves as lazy, observers of self-handicappers develop

negative attitudes about their personalities and work ethic (Smith & Strube, 1991). Some AAC

staff members also saw athletes as lazy. In discussing classroom behavior, one staff member

commented that she encourages athletes to take notes in class, but does not fight them over it, "I

ask them to try…if they don't they piss off the teacher." When I asked why they would choose

not to take notes, she added, "It is too fast for some. Some are too lazy or asleep." The staff

member had a clear sense that some athletes were not capable of keeping up with the pace of

class, but for others, she believed they were intelligent enough to keep up, but were simply too

lazy. This perception ties to the learning specialists' relative praise and criticism of their

athletes, praising athletes by calling them "low maintenance" and criticizing them by calling

them "so lazy". Some athletes who may be concerned about their own ability to take notes or

perform academically may start presenting themselves as lazy to protect their image as

academically competent and simply disengaged.

On several occasions, I saw staff members encouraging athletes to "try" in order to earn a

0.7 to receive credit for a class rather than switching to the S/NS option. The line between

athletes passing and failing is perceived to be one of effort versus ability. By sending that

message to students, the staff may inadvertently support self-handicapping behaviors. For

instance, during one advising session, I witnessed the following exchange:

> Athlete: ASL is going great. History, comm, good. I got 48 out of 60 on my test…
> Adviser: That's good.
> Athlete: That's not good, but I didn't really study.
> Adviser: Think about how well you would have done if you studied.

Rather than addressing the fact that the athlete did not study for the test, the adviser boosts the

ego of the athlete despite his self-handicapping behavior. Ultimately, the staff members of the

AAC are complicit in the self-handicapping behaviors of athletes as an ego protection strategy.

While past research looks at self-handicapping from the standpoint of the individual, my research

indicates that the contextual support for self-handicapping may lead to systematic

underperformance by athletes broadly and special admits with low levels of academic

preparation specifically. By disconnecting athletes' performance from a discussion of

preparation and ability, staff members perpetuate self-handicapping behaviors as a way for

athletes to protect their academic self-esteem. One potential fix to this problem is to praise the

strategies athletes use rather than their intelligence (Dweck, 1999). By focusing on growth and

improvement, the staff may be able to help athletes see their academic abilities as malleable

rather than fixed. However, this strategy would require the staff to be open and direct with

athletes about their entry credentials relative to the students at large and to help them navigate

the academic domain with honest conversations about current skill levels, rather than the

approach I witnessed of letting athletes "take their shot" and then crash and burn into ethnic studies.

Learning within the System

Athletes navigate the complex system of support as they learn how to differentiate the *musts* from the *shoulds*. The system of constraints acting on the athletes presents a number of musts, mostly in the athletic domain. The system of affordances presented through the support of the AAC offers the athlete a grey area to navigate. While class attendance is presented as a must, though paying attention in lecture is only a should, the athletes find ways to beat the system through building relationships with class checkers, learning specialists, tutors, etc. They learn that attending Study Table is a must that carries no consequences and therefore becomes a should. They learn that by attending Study Table, but failing to bring anything to work on, they can sweet talk the monitors into dismissing them early.

The athletes do learn academic material; they write papers, pass classes, and earn degrees. However, they are also learning the systems that surround the academic and athletic domains, and as shown in this chapter, they learn that they can survive the academic requirements at the University with minimal effort as long as they take advantage of the support provided. The tracking systems in place to oversee their eligibility, and utility to the University, will help keep them just above the academic mark needed to play, leaving them free to relax and be "lazy" within the academic domain.

Findings on Accountability

While the staff of the AAC has the goal of turning special admits with low academic profiles into independent learners, the constraints acting on the system requiring their eligibility greatly limits how much the system can allow the athletes to feel the consequences of their

actions; to be held accountable for their efforts in the academic domain. What does accountability look like when an athlete cannot be allowed to fail? It looks like the tracking of an athlete's moves across the branches of the support offered by the AAC. It results in the academic self-handicapping behaviors of the athlete, backfilled by intensive support by tutors who work to teach the athlete what he needs to know to pass his classes. Ultimately, earning a degree is seen as the paramount achievement for athletes and undergraduates in general, but what a special admit athlete learns along the way has much more to do with systems navigation that it does with the content of their major.

Chapter 8

Theory Revisited

Now that the data have been presented, I will use this chapter to apply both theoretical

frameworks I originally presented in Chapter 3: Activity Theory and Figured Worlds. I will

begin by adding a layer of analysis to the thick descriptions from Chapters 5 through 7 to build a

deeper understanding of the cultural meaning behind the actions of the athletes and others in the

different domains. Additionally, I will look at athlete identities through the lens of Figured

Worlds to reveal which and how figurative and positional identities are formed and perpetuated.

Next, I will connect those identities to behaviors exhibited by the athletes, including passive and

active forms of resistance. Within the Figured Worlds framework, I will circle back to the theme

of accountability by discussing the limits to agency and self-authorship that exist within the

domains inhabited by the high profile special admit athletes at the University. I will then move

on to a systems-level analysis using Activity Theory to make sense of the constraints and

affordances acting on athletes through the lens of system goals and conflicts.

Figured Worlds and Understanding the Athletic and Academic Domains

The value of using a Figured Worlds perspective in my data analysis lies in uncovering

the meaning behind actions based on an enhanced cultural understanding. To briefly restate the

theory: identities are either figurative, meaning they are a type of character one can fulfill, or

positional, meaning that they confer or lack power in different domains or worlds. Within this

theory, an individual enacts agency through the acceptance or rejection of figurative and

positional identities in different domains.

The data in the previous chapters present a different perspective on the experiences and

pathways of high profile special admit athletes than has previously been offered in the literature.

In contrast to the experiences of athletes in Adler and Adler's (1985, 1991) work (which focused on the athletic, academic and social domains and found that the athletes experienced what they termed "role engulfment" in the athletic domain), the experiences of the athletes in this study are better understood through the lens of their constraints dominating their affordances. The constraints of the athletic domain take primacy and determine the reactions of the Athlete Academic Center (AAC) that develop affordances to make viable the existence of special admits at the University. For the athletes I interviewed, rather than experiencing role engulfment, many in their first year felt neither security nor a sense of "home" in either the academic or athletic domains. As the athletes accordingly found themselves adrift in their athletic and academic experiences at the University, the AAC through their tracking and cheerleading became a home base for many of the athletes. True freshmen like Kevin felt comfortable in the athletic domain, so certain of his athletic future that he did not bother engaging in the academic domain beyond maintaining eligibility. Athletes like Clarence, who wanted to leave but was retained, and Darnell, who wanted to stay but was let go, were limited in their engagement with both the athletic and academic domains. Similarly, Ricky found himself failing classes that would count toward his intended engineering major and being harassed by football coaches and fellow players. As a result of these conflicts and difficulties, the hybrid space of the AAC is where athletes sought and received support in their first year.

One learning specialist remarked on how she had observed over time that special admit athletes tended to improve their academic performance once they had connected with people or activities outside of the athletic domain. To encourage more special admits to find connections outside of athletics and the AAC, she and other AAC staff members developed a freshman seminar with content aimed at making connections outside of athletics and reflecting on one's

experiences. Though the course may have been successful in reaching its goals, ironically the course was offered only to athletes, and was held in the same classroom space where Study Table took place. The seminar location and composition mirrors a concern expressed more broadly that special admits do not consistently get developed and pushed out of the hybrid space into the academic domain. When thinking about the difficulty in schedules and relative preparation, trying to find ways for athletes to connect with the University and other students at large becomes a serious challenge.

The academic improvement that manifests when athletes engage in meaningful ways outside of athletics and the AAC may rarely occur during an athlete's first year. Such crossings from the hybrid space into the academic domain may take place for certain fortunate athletes, but by the end of their first year, none of the first year football players I interviewed felt like they were on a good academic path toward an intended major, or had made meaningful connections unrelated to their athletic involvement. When considering the data through a Figured Worlds perspective, a hybrid space like the AAC should help athletes pivot from the athletic domain into the academic domain. Contrary to that model, the athletes in this study were not anchored in an athletic domain, rather they were adrift at the University trying to find a foothold in both domains while using the affordances developed by the AAC to ground their understanding of themselves both as athletes and scholars. Ultimately, the athletes in this study found few opportunities to be "normal students" at the University. There were few moments for Darnell to express his desire to be just a student, viewing football as "not who I am, it's just what I like to do, it's just the sport I like to play." For Darnell, the fear of letting go of his identity as a football player altogether led him to transfer away from the University. Future research could look at

special admits who feel satisfied and successful in their academic endeavors and examine what

was the trigger for the athletes in connecting with the academic domain.

While using a Figured Worlds perspective adds insight into meaning of activities and

perceptions of athletes, the idea of the AAC as a hybrid space situated in between the athletic and

academic domains has shifted to include the system of affordances and constraints acting on the

athletes. Specifically, both the athletic and academic domains exist primarily within the system

constraints and the AAC operates as a bridge, or hybrid space, between the two anchored in the

affordances developed by the system.

Figure 8.1: Figured Worlds as seen through Affordances and Constraints
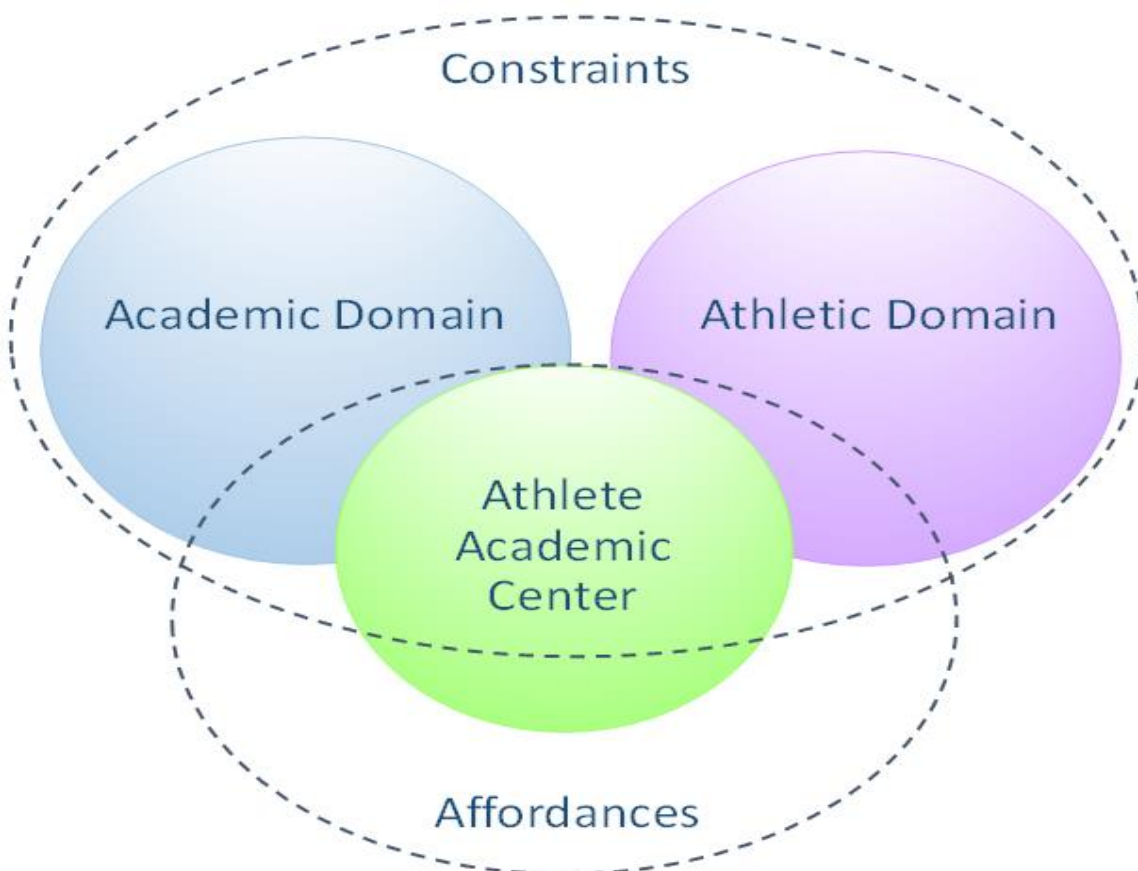
Thus, in contrast to Adler and Adler and Benson's studies that showed athletes highly engaged in

athletic domains, but mostly detached from the academic domains, my research shows that high

profile special admit athletes in their first year rarely find a sense of belonging in either domain and lean on support, like the AAC's, for encouragement and external motivation to continue to engage in either domain.

The constraints are not all equal, however. The constraints imposed on athletes by the athletic domain tend to be *musts*, while the constraints they face from the academic domain tend to be *should*s. As a result, the athletic domain has primacy over the AAC and system of support. While athletes have an option as to whether to continue to engage in the academic world or to engage in self-handicapping behaviors and withdraw, they must continue to perform athletically to hold onto their athletic scholarships when issues such as over-recruitment occur. Tracking and oversight also play a role in how the athletes engage with the athletic and academic domains. Recall that the athletes in Benson's (2000) study felt like the faculty in the academic domain exhibited a lack of concern for athletes' learning by not holding them accountable for attendance and participation like their coaches did in the athletic domain. In this study, the tracking and oversight of athletes across the athletic and academic domain by the AAC staff led to a blurring of domains. With Sam peering into classes, learning specialists talking with faculty, and tutors attending lectures to take notes and attendance, the athletic and academic domains for the first year athletes overlap significantly. This "lamination" of domains is likely to trigger the stereotype threat associated with the acknowledgement of the dual student and athlete identities as predicted by Yopyk's (2006) study. The result of the tracking and oversight from a Figured Worlds perspective is that the athletes never have the opportunity to leave their athletic domain. Because of the constraints acting on the systems - tight schedules that force athletes into many of the same classes and relatively low academic preparation levels of the special admits that distance them from accessing the class content - high profile special admits are anchored in the

hybrid space and are thus limited in their ability to forge academic identities and rarely achieve the AAC's goal of developing into independent learners.

Figurative and Positional Identities

As athletes 'try on' various identities, affiliating with some and rejecting others, how athletes come to think of themselves and how others perceive them may shape their academic performance. During my research, I collected the various names used to refer to athletes. Below is a list of those identities, categorized into academic, behavioral, high and low profile identities of athletes, as well as a category for identities of non-athletes.

Figure 8.2: In Vivo Identities from Interviews and Field Notes

Academic Identities for Athletes as called by AAC Staff	Behavioral Identities as called by Staff	Other identities for Athletes and Staff
Slow ones	Charmer	Students at Large:
Handicapable	Baby	Normies
Good student	Shirt tugger (needy)	NARP (Non-athletic regular person)
Drama nerd	Puppies / Cats (football vs. basketball)	
At risk	Flirt	Staff:
Knucklehead	Distractor	Dorm mom
Bookworm	Ringleader	Meanest one
Hybrid (between Knucklehead and Bookworm)	Mama's boy	Snitch
Lazy	Tough Guy	Babysitter
Low maintenance	Gangbanger	
	Good guy(s)	High Profile Athletes:
Academic identities as called by other athletes	Teddy bears	Migrant Worker*
Meathead	Sleeper	Cattle*
Overachiever (negative connotation)	Leader	Slave*
Caveman	Knucklehead	Puppies / Hunting dogs
Dumb jock	Entitled Brats	

	Behavioral Identities as called by other Athletes	Low Profile Sports:
	Hater (dangerous athlete)	Welfare sports

* One staff member who was a former athlete used all three starred identities. He was the only person to mention those identities

From their entry into the University through Bridge to the end of their first year, the athletes heard these figurative identities from staff and each other and learn about the characters or roles they were able to fill. The identities listed above range from the more frequently used terms like "knucklehead" and "charmer" to the infrequently used terms such as "handicapable" and "shirt tugger." Though the frequencies vary, the figure above is inclusive of all identities I documented in my field notes and interviews to represent fullest picture of the climate and context the athletes navigate in their first year at the University. Many of the identities listed in the chart above may be applied to an athlete, and then accepted or rejected by the athlete through his or her behavior. However, the identities linked to the high and low profile sports reflect athlete positionality and power within the athletic department and the University at large. The view of high profile athletes as migrant workers, cattle, or slaves reflects a belief that they are being used by the business of the athletic department for profit while not being able to earn much in return. Similarly, the view of low profile or non-revenue generating sports as welfare sports puts them in a subordinate position to high profile sports within the athletic department and University at large.

The messages athletes hear about the figurative identities afforded to them at the University starts early in the year. While the English based content in Bridge helps athletes close the gap in their academic preparation for the University, less overt lessons that are not built into the syllabi of classrooms teach athletes what is expected of them and what roles they will be afforded. As one instructor announced in the afternoon class, "You don't start with a blank slate as a student athlete." Rather, athletes learn, "You will be judged…where you sit…what you wear…" and that they will be "held to a different standard" because they are "known." Bridge becomes a point of entry to the University in which athletes can begin to choose which figurative

identities to adopt and which to reject, but context itself – the classes, instructors, coaches, and peers – helps educate athletes on the historical caricatures. In revealing the reporting lines between the AAC and the athletic domain dominated by coaches, one instructor said, "Your coaches ask us who are the sleepers, the leaders, the knuckleheads…they want to get a read on you guys." From this comment, athletes learned what figurative identities are recognized by the staff and coaches they work with, and that there are strong lines of communication between the athletic domain and the academic support center. Further, athletes learn that academic issues are reported to coaches and often result in physical punishments blurring the lines between the worlds.

In contrast to figurative identities, positional identities establish power dynamics within specific contexts (Holland et. al., 1998). Because high profile sports are traditionally played by men, the University uses the vast majority of its special admit allotments on male athletes with the occasional female special admit in a low profile sport who can act as a game-changer for a team. Bridge intentionally has a mix of male and female students because, as a staff member notes, "Women really contribute well in that sense in helping…pushing the guys to participate." Because so few women are brought in as special admits, the dynamic at Bridge teaches athletes that on the whole, females are much more prepared and academically driven than males. The staff member quoted above was concerned that the lack of males' participation stemmed from being "scared" and not wanting to "seem dumb" or to "say the wrong thing." The difference in positional power held by men and women in Bridge was reflected in the behavioral identities they adopted.

Figure 8.3: Figurative Behavioral Identities in Bridge
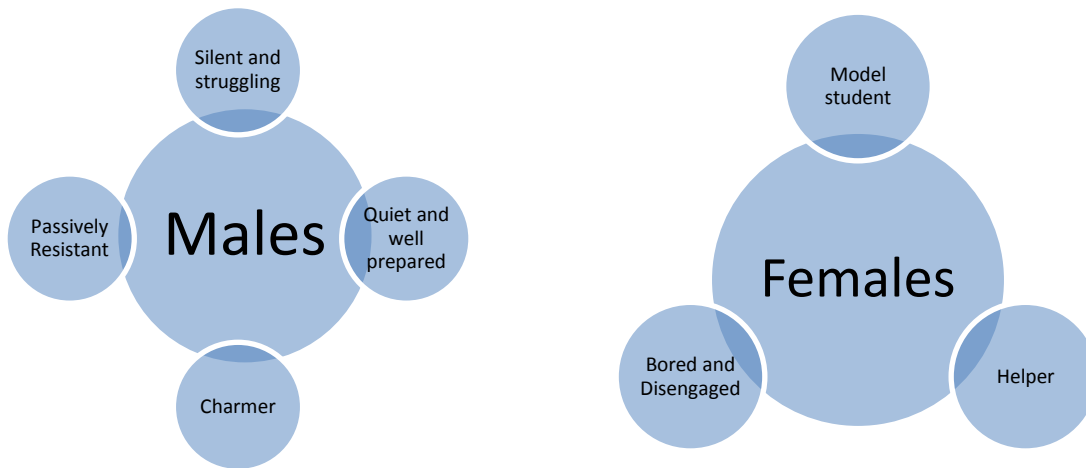
Women who adopted the model student identity exhibited ideal classroom behavior and responded to instructors' questions. The helpers supported men who fell into the silent and struggling category, acting as peer tutors. The bored and disengaged women saw Bridge as remedial and were resentful of their attendance. Passively resistant men increased in number over time, exhibiting minimal effort even when they were relatively well prepared. As one such male told me, "If I pass, I'm happy." The silent and struggling men were made up of several special admits who were willing to talk with tutors, but not in class where the stakes were higher and they feared appearing underprepared. The quiet and well-prepared group consisted of the men who were not special admits, but who limited presentation of their own academic skill level within the class so as to avoid standing out relative to other men. Lastly, the charmer established a near-flirtatious relationship with some tutors and staff in which the athlete used sweetness to elicit support, get out of trouble, or avoid requirements, which allowed for increased support without academic ability factoring into the discussion. The charmer identity allowed special admits to protect their academic egos without self-handicapping.

Identities in Transition to the Academic Figured World

Three-quarters of the way through Bridge, the class attended the University's general new-student orientation program. Orientation was framed as "a chance to meet other students – the 'normies'," the affectionate moniker used in the AAC to refer to students at large. Students were instructed not to "feed into the stereotypes. Show how awake and smart you are…" Entering the large auditorium in the center of campus for orientation, the Bridge group sat together in the back. The ways in which athletes chose to be vocal during orientation provided insight into identity formation within the academic Figured World. During a slide show in which the presenter asked students to identify images on the screen, one male who had been quiet during Bridge yelled out responses aggressively. One athlete said, "The regular people don't know us," while another added, "they gonna love us." While dominating the participation at orientation, athletes added a layer of self-critique to one another's responses. When one football player attempted an answer but stumbled grammatically, a teammate chimed in, "he's like a caveman." A female athlete also stumbled through a response, which earned laughter and the comment, "You must play a sport." When the presenter flashed the number "800+" to indicate the number of clubs at the University, one football player shouted, "What I got on my SAT." With the rest of the crowd virtually silent, the college athletes from Bridge stereotyped each other, playing into the stigma of athletics and possibly providing a preemptive strike against what they anticipated experiencing walking into a 300-person lecture hall.

Changing Perceptions of Bridge over Time

Athletes entered Bridge ready to embrace the challenge of their first college course and entry into the academic world. A staff member articulated the purpose of Bridge as helping athletes to "see themselves as students," to say, "I think I can do school." The combination of challenging

material and support from tutors led to transformative experiences. One football player

remarked, "I've never read like this before." Another stated, "I've learned more in the past week

than I did in all of high school." Instructors framed the challenge as an academic "boot camp,"

"We push you – not to put you down, but to pick you up." However, this enthusiasm was not

sustained over the summer.

By the end of Bridge, students viewed the course and support as embedded within an athletic

domain, as preparation for the type of support they would receive over the year. Instructors

framed Bridge as "practice for class" and encouraged athletes to "make mistakes with us" so

they could be minimized or avoided later. Significantly, the rhetoric of the instructors shifted to

lectures on what *real* college is like. One instructor informed the athletes, "If you mess up

something simple, your professor will think you are lazy." In testing situations, "If your phone

comes out, they will tell you to leave and they will fail you." In response, Rob felt that, "You

were just holding our hands through the whole process; you didn't set us loose and learn by

ourselves like college students do." Rob's comment is significant in that it shows how Bridge

accentuated the divide between athletes and students at large.

Identities Beyond Bridge

Many of the athletes I interviewed left Bridge with a high level of academic confidence.

While at the beginning of Bridge, King felt he was underprepared for the University, he felt that

his success in the program positioned him to be better prepared than the students at large when

the actual school year began. The academic bravado the athletes possessed in their fall

interviews dissipated over the year. Though they all continued to identify as "student athletes"

and viewed the term as reflecting a "need to take care of business on and off the field," the

continual setbacks and lower-than-anticipated grades in the academic domain led to the

withdrawal of effort and self-handicapping behaviors in many of the athletes. Over the year, athletes like King shifted from being silent and struggling to exhibiting passive resistance. Clayton, Kevin, and Clarence were all exhibiting passively resistant behavior by the end of Bridge, with their passivity and distancing from academics increasing throughout the year. Taylor relied on charm to help him navigate a system that confused him daily, charming his way into having advising sessions that were twice as long as most. Rather than becoming resistant over the year, he continued to use all the support offered by the AAC, but did not complete much, if any, work outside of tutoring sessions.

Darnell and Rob were different: they both entered Bridge with a reasonable level of preparation and mostly filled the quiet and well-prepared role during Bridge. Once during Bridge, Rob made an argument during an in-class debate, referencing a book he had read previously to make his point. Though he was praised by the instructors and tutors, his classmates called him an "overachiever," teaching him that his background and ability were out of alignment with what was expected of him in the classroom. Because of their preparation, I expected that Darnell and Rob would be the athletes most likely to achieve their academic goals. However, they both grew resistant to the system of tracking and oversight during the year, and as a result did not take advantage of all of the support available to them through the AAC or take seriously classes they thought would be easy. Both Darnell and Rob fell into the trap of reducing effort and shifting to using their tutoring as the locus of their learning despite their ability to engage in the classroom content.

Context and Positionality

The power associated with athletes' positional identities depends on context. As explained above, the positionality of male and female athletes in Bridge created a dominance of

women within academic spheres. However, since women compete in "welfare sports" they have

less power within the context of the athletic domain. Likewise, for any individual athlete, an

identity he or she carries may confer significant power in one context and relatively little power

in another context. Darnell's story of the dominant football player whose jersey is worn and

photos are requested by students at large on a Saturday, but who is denied entry into a party on a

Thursday, highlights the power of context in the positional identity of a high profile athlete:

> I feel like when you go on Greek Row, just like on a Saturday, you'll have on
> let's say [a current star player's] jersey, cheering for him, you want his autograph,
> you want to take a picture with him after the game, but then on a normal Thursday
> night, when he wants to come to your frat, you won't let him in because he's on
> the football team.

Similarly, a dominant athlete who is revered on the field of play may find himself in a classroom

context where the "professor show[s] no interest in hearing what I have to say." Athletes may

put more time and energy into athletic success because of the positional power they are afforded

by success within the domain. High profile special admits have extra work to do in order to

successfully engage in the academic domain. They must overcome their own relative academic

preparedness while trying to disprove the dumb jock stereotype as they attempt to interact with

the course content. These extra burdens may account for some of the withdrawing of effort

within the academic domain.

  In my interviews, I talked with the athletes about race and appearance within the football

team and on campus. At the University, athletes are identifiable walking across campus in team

issued gear. While less stigmatized athletes (white, female, in low profile sports) can easily

blend in with the students at large when wearing non-athletic clothing, the most stigmatized

athletes (non-white, male, in high profile sports) are unlikely to be able to blend in with the

general population simply by taking off athletic gear. Kevin acknowledged that he might be able

to be seen as "a regular student" when he tries "to wear nice clothes," but realized that "obviously if you're [Premier NFL-bound player] and you're 6'6", 250 pounds…kind of hard not to be noticed." The athletes I interviewed had different approaches to their appearance on campus relating to their positional identities. Clarence, Clayton, Rob, and King wore only athletic gear to class. Clarence once wore jeans when it was not raining, noting that wearing athletic gear was more about convenience and practicality than identity. King went a step further and wore only gear that specifically had the University's football logo on it. King knew he would be read as a football player whether or not he was wearing team issued gear. Kevin, Darnell, and Ricky all tried to avoid wearing team issued gear. Kevin stressed that he wanted to have the ability to shift his appearance in different contexts and Darnell actively wanted to disassociate himself from having a football identity when on campus. Ricky realized that "all the athletes if they're standing together…there's days when we're all wearing the exact same thing…like you have a uniform on." The uniform appearance of high profile athletes on the main campus kept them from being able to integrate into the population of the students at large. Darnell understood that, "There's not really good things associated with the football team in academics." Even though he tried "to wear regular clothes and my jeans…just like a normal person," he still, "sat usually with just my teammates" in class because when he tried to sit away from the team, "It just felt weird, like I met new people, which is cool, that was the whole point, but it was just awkward." Breaking away from an athlete identity on campus proved difficult for those who attempted the task.

The ability to wear apparel that was not team issued indicates that the athlete has a high enough socioeconomic background to be able to afford clothing. Athletes and AAC staff members discussed the economic reality of some athletes who send part of their scholarship

stipend home each month to their family, "I've had plenty of students take their scholarship checks and send it home to mom so she can pay rent and feed brothers and sisters. And [the athletes] live on couches." For athletes who are balancing caring for their individual needs and their families' needs, switching into non-athletic gear may not be a financial possibility. One athlete I spoke with at the AAC indicated that he would like to wear non-athletic gear, but had grown so much since starting college that his pre-college jeans no longer fit and he could not afford to buy new ones.

Disassociated from socioeconomic factors, race did not correlate with athletes' preference of apparel; the convenience of wearing team issued gear led the majority of football players to prefer that option. Race did, however, emerge as a theme in my research. During Bridge, I noticed that the Hawaiian Pacific Islanders (HPIs) tended to sit in the front of the classroom, correlating with a trend of high academic performance across the HPI football players. The white football players scattered around the classroom, but the black players tended to find seats in the back corner.

When I asked athletes about social divisions in the football team, most indicated that the team was not divided along racial lines, but that most of their friends on the team were of the same racial background as them. Ricky was an outlier in seeing the racial divisions on the team, "I mean like the Polynesians hang out together, blacks hang out together, whites hang out together. And then, well like at Training Table? It's all like segregated, it's funny." He then added, "It's mixed too sometimes, but like, the majority of it's all segregated." The athletes explained their friendship groups in three ways: first, they tended to spend time with athletes who also played their position; second, they talked about how their friends tend to hail from a

similar area as them; finally, they tended to gravitate toward spending time with their

roommates.

When looking at the first category, athletes identified that most athletes who played their

position tended to be of the same racial or ethnic group. As for their connection to people who

hailed from similar areas, all seven athletes I interviewed were attending the University from

out-of-state, but only the white athlete formed friendships with local athletes, who in turn invited

him to spend weekends with them at their homes. As a result, in-state athletes had an advantage

of leaving the University and traveling home to attend games and parties at their former high

schools, where they carried significant positional power as "big men on campus." Through the

friendships they developed, they shared this advantage with other white athletes from out-of-

state. The out-of-state non-white athletes tended to stay on campus over the weekends and

bonded with one another. Lastly, based on the sample of football players I spoke with, they were

all placed with a roommate of similar racial or ethnic background. These roommate pairings

were planned by the football team management, but I do not know if the roommate pairings by

racial and ethnic lines were intentional by the management or universal for the team. As a

consequence of all these factors, younger athletes on the team may experience more racial

segregation in their first year than later in their careers when the team can socialize at the same

locations together, and the temporal distance to high school is further in the past.

Behavior

The figurative and positional identities carried by athletes within constraint-driven

domains affect their behavior. Over the course of the year, the athletes I studied increasingly

behaved in an oppositional manner toward the academic domain. Courses that were supposed to

be easy proved challenging, and those who took their shot at their intended major bruised their

GPAs but spared their egos by self-handicapping themselves as the low grades rolled in. The tutoring provided by the AAC allowed athletes to keep the locus of learning within the hybrid space of the AAC and to stay detached from the academic domain while still maintaining their eligibility. The ideals of academic achievement professed by many during the fall interviews gave way to seeking the path of least resistance through the University. Athletes like Kevin entered the University already carrying those lowered expectations for their academic performance; in his case, with a brother playing professionally, there was little reason Kevin could see to stray from a very real and realizable path toward football and financial success.

Reduced effort on the part of the athletes was met by low expectations from the AAC. Although the signs have since been taken down, at the beginning of my study the computer lab displayed signs on the sides of computer monitors outlining printing regulations. These included a recommendation to not print articles more than ten pages long because, "Are you really going to read it anyway? Prrrrobably not so please don't waste your time and paper." The presumption embedded in the note indicated that no athlete, high profile special admit or otherwise, would be likely to read an article longer than 10 pages. Athletes reading such a notice, who may have intended to complete their readings, were effectively told by the AAC to lower their own expectations. The sign's removal highlights the fact that the AAC is not static. New coaches, administrators, staff, and athletes themselves can all shift the environment and thus the context of the hybrid space.

The most extreme form of resistance and attempting to beat the system manifests as academic dishonesty, such as cheating on exams and papers. In observing a conversation between a high profile special admit and his learning specialist, I witnessed the athlete's assessment, "It is so easy to cheat in that class," as an excuse not to study or to be overly

unconcerned about needing to get an 87% on the final exam in order to earn a 0.7 GPA. The

learning specialist and athlete were discussing his need to either shift to the satisfactory / not

satisfactory (S/NS) and not receive any credit for the class, or to earn a 0.7 GPA and receive

academic credit. The learning specialist told the athlete that his "GPA [was] too low to absorb a

0.0" meaning that he needed to earn the 0.7 to stay eligible. In calculating the 87% needed to

receive credit, the learning specialist told the athlete that she thought he was capable of hitting

that mark on the final. The athlete indicated that he planned to cheat on the exam as needed, to

which the learning specialist replied, "Obviously you didn't cheat on the midterm." The athlete

said that he had tried to cheat. The learning specialist then told me that she tells the athletes not

to cheat from each other, not because of ethical concerns, but because they cannot be certain that

other athletes have the correct answers. The conversation between the learning specialist and

athlete included a lot of friendly banter, but the athlete's use of cheating as an option allowing

him not to engage in the course material is all too real. My research did not formally look at

classroom behavior and issues of academic dishonesty, but through speaking with tutors who

also work as graduate teaching assistants in their academic departments, it became clear that

cheating on exams in large lecture halls happens frequently and with few or no consequences for

athletes and students at large.

Cheating is not sanctioned by the AAC or its staff. In spite of the situation described in

the banter above, one academic coordinator was adamant that athletes should never cheat. One

of his teaching philosophies included showing athletes he worked with his academic transcript

with low grades from his first couple years of college. He would then follow with, "You know

why my grades were like that? I said I tried and I didn't cheat, that is why my grades sucked…I

wouldn't cheat. I felt better getting an F than cheating. That's not going to get you anywhere in

life." This same academic coordinator spoke of the need to hold athletes accountable for their actions on and off the field although accountability within the system is severely hindered by the previously discussed constraints.

The last behavioral concern facing athletes that I will address is drug use. The use of drugs and alcohol did not come up as a significant theme in my interviews with the athletes, but the staff shared concerns over athlete drug use with me. Drug and alcohol use was described as a coping mechanism for athletes from out of town who are homesick, "They are going to do it. Saturday, it is raining, they're homesick, they don't have much money and some friend comes over with a bottle of Jack Daniels and a joint. I am going to take a hit and take a swig." The staff member indicated that the drug use could result in an athlete's removal from the University: "I am not around and the coaches are gone and he's bored, he might hit the weed. He might try to sneak one in. And we take his scholarship away from him and send him home." The quote above is telling because it reveals that 1) drug use can be used to revoke a scholarship; 2) tracking by AAC staff and coaches keeps athletes from making "bad decisions"; and 3) in the absence of such oversight, athletes will get themselves into trouble through drug use. The University has instituted a policy through which athletes who test positive for drug use are enrolled in a program for a year with mandatory testing to support them in stopping the drug use. The University administrators operate under the understanding that "If you aren't going to be tested you go back to your roots and that's what you are doing [when you smoke pot]." Though the athletic administrators present the new drug treatment policy as supportive because it gives athletes an opportunity to retain both their scholarship and place at the University while in treatment, the staff member I spoke to most about drug use saw the selective testing done by the

University as a way of potentially finding ways to force out an athlete and regain his scholarship for an incoming athlete.

Agency and Authorship

In the traditional understanding of Figured Worlds, actors meet societal expectations that they can accept or reject in forming their identities. The figurative identities that the athletes encounter in the AAC or hybrid space reflect the presumptions of academic struggle and disinterest. The behavior-based figurative identities illustrate the tracking and oversight conducted by the AAC staff. Because of the cultural storylines of high profile athletes fulfilling the dumb jock stereotype, the weight of countering that narrative, combined with the realization of their own lack of academic preparation, left the athletes in this study to follow a path similar to that of the African American women in Signithia Fordham's[38] (1993) study: they silenced themselves within the academic domain. Because of their relative positionality in the classroom, the athletes I interviewed focused their academic engagement on support offered through the AAC.

Seen as a hybrid space, the AAC is at the center of two domains within the Figured World perspective. That space between worlds, in theory, is the place of authorship. The athletes' acceptance or rejection of the various figurative identities that they encounter is in Bakhtin and Holland et al.'s (1998) argument, reflective of their agency. However, the model of the Figured Worlds I presented in Chapter 3 fails to account for the constraints and affordances acting on the system as seen in Figure 8.1. Significantly, the constraints and subsequent tracking and oversight embedded in the lives of high profile special admit athletes leave them with very little agency to forge their own path or identities. Thus, in thinking about the affordances and constraints acting on the athletes in their first year at the University, accountability became the

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[38] For a discussion on Fordham's study, please see section on "Figured Worlds Imagined and Defined" in Chapter 3.

central theme in understanding academic performance. When an athlete must remain eligible, he cannot fail academically. The support he receives to remain eligible allows him to disengage from the academic domain and self-handicap to protect his own ego. The athlete is left being accountable for navigating the *musts* and the *shoulds* within the affordances and constraints acting on him, ultimately reducing his effort as a strategy to protect himself from the reality of his own relative academic preparation and current ability relative to the students at large. The AAC provides a space for athletes to anchor themselves in their first year, navigating the academic and athletic domains. All too often for the athletes I interviewed, the driving forces within athletic and academic domains constrained the athletes' pathways and left them to author identities based on the perceived messaging of the AAC to progress toward graduation on the path of least resistance.

Systems-Level Analysis Using Activity Theory

In addition to building an understanding of the culture and context surrounding low profile special admits, I want to provide an understanding of the culture of the AAC and the constraints and affordances acting on the athletes from a systems-level perspective. As introduced in Chapter 3, Activity Theory provides a framework for looking at different systems (e.g., athletic departments, athlete study centers, football programs, universities, etc.) with a focus on understanding how the elements of the system (e.g., tools, division of labor, rules, etc.) interact and potentially are in conflict. Those conflicts or contradictions can occur within activity systems as analyzed using second generation Activity Theory, or between systems as illustrated through third generation Activity Theory. To revisit the basis of Activity Theory, the subject of an activity system focuses on an object to produce an outcome.[39] The subject's focus is mediated by the other dimensions of the activity system. The subject of a system can be

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[39] For a full introduction to Activity Theory, please see Chapter 3.

reduced to a single individual, or expanded out to an entire university. As a result, the ability to

zoom in and out allows for an infinite number of systems to analyze in this case study. Rather

than attempt a comprehensive review of the systems in my research, I will focus the application

of Activity Theory to clarify the tensions between money, diplomas, and learning within and

between the systems involved in the lives of high profile special admit athletes.

When using Activity Theory to explore the dynamics of an activity system, it is

interesting to see how the object affects the system. For instance, in talking with administrators

about the goals of the athletic department, they said that the mission is "about the three-legged

stool." The three legs represent the multidimensional focus of the department, which include

"doing this right compliance-wise, it's graduating student athletes and it's winning at the highest

level." When looking at the athletic department as the subject of the activity system and

considering each of the three goals (compliance, graduation, and winning) as the object, one sees

the different tools used by the system to produce their desired outcomes. Ideally, the tools and

objects are not in conflict with each other, as the department encourages coaches to "recruit good

kids, but recruit kids that can help you win." However, what happens when a coach finds

athletes who are not necessarily good guys, or decent scholars, but can help them win?

Recruiting such athletes shows the primacy of winning and competing at the highest level in high

profile sports and explains, in part, the need for athlete academic centers and NCAA regulations.

One last tool of Activity Theory that I will explore is its use in illuminating change over

time. A core element of Activity Theory is its function to understand conflicts within and

between activity systems against the backdrop of historical development. Given that some of the

AAC staff members I spoke with had experience as high profile athletes in the past, I will look at

their experiences in contrast to the current system to make sense of the changes over time that

have further developed the constraints acting on the athletes. I will first look at the experience of high profile special admits over the year I conducted my research, and then take a more historical perspective to understand their schedule and commitments against the backdrop of football at the University roughly during the time that Benson was conducting her research on high profile athletes with low academic performances 15 years ago. Currently, the athletes I spoke to have the sense that "football never stops."

High Profile Special Admits & Change Over Time

The first activity system I will analyze places the high profile special admit athletes as the subjects. At the beginning of the year, the athletes I spoke with tended to share the same outcome goal of playing in the NFL, achieved through their focus on the object of playing football at the University. In addition to playing football, the athletes all intended to graduate and many focused on the object of specific majors, namely business, engineering, and psychology. King and Clayton were the exceptions, entering without a clear sense of their intended academic path. At the beginning of the year, the high profile special admits' activity systems trended toward the following figure.

Figure 8.4: The Activity System of a Special Admit at the Beginning of the Year
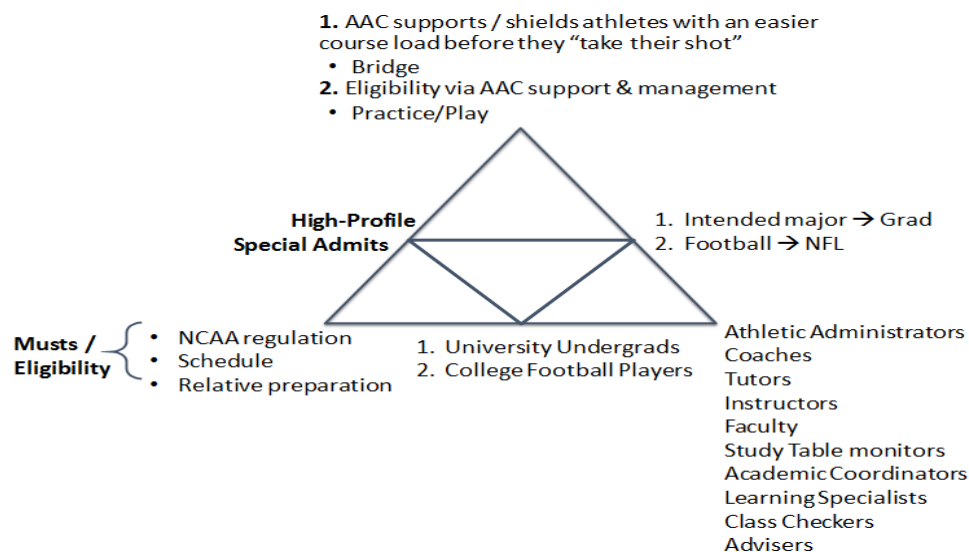
In the figure above, I represent the first object of the system as the athlete's intended major and the second as football with the respective outcomes of graduation and joining the NFL. While these are lofty goals for any undergraduate to be focused on at his or her point of entry into the University, the high profile special admits have benefited from intensive recruitment that has bolstered their sense of both their athletic ability and academic opportunity. Football recruits meet with faculty members from the business school, if that is their intended field, even though the AAC staff understand it is likely that the athlete will be blocked from the major based on his academic credentials.

Early on, special admits benefit from Bridge and the shelter the AAC staff provide in helping them select a less challenging course load than the series of introductory courses toward a highly competitive major. By winter, some athletes learned that academics at the University were more difficult than they imagined, while others were ready to "take their shot" at their intended major. On the football side, athletes had a wider spectrum of experiences. Some athletes, like Kevin and Clayton, felt quite at home and on track toward their goals of playing in the NFL. In contrast, injury and competition for positions led athletes like Darnell, Clarence, Ricky, Rob, and King down a frustrating path toward finding their footing in the athletic domain.

By the end of the year, the activity system of high profile special admit athletes had shifted as illustrated below.

Figure 8.5: The Activity System of a Special Admit at the End of the Year

1. "Take their shot" in winter
  • Shift to ethnic studies, communications, anthropology
    (2nd option)
  • Increase dependence on tutoring
  • Shift toward self-handicapping
  • Advise toward American Sign Language & Swahili

2. Focus on eligibility

High-Profile Special Admits

1. Lowered expectations = Business → 2nd option
2. Performance on a spectrum = Football ↑↓ NFL

Musts / Eligibility
  • NCAA regulation
  • Schedule
  • Relative preparation

1. University Undergrads
2. College Football Players

AAC Staff
Coaches
Etc.

On the academic front, the reality of their relatively low academic preparation paired with the constraints of their schedule and need to stay athletically eligible saw the athletes emerging from "taking their shot" at their intended major with lowered expectations of their investment in the academic domain. Athletes who previously had goals of majoring in business or engineering shifted their sights to communications. Initially undecided athletes like King found that they struggled with the courses in the preferred majors, like communications, and were looking for a new academic safe harbor. The tools athletes used shifted to an increased reliance on the tutorial program as their locus of learning while they exhibited detachment and self-handicapping behaviors.

Athletically, the athletes were learning that "football never stops." Their tools toward athletic success included maintaining eligibility and trying to survive the physical and mental rigor of membership on the football team. While the athletes' academic performances were all lower than they expected by the end of the year, athletes who were initially disenchanted with

football, like Clarence who had wanted to leave during the winter, tended to feel more positive about their roles on the team by the end of the year stating, "If we were to play a game today, I would be a starter," but adding from experience on how quickly one's fortune can change: "You never know how these things go. It's all about controlling what I can control." Even athletes who did not have positive experiences during the year athletically shifted their understanding of the team as operating a business. Their athletic potential was highlighted by the coaches, and they expressed a desire to prove themselves and work hard on the athletic front. King, fully recovered from his injury, described his performance in the spring football game as the best experience he had all year. In contrast, Bridge was his academic high point, and he stated, "Getting my comm grade back from last quarter" was the worst academic experience he had. For the majority of the athletes, Darnell being the exception as he was forced out, football ended on a positive note, while academic aspirations had largely faded.

Increasing Constraints as "Football Never Stops"

While the pressure to "compete at the highest level" has always been present for coaches based on the expectations of athletic administration, the pressure to control all of the facets of a high profile athlete's life have increased. I talked with several AAC staff members who played football at the University during the team's glory days when they were among the top programs in the country. In contrast to the five weeks off that the football players were allotted during the year I followed the team, one staff member stated, "When we were here, we had the whole month of May off." That time was filled with voluntary "self-regulated" workouts, "but it wasn't as intense." Teammates gathered on their own to workout, pushing each other to "come in shape for training camp." In addition to the freedom of May as time off following spring football, "even in the summers, it wasn't mandatory for us…we all found a way to…get together

and workout…we all self-regulated because we knew if we don't come in shape on the first day of training camp…we're losing out jobs." In contrast, "nowadays it's a lot of handholding…I don't know if these guys are having fun here, you know, the college experience…I know it was fun for us back then." Looking at the activity system of the football program during its most successful era at the University, one sees that the rules put the onus on the athlete to earn their position. The tools gave the athletes much more freedom and the outcome was disciplined and self-regulated group that had fun winning a lot of games.

Figure 8.6: The Activity System of Football's Training Schedule in the Past
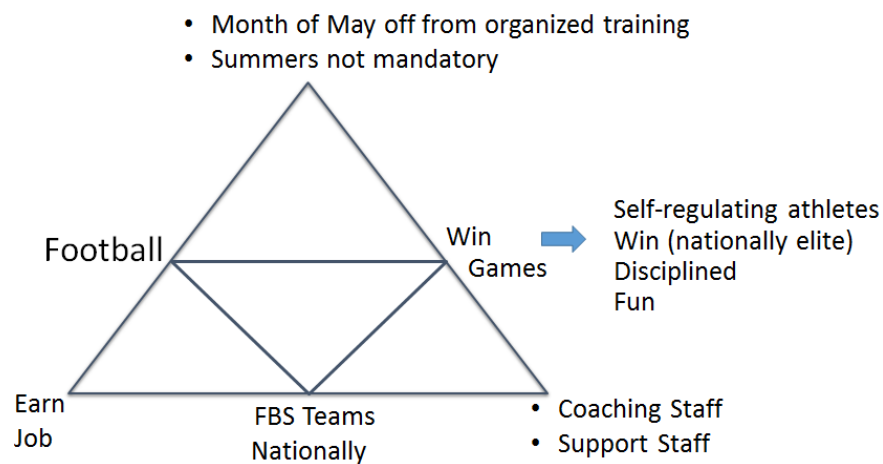
In contrast to the training program of the University's football team roughly 15 to 20 years ago, the current activity system surrounding the team's focus on winning illustrates a shift in agency away from the athlete. The activity system above much more closely aligns with the NFL system that, as Darnell pointed out, provided many more affordances and agency to players including, "you don't hit in practice… there's no summer ball…no mandatory lifting…that time off from the season to training camp again for next season is up to you. I mean it's your choice where you work out." Though current college athletes still have to earn their positions like NFL players and college athletes in the past, they do not have a similar opportunity to self-regulate

their training as former athletes who viewed their agency as a sign that the "coaches had that trust in us."

Figure 8.7: The Activity System of Football's Training Schedule in the Present
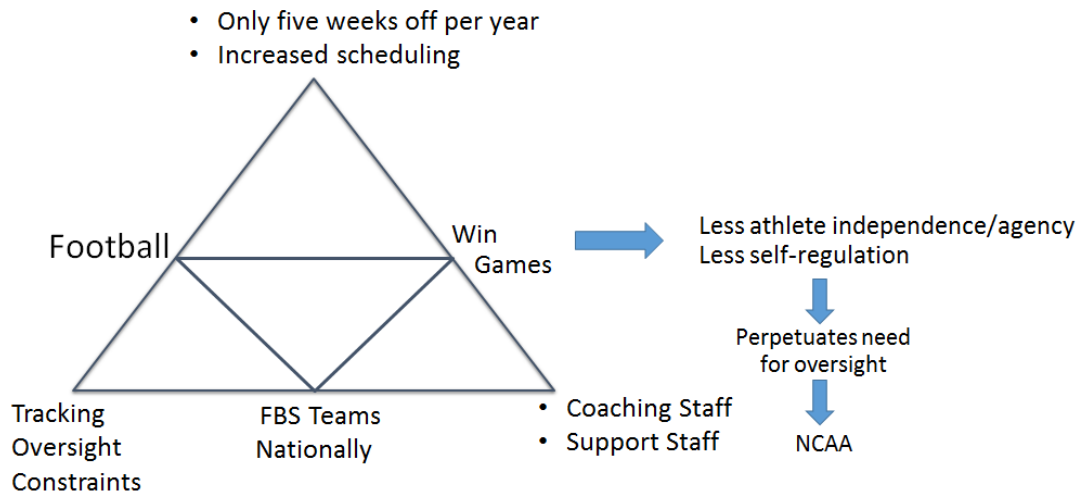
The increasing competitiveness of college football and the race to have more training time and oversight of the athletes have led to increased scheduling constraints. As a result of increased tracking and time demands on the athletes, they are less independent and do not develop the skills to self-regulate athletically or academically. The lack of personal development perpetuates the need for oversight. The NCAA policies and policing of intercollegiate athletics, as seen in light of the athletic arms race affecting universities, operate to hold the growing scheduling demands of high profile programs in check through legislation like the 20/8 Hour Rule,[40] Graduation Success Rate (GSR), and Academic Progress Reports (APR). While the 20/8 Hour Rule limits athletic participation, the GSR and APR scores lead to increased oversight and tracking of athletes by coaches and AAC staff across academic domains.

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[40] Note that the rule limits athletes to 20 hours per week of participation in-season and 8 hours per week of participation out-of-season.

Using third-generation Activity Theory illuminates the conflicts between the activity system of the football program[41] and the NCAA both in terms of the tools used by the systems to mediate the objects of the systems and of the outcomes of the two systems.

Figure 8.8: The Football Program and the NCAA in Conflict
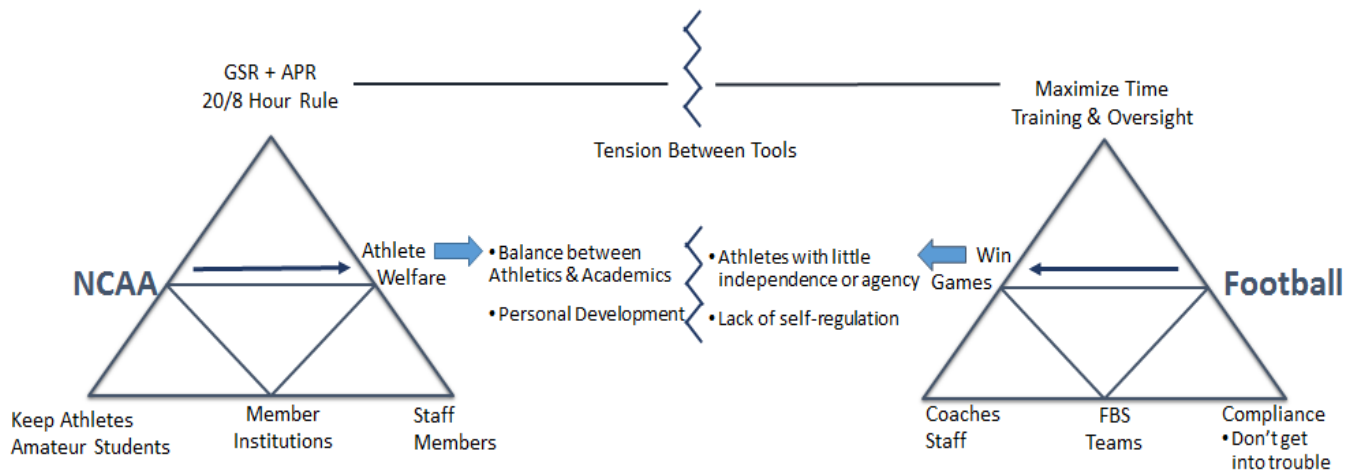
Within the activity system of the NCAA, I have listed the object of the system as "athlete welfare," though there is current national debate over ways in which the NCAA is privileging their own financial gain in the defense of athlete amateurism rather than athlete compensation. Taken in the best light, the NCAA's activity is aimed at achieving the outcome of balance between athletics and academic for college athletes. The development of the CHAMPS / Life skills program[42] also indicates the NCAA's investment in athletes' development outside of the athletic and academic domains. The ideals of the NCAA are in conflict with the actual outcomes of the Football team's activity system. As shown above, the increased oversight and scheduling of athletes has diminished the balance between football and everything else while blurring the line between where athletics end and the athletes' academic and social lives begin. Most

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[41] This activity theory may extend to other teams, high and low profile, at the University. However, the football team's athletes were the most scheduled and regulated at the University.

[42] In 1994, the NCAA launched the CHAMPS / Life skills program to "create a total development program for student-athletes" (CHAMPS / Life Skills Program, 2008-2009). The acronym CHAMPS stands for Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success.

importantly, the oversight of the athletes as driven by the need to ensure their athletic

performance and maintaining academic eligibility, has led to a decrease in self-regulation and a

loss in athletes' personal development.

The tension between the tools of these two activity systems is somewhat obvious. The

football program would like to have the athletes training, studying film, and lifting weights as

much as possible. The NCAA's regulations have developed to limit the number of hours an

athlete can practice and to make sure that the teams and institutions are held accountable for

athletes' movement toward and attainment of degrees. What is more interesting is that the

NCAA does not enforce all of its policies equally. One AAC staff member indicated that the

NCAA is willing to enforce the rules that restrict benefits to athletes, but they are hesitant to

actively check and enforce the 20/8 hour rule:

> They can go and find somebody being paid by a booster, but they can't come to these
> schools and see the student athletes doing more than 20 hours, which is a rule set for
> every school. They can go to any school, any one of these FBS schools and see the
> student athletes doing more than 20 hours, they don't want to enforce that rule.

Possibly, the enforcement of the 20/8 hour rule would be too difficult and may run counter to the

NCAA's interest in allowing member institutions some autonomy, while protecting their

financial interests in providing high quality athletic competitions for consumption by the public.

Teams report practice schedules to the NCAA, but the time commitment required beyond

those meeting and practice times is equivalent to holding a fulltime job. I asked each athlete to

describe their schedule for the day before our interview. Darnell gave me the following

breakdown:

> Uh…we woke up at 5:30, um, we were at practice by 6, we had meetings at 6:15,
> um, from meetings we went to, uh…no wait, did we lift first? No – we had
> meetings, and then from that we had a walk-through, we came back in, had more
> meetings, then we went to practice for like an hour and 45 minutes, and then after
> that we had lifting, which was at around…10? Around 10, we had lifting. We

> got done at like 11 'cause they gave us 30 minutes to get showered and go to class. So. Had class at 11:30, uh, we got out at 12:30, then I had like a…a…quiet long break 'cause…I didn't have [general studies] class til 2:30 so we had time to eat and just relax for a little bit. After [general studies] class at 2:30, I was back out at 3:30 and we had football meetings at 4. From 4…I want to say from 4 to around 5, almost 6, almost 6:00. Then we were done but we still had a mandatory football, or a sports meeting, which was with every, all the sports on campus at 7:30 and then we got out of that at around 8:30 and then we were done for the day.

Based on Darnell's day above, he spent five hours in the morning in team commitments, and then another two in the afternoon. The final hour-long meeting would not count against the 20 hours, but it is hard to imagine that he spent seven hours in meetings and practice in one day and still stayed within the bounds of the 20 Hour Rule. To illustrate that Darnell's account above is not an outlying day, here is King's account of a different in-season day:

> All right. Wake up at 5:45, leave the dorms about 5:50, 5:55. You get here about 6:00, 6:07 and get dressed and go lift weights at 6:15. Then you get done with weights about 7:30, then you go – you have meetings at 8:00. We have meetings from 8:00 until 9:00, 9:40. Then you have strikers at 10:15. Then you got practice at 11:00. You have class at 11:30. You got a class at 12:20. Then you have tutoring at 12:30 to 1:30. And then we have meetings again at 2:30, 2:30 to about 4:00. And then you're done.

King's account shows again morning commitments ranging from 6:15am until after 11am followed with an hour and a half of meetings in the afternoon.

While NCAA talks about student welfare, its policing efforts are focused on what the athletes might get beyond their scholarship, rather than what is taken from them beyond the 20/8 hour rule. The same staff member provided an example, "Did you see a golfer got in trouble for washing a car? …using the school's water hose to wash her car. If they can come at something that petty but they can't control the 20 Hour Rule, I think their priorities are backwards." Though the NCAA enforces the APR, GSR, and eligibility reporting, the lax enforcement of the 20/8 hour rule highlights that "the NCAA is a membership. That's it, and the members control what happens." While low graduation rates and APR scores might catch media attention and

spark backlash against the amateur ideal of the college athletes, the casual breaking of the 20/8

hour rule leads to better teams and competition at the highest level. The media, and athletes,

have largely been silent on the issue until now. The rapid shifting of high profile athletes' voice

for change is a topic I will address in my conclusion. From discussion focused on Activity

Theory, one can see how the tensions and contradictions in the activity systems surrounding

college athletes are leading in the direction of transformational change.

So why does the athletic department itself fail to step in to limit the number of hours that

athletes can participate in athletics? The answer is best illustrated through thinking about two

conflicting objects of the athletic department activity system: graduating students and competing

at the highest level. In essence, these two objects point at a desire to value student welfare while

still winning games. Below is a figure illustrating how the objects of the system, and therefore

the outcomes, are in conflict within the athletic department's activity system.

Figure 8.9: Athlete Welfare versus Winning within the Athletic Department
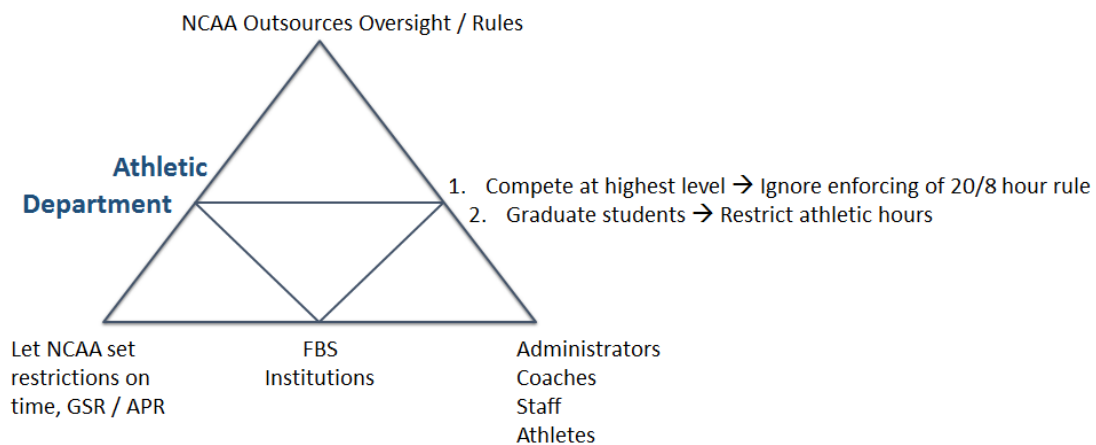
First, the athletic department is seen as outsourcing the regulation of athlete welfare to the

NCAA through the adoption of the policies and the expectation of enforcement by the NCAA.

Most importantly, the figure of the athletic department's activity system as applied to Activity

Theory shows that if the athletic department were following the object of student welfare and

desire to graduate athletes, they would act to restrict the hours of athletic participation to at least

the NCAA maximums, if not impose restrictions to limit the times teams can meet and practice

to protect the open space on an athlete's schedule. However, the athletic department does not

separately enforce the 20/8 hour per week rule and largely ignores what is commonly thought to

be an unenforced rule in order to serve their object of competing at the highest level and winning

games.

Where does the University stand on athletic participation of its students? As long as

athletes are graduating at high rates relative to students at large and the league averages, which

they are, the University largely stays out of the way of the athletic department. In such a view of

the big picture of the University, the athletic department operates as an auxiliary enterprise,

connecting only when needed to make sure that expectations are being met.

Figure 8.10: Knotworking: Limited Connections between the Athletic Department & University
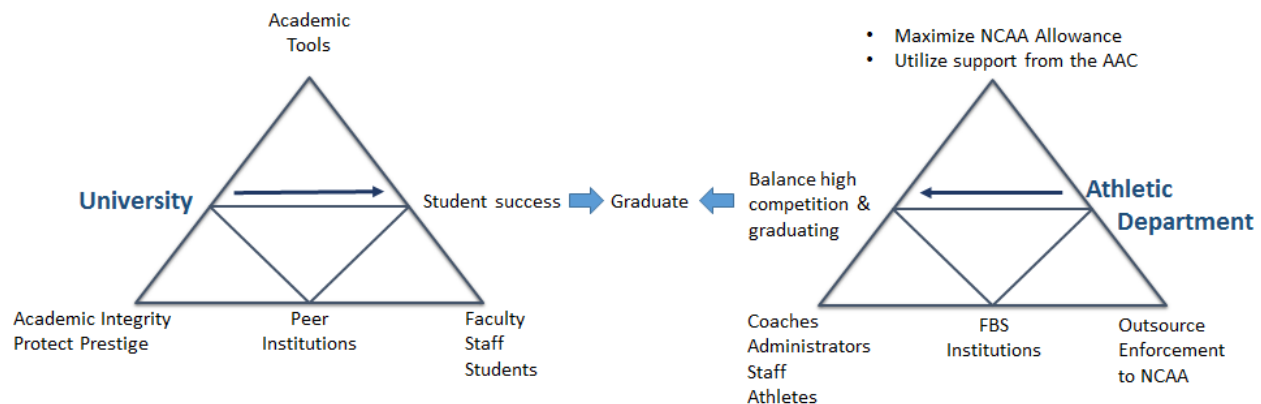
The idea of knotworking within Activity Theory expresses the tenuous connections between

activity systems. The figure above illustrates the University and athletic department coming

together in the shared outcome of graduating students. Though the object of the University's

system may focus on student success and the athletic department is balancing the desire for wins

with the desire to graduate athletes, the common outcome of graduating athletes and students at

large buys the athletic department freedom in the decision making process and oversight of athletes.

The Athletic Department's Third Object – Compliance

In addition to including the objects of winning games and graduating athletes, the athletic department's activity system can also be arranged to focus on the object of compliance. On one hand, an athletic administrator felt that compliance was aimed at the athletes themselves: "Do the right thing, obey the rules, obey the law of the land and the laws of the government…and be a good citizen." Compliance was seen as the athletic department supporting the development of athletes as citizens. In a different view within the athletic administration, "doing things right compliance-wise" was about "doing [the work] the right way...ethical things." Thus the object of compliance is about both athlete development and a level of ethical conduct within the athletic department itself. The rules used to govern compliance are still outsourced to the NCAA in terms of restrictions on athletes' training time and mandates on their academic progress. Based on the limited enforcement of the 20/8 hour rule, the athletic department must balance the ethics of compliance with the drive to compete at the highest level. In actuality, using the lens of Activity Theory allows one to see the way in which compliance is managed through layers of activity systems. The outcome of these systems is that there should be "no surprises" at the next level of oversight based on the reporting lines from system to system.

Figure 8.11: Reporting Lines through the Layers of Compliance
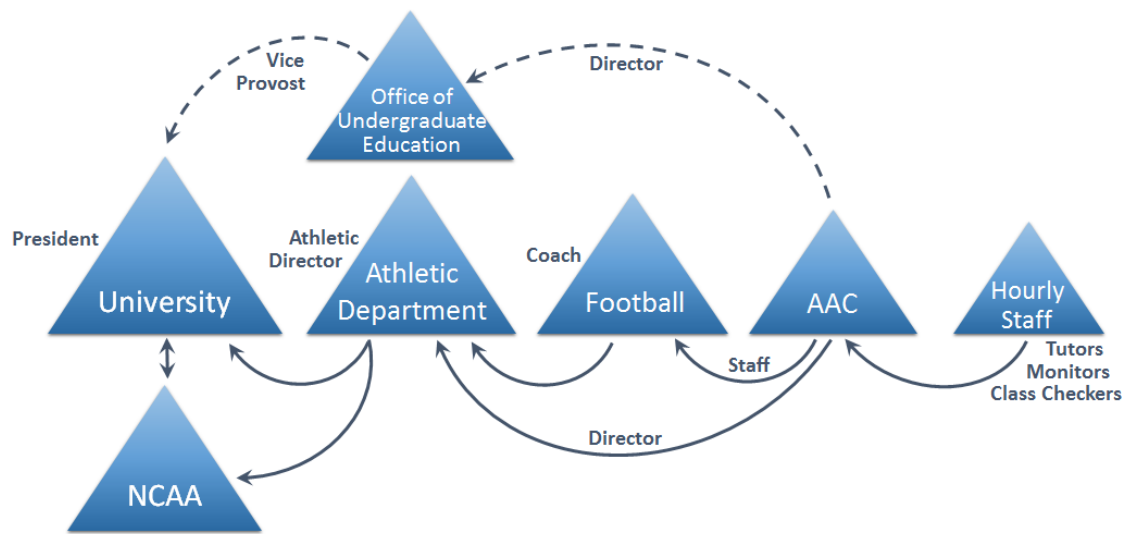
The figure above illustrates how hourly staff within the AAC, such as tutors, Study Table

monitors, and class checkers report into the full-time staff at the AAC and support the athlete

tracking mechanism. The hourly staff report on attendance and progress both directly to learning

specialists and academic coordinators and through the online tracking system in which they enter

a report on each athlete at the end of each tutoring session. The next line of reporting is

controversial. The AAC should not have any staff reporting to coaches based on a potential

conflict of interest whereby a staff member maybe asked to do something unethical to keep an

athlete eligible. The AAC staff members do not report to coaches in a manner represented on an

organizational chart, but they do inform coaches, especially football, with weekly reports on the

athletes. When I asked about the content of these meetings, an AAC staff member who attends

regularly told me that, "There's probably one or two coaches who I think really cares because

you can see dialogue going in the meeting." However, "All the rest are just focused on football

and making sure, hey, is he eligible, can he play?" The staff also underscored the need to

document everything that happens with the athletes they are tasked with tracking, "I'm keeping

careful record, that every time they miss tutoring I'm reporting it to coaches, that every time they get a bad grade, that I'm documenting it, so at the end of the quarter no one's surprised…no surprises is the main goal." The goal of "no surprises" relates to compliance insofar as the systems to which a report is submitted demand an accurate understanding of athlete eligibility and behavior to stave off any potential compliance issues before they manifest.

While staff at the AAC provides information to football coaches, the director of the AAC reports into the athletic department administration and into a vice provost in an Office of Undergraduate Education housed within the academic side of the University. Coaches also report into athletic department administration for compliance oversight. Ultimately, the athletic director reports to the University president and the NCAA with reports on performance and compliance. A high level athletic administrator commenting on the relationship between the athletic department and the president stated, "[The president] doesn't want to be surprised by anything. Always good to know good or bad what is happening…He's dialed in…I think he is healthily dialed in. I don't think he is over the top, meddling or – but he wants to know. He wants to be informed and that's a good thing." Ultimately, when compliance and the reputation of the University are on the line, all of the people and systems involved focus on communication to the next larger activity system in order to maintain some institutional control over high profile special admit athletes.

Learning in the Athletic and Academic Domains

I have developed the idea of learning for athletes as variable in different contexts. The athletic domain is largely operated on *musts,* things athletes have to do and for which they are accountable. In contrast, the academic domain is largely governed by *shoulds*, or things that an athlete is encouraged to do, but can make do without. One large and controversial observation in

my research is that athletes can and are graduating while learning some academic content, but the amount learned and areas of study pursued are moderated by the systems governing the athletes. Namely, the constraints from the athletic domain and the athletes' relative academic preparation combine with the support provided by the AAC to encourage greater dependency on that system of support and less growth as independent learners. Beyond focusing on what is learned, Activity Theory looks at how athletes learn. The contrasts in how learning occurs in the activity system of football versus the activity system of an academic course show why and how it is easy for athletes to withdraw effort in the academic domain, and how systems of support like the AAC come into being.

Figure 8.12: A Focus on Learning within the Athletic and Academic Domains
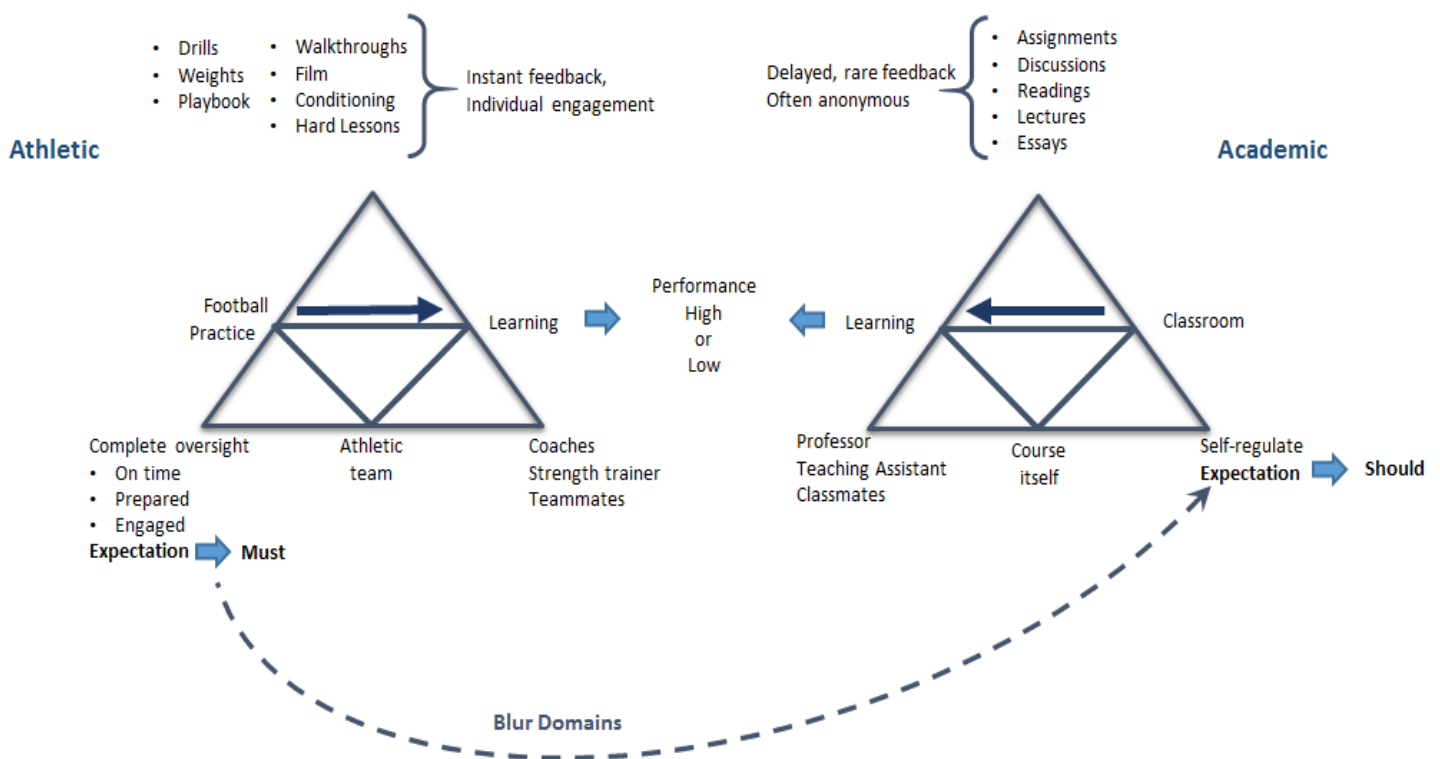
The two major points of contrast between the systems lie in the tools they use and the rules they follow. First, the tools used in football learning include activities such as weight lifting, film study, hard lessons, and conditioning. All of the tools are *musts* in the world of the athlete,

mostly because they receive instant feedback from coaches play-by-play and then are asked to correct their errors while trying to practice new skills. The athletes are evaluated as individuals in their performance on all of the tools used in the system, and they know that if they do not know the play book, they will not play on the field. In contrast, the tools used to support course learning ultimately become *shoulds* in the world of the athletes. Specifically, reading material for class, note taking, engagement in lecture and discussion sections are all things an athlete should do, but are not required to in order to progress through the system. In discussing his readings, Darnell said, "By far you don't have to read everything. Just 'cause they assign it, I mean that's part of college now: growing up. Just, they assign it and they expect you to do it, and if you want to succeed in their class, then you should do it but you don't have to do anything now." I followed up by asking him how he gets by without doing the reading to which he responded, "For me, really talk to the tutor." Completing essays and assignments and class attendance are required, but they are tracked through the oversight of the athletic domain rather than the rules governing the academic domain. This contrast between the rules of the systems is interesting, as most courses expect students to be self-regulating learners who engage in the material willingly (this might be an idealized vision of the undergraduate academic experience) while our current model of regulating athletes is outsourced to the coaches and AAC staff. The enforcement of the rules of the athletic domain being imposed on the academic domain blurs the lines between the domains. However, because eligibility for the athletic domain is necessary for the activity system of football to work, the rules from the athletic domain are applied to the academic domain through class checkers and other AAC staff. The inaccessibility of academic learning within the classroom for low profile special admits, paired with the low level of accountability for engagement in the material, results in the need for the AAC and tutorial

services. The support from those services effectively shifts the locus of learning from the classroom to the tutoring session in the AAC. The tutorial sessions tend to perpetuate passive learning among athletes who are not held accountable to prepare for the session; there are no negative consequences for athletes within the tutoring system unless they fail to attend.

In contrast to the passive learning that takes place within the academic domain, football learning is mostly active and hands-on. The playbook studying is directly applied in practice. Plays in practice are videotaped and played back to the athlete later that day so that their performance can be analyzed and improved. Athletes are constantly accountable for their behavior, and the feedback they receive, whether praise or punishment, happens quickly. Athletes learn what behavioral rules they need to follow across both domains to avoid hard lessons at all costs.

Ultimately, athletes are engaging in multiple systems in which learning looks very different. The format of large lecture courses may work for prepared and engaged independent learners, but serves as a poor point of entry into the academic domain. In contrast, the learning that took place during Bridge much more closely mirrored the learning in football. Bridge's instruction, individualized support, and reflection on practice allowed athletes to perform at high levels academically. However, the shift to the anonymity of large lecture halls and trouble engaging with the material because of preparation and exhaustion effectively diminished the athletes' investment in the academic domain over time. Some athletes found an academic passion and became deeply engaged, like one such special admit whose learning specialist shared that he prided himself in being a "drama nerd." For the majority of special admits who were finding their way toward ethnic studies, the draw was less a passion for the subject and more the "it's a degree" sentiment shared by a sophomore football player. In contrast to the diminished

investment in academics, the way football is learned allowed for athletes to stay more resilient

when facing disappointments such as injury and redshirting. Again, the athletes largely felt

positive about football at the end of the year which is in large part attributable to the way

learning occurs within the domain.

Accountability across the Activity Systems

One way of looking at how accountability operates based on the affordances and

constraints acting on high profile special admit athletes is to analyze what success looks like

across different activity systems. When looking at the constraints acting on athletes, I largely

outlined the schedule and requirements affiliated with football along with their low level of

academic preparation relative to the students at large. In looking at the affordances, the activities

and programing of the AAC emerged as tools to support athletes, to keep them eligible, and on a

path toward graduation. Based on these affordances and constraints, I will look at the activity

system of the AAC and of the football program, both aimed at the object of athlete success.

Figure 8.13: The AAC and Football Activity Systems Applied to Athlete Success

When the football program focuses on athlete success, its outcome is winning games, likely with

NFL caliber players. The AAC's focus on athlete success is articulated as developing

independent learners. However, for high profile special admits, the goal becomes less about their independent learning and more about their graduation. Ideally, the goals of winning games and graduating players are not in conflict. The tension lies in the desire to recruit and enroll the best athletes possible while leaning on the staff of the AAC to keep them eligible to play. The staff at the AAC largely believe that they can help any athlete with any academic skill level to graduate, but the system is continuing to be tested by a greater number of high profile athletes with low entry credentials, because the athletic department is willing to take some calculated risks to win a few more games by enrolling more athletes with lower academic profiles until the department "stub[s] [its] toe", meaning that they take a hit on their APR and GSR scores.

The football program is seen as being governed by the athletic department's goal of compliance. That desire for compliance trickles down to the AAC, which is governed by the rules of eligibility and, in reality, a need to maintain the eligibility of the University's most valuable players. Because eligibility drives the workforce of the football program, the coaches are acutely aware of eligibility matters. As mentioned above, the tracking of athletes is largely done for reports into the football coaches by the academic coordinators and learning specialists. The focus on eligibility maintenance and compliance lead to two conflicts within the activity system of the AAC. First, the athletic coordinators and learning specialists are set at odds with each other because the learning specialists are put into roles to support and protect the athletes while the academic coordinators are, in part, trying to foster the athletes' independence. Accountability of the athlete for his own learning, time management, and even athletic success has largely been usurped in the systems I have outlined. One outspoken academic coordinator who wished to hold athletes accountable for their actions with a "if you don't want to do it and you can't do it, go home" mentality was blocked. A second form of conflict exists between the

staff (division of labor) and the rules. The staff members cannot act against the rules, even if the rules prevent the system from attaining its goals of developing independent learners through accountability. Interestingly, the system of accountability works well within the football activity system. Athletes who are not producing results on the field are systematically removed from the team. Academically, those who are not producing results are shifted into less competitive majors and provided with increasing levels of support. The academic model is adaptable to all in order to protect the athletic work force, but the athletic model for football players is cutthroat: perform or leave.

Outcomes of a Return to Theory

When taken as a whole, using Figured Worlds and Activity Theory develops both an on-the-ground cultural understanding of the worlds of the athletes and a systems-level analysis that illuminates the pressures acting on their worlds that they cannot see. The Figured Worlds analysis helps provide an understanding of the figured and positional identities that high profile special admits are presented with and embody at the University. The rejection and adoption of figured identities mirrors what Activity Theory illuminates as the change of objects and outcomes of athletes over their first year at the University as they start with high expectations in both domains and adjust accordingly over the course of the year. The way athletes learn in different domains highlights how and why athletes tend to be more resilient in the athletic domain as opposed to the academic domain. Their highest academic achievements during the year come during Bridge, in the courses taught and supported most like the learning that occurs in the athletic domain.

While I initially planned to look at athletes' movements from an athletic domain into the academic domain through the hybrid space of the AAC, the reality for first year high profile

special admit athletes is more bleak. The "role engulfment" discussed by Adler and Adler (1985, 1991) focused on older athletes who were more established in the basketball program the researchers were observing. In contrast, following athletes from their points of entry revealed that they do not automatically have a home in the athletic domain. With the exception of Kevin, the true freshman, and Clayton, the rising star, the athletes I interviewed were disenchanted with football and their role within the team for the first two-thirds of the year. Only with the promise of prepping for a role the following fall did the majority of the redshirted athletes improve their outlook. Sadly, Darnell paid a price for his injury and his inability to perform by the time of spring football practice. As a result, he was ushered out of the University. In sum, the anchoring of athletes in the athletic domain and their slow transition out into the academic domain is not what I found. Rather, high profile special admit athletes enter the University without solid footing in either domain as they are confronted with the constraints and requirements of football on one hand and their relative lack of academic preparation on the other. As a result, the athletes find a home in the hybrid space of the AAC and find the support, and affordances needed to branch out into the athletic and academic domains.

Applying Activity Theory also helps illuminate the change over time of schedules and self-regulation of high profile special admits. It also shows how the schedules athletes are subject to are selectively enforced both by the NCAA and the athletic departments in deference to competition, winning, and, ultimately, revenue. Accountability in the systems involved in intercollegiate athletics is complex and malleable. Activity Theory does not give us neat answers, but it does raise tough questions. If the athletic department at the University values athlete welfare, winning, and compliance on the same level, then why are they not actively cracking down on the 20/8 hour rule across their teams? Especially in the high profile or

revenue generating sports, the need to win supersedes the need to protect athletes or adhere to

unenforced NCAA guidelines. The lack of support from athletic departments is causing teams to

act and advocate for themselves independently. Conflicts within an activity system where 1)

athletes are used as tools; 2) the object is winning; and 3) the 20/8 hour rule is continually broken

lead to transformative change within the culture and structure of intercollegiate athletics, a

change that we are witnessing in real time. In the conclusion, I will reflect on what I have found

in the research at my field site, put those findings into the context of the existing literature, and

then expand to place them into the context of the current tensions between the NCAA,

universities, and the athletes who play the game.

Chapter 9

The Conclusion

On April 7, 2014, Shabazz Napier sat in a locker room in Arlington, Texas, surrounded by cameras and microphones. He had just been named the most outstanding player of the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball tournament known as "March Madness" after helping his University of Connecticut team win the national championship title by defeating the University of Kentucky. Shabazz Napier will likely never again hold as much positional power as he did in the moments following the championship game. Significantly, he chose to tell the reporters and the national audience that he sometimes goes to bed "starving" (Fulton, 2014). His comment was aimed at giving voice to the discrepancy between the scholarships athletes receive and the actual cost of attending their institutions[43] along with the absurdity of the micromanagement of athletes' benefits within the NCAA's food policies. Though NCAA president Mark Emmert called the food policy "dumb" and "absurd," it took Napier's prompting and the public shaming of the NCAA to effect change (Fulton, 2014). While most NCAA policy changes get stuck in the quagmire of different membership institutions' interests, it took the NCAA only eight days, following Napier's "starving" comment, to approve new rules allowing athletes unlimited meals and snacks (Fulton, 2014).

When considering Napier's comment in terms of Activity Theory, one sees the NCAA as focused on the object of March Madness, which accounts for 75% of their total annual revenue.[44] Napier, like other athletes, operates as a tool within the activity system. The rules guarding the athletes' amateurism, including the NCAA food policies, were in conflict with the athletes' well-

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[43] That shortfall amounts to about $3,285 in out-of-pocket expenses per athlete for the 2011-2012 school year based on a NCPA- Drexel University Sport Management Department study (Fulton, 2014).

[44] In fiscal year 2013, the NCAA reported $681 million in revenue from media contracts affiliated with the men's basketball tournament. The revenue represented 75% or their $981 million in total revenue in fiscal year 2013 (Berkowitz, 2014).

being. Thus, Shabazz Napier, a tool within a system, was able to capitalize on his momentary

positional power to highlight the conflict between the push for amateurism and utilization of the

players as tools within a system that generated hundreds of millions of dollars to effect almost

immediate change. Moments like Napier's are rare, but they illustrate the power of the conflicts

within activity systems to effect transformative change. While the NCAA has not addressed the

overall shortfall between the average athlete's scholarship award and the actual cost of attending

a university, we see a preview of that battle arising in Northwestern University's football team's

push to unionize. The landscape of intercollegiate athletics is changing rapidly. The systems of

affordances and constraints outlined in this dissertation are not fixed, nor are the activity systems

that surround college athletes. The goal of this dissertation is to provide an in depth look at the

experiences and the systems that surround certain high profile special admit athletes attending a

single university in order to suggest what current practice looks like and, more broadly, how it

might evolve in the future.

A Return to the Problem at Hand

Intercollegiate athletics has become an increasingly commercialized enterprise. In order

to capitalize on the potential for significant revenue generation, institutions and their athletic

departments are under pressure to win. Recruiting special admit athletes, who enter universities

with entry credentials that would prevent them from being admitted under the standard

admissions policy, provides the athletic talent needed to compete at the highest level. The

"costs" associated with the admission of special admits are measured in terms of the admissions

slots they occupy at highly selective institutions (Bowen & Levin, 2003) and the institutional

costs associated with supporting them academically at places like the University. Over 30 years

ago, Maloney and McCormick found that there was "something about athletes in revenue

generating sports [that] causes them to do worse in the classroom over and above their poorer background" (1991, p. 563). Two decades later, Bowen and Levin confirmed Maloney and McCormick's findings that athletes in general are systematically underperforming relative to their entry credentials. While athletes continue to graduate at increasingly higher rates, their academic performance relative to their classmates and entry credentials continues to drop (Marot, 2010). Given institutions' investments in academic support for athletes, as demonstrated through the programs at the University's Athlete Academic Center, why are special admits underperforming relative to their entry credentials rather than far exceeding them? My research focused on the use of Activity Theory and Figured Worlds as applied to the emergent constraints and affordances acting on athletes to understand why athletes, and especially high profile special admits, might underperform academically relative to their entry credentials.

The original thinking that athlete academic support centers like the AAC operate as hybrid spaces between the athletic and academic domain evolved over the analysis of the data. The AAC operates as a hybrid space for athletes by expanding what counts as competent participation within the space. However, academic participation within the AAC proved to be driven by the constraints acting on the athletes. Ultimately, both the athletic and academic domains were driven primarily by constraints, while the AAC operated as the primary source of affordances for special admit athletes in their first year at the University.

Constraints and Affordances

In order to understand how the systems surrounding high profile special admit athletes may affect their academic performance, I framed my research questions around identifying the constraints and affordances acting on the athletes and used those findings to better understand the tensions existing within and between the systems in which athletes are embedded. I will briefly

outline the findings on the key constraints and affordances from the data before looking at how they play out using a Figured Worlds perspective and Activity Theory. I will look at how, in sum, the findings from this study develop an understanding of athlete academic performance.

In identifying the primary constraints acting on the athletes, I listened and watched for factors that limited athletes' choices, mobility, opportunities, and the rules that governed them. Four major themes developed as constraints: the business of football, the need to maintain eligibility, athletes' schedules, and their level of academic preparation relative to students at large. When the football program is viewed as operating as a business, the manner in which athletes are recruited begins to make more sense. To bring in the best talent, coaches will tell athletes that they will play as freshmen and be able to major in business, even if those are unlikely realities.[45] Athletes who enter into the program but fail to perform at the levels the coaches anticipated are forced out against their will to make room for the next group of recruits that will hopefully help the business thrive. To protect the football team's labor force, athletes must be kept eligible. The maintenance of eligibility leads to the drawing of information lines from AAC staff into coaches. Reports from the AAC are based on an aggressive tracking system used to monitor the team's primary assets, the athletes themselves. To maximize athletes' potential on the field, coaches will push to schedule as much training and meeting time as possible with them, often beyond what the 20/8 Hour Rule allows. Even time not scheduled for football commitments is reserved for potential meetings, effectively blocking athletes' access to courses they may wish to take. The schedule constraints athletes face result in advisers directing athletes toward online and independent studies courses that will have a minimal impact on their

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[45] Coaches may be able to defend their actions by arguing that athletes had the opportunity to earn a starting spot in pre-season and to major in business if they excelled in their course work. What is missing is the likelihood of each occurrence. Not many freshmen can be listed as active on the roster, and historically, special admits have not been able to major in business.

schedule, but which raise concerns over isolation and rigor as discussed in Chapter 6. Lastly,

special admits' low levels of academic preparation, paired with their need to maintain eligibility,

constrain their ability to take academic risks. Advisers strategically allow athletes to "take their

shot" at their intended major in winter, but otherwise steer them toward "generous" classes like

Swahili and supportive majors like ethnic studies.

     In response to such constraints, athletes receive several affordances through the AAC.

First, as the primary source of revenue for the athletic department, football players enjoy

privileged status within that domain. That privilege trickles down to their support within the

AAC. They work with learning specialists and academic coordinators who handpick the best

tutors for them. The tutors then provide a substantial amount of support for the athletes, and in

some cases render superfluous the need to engage in the coursework beyond tutoring sessions.

The AAC staff attempt to serve as a filter or buffer for the athletes by managing the technicalities

of the NCAA rules on their behalf. Acting as cheerleaders, staff members support athletes'

academic ambitions toward competitive majors, even if the athletes' relative preparation

indicates to the staff that they will struggle with the coursework. The system of taking their shot

at their major is an affordance, but it also has negative effects on the athletes' long term

academic engagement and effort. For the athletes who are academically relatively

underprepared, Bridge functions to afford them an academic "boot camp" experience before the

start of the school year. While Bridge helps athletes shrink the gap in their preparation, it also

trains them in and acclimates them to the AAC support structures. Lastly, Bridge provides a

crucial buffer for the athletes' GPAs, which afford athletes their "shot" at entry level courses for

competitive majors without risking their eligibility.

Though most of the academic domain falls under constraints, the majors that provide special admits pathways to degrees serve as affordances. However, the requirements to access majors continue to increase at the University. While ethnic studies, sociology and communications have typically been highly subscribed to by special admits, recent increases in the requirements for sociology and communications have left ethnic studies as one of the few remaining safe harbors. These shifting admissions requirements into majors affect all students at the University, but special admits enter with such comparatively low academic preparation that the likelihood of being able to major in departments with even minimum entry requirements is a challenge.

Ultimately, high profile special admit athletes' pathways are constricted by their affiliation with their athletic teams. That team affiliation provides a point of entry into the University, but the pathways available to the average student at large are constricted for the high profile special admit. The constraints overwhelm and drive the affordances in the system with the goal of maintaining athletes' eligibility and therefore utility on the field through graduation. As a result, athletes have very little room for agency and authorship within and between the systems in which they reside.

Agency, Identity and Authorship

Viewed through the lens of Figured Worlds, high profile special admits' limited agency and authorship translate into relatively fixed figurative and positional identities. By observing athletes attending Bridge in their first engagement with the academic domain – and students at large – during their summer orientation sessions, one sees that the athletes enter with a developed sense of the stereotypes and stigma acting on their identities as athletes. From their first days on campus, men and women carried different levels of positional power in the academic and athletic

domains that developed in Bridge and persisted throughout the year. Because of the relatively high academic preparation of most female students, and the high profile athletic status of the majority of the men, the perception of women carrying high levels of positional power in the classroom and men carrying high levels of positional power on the fields was perpetuated beyond the athletes' relative skill levels in each domain. While the division of positional power by sex is somewhat intuitive and represented in women athletes' higher GPAs and graduation rates nationally, the data also reveal the issue of positional power within athletic teams. Most existing literature on high profile intercollegiate athletics looks at athletes' high athletic affiliation (e.g., Adler and Adler's concept of "role engulfment") and academic disengagement. However, my data point to the positional identities athletes hold within teams as significant to their experience. First year athletes who were not performing well athletically or injured players prevented from playing altogether were left without an anchor in either the athletic or academic domain. As a key finding, the AAC not only operates as a hybrid space between the academic and athletic Figured World, but also provides an anchoring point for athletes with little positional power in either domain.

Systems-Level Tensions and Contradictions

Based on the business of football driving the systems in which the athletes are embedded, athletes who underperform athletically relative to the "promise" they were recruited on find themselves in a precarious situation during their first year. To understand the relationships between the systems acting on college athletes, I used Activity Theory to illuminate the change over time in athletes' objectives in academic and athletic domains. Significantly, the change over time of the athletes' schedules revealed an increase in hours and oversight and a decrease in agency and self-regulation.

By looking at the football program operations as a business model, it is easy to place blame for the constraints acting on the athletes simply on the shoulders of their coaches. However, it is important to see the culpability of the NCAA and its selective enforcement of policies as a constraint acting on the athletes as well. While rules such as calling it a meal when cream cheese is added to a bagel have been highly enforced, the 20/8 hour rule has been casually ignored to the benefit of the business and the detriment of the athletes' schedules and freedom. The athletic department governing the football program presents itself as balancing three goals: competing at the highest level, graduating athletes, and not getting into trouble with compliance issues. Because the athletic department is funded by revenue from the football program, the business of winning and competing at the highest level take primacy over the other goals. The department funds the AAC to provide insurance that their other goals will be met, but the department does not actively protect athletes' schedules beyond what is needed to comply with the weakly enforced NCAA policies. Football player time audits would likely reveal mandatory meetings and practices every week that require in excess of 20 hours in season and 8 hours out of season.

Using the two theoretical lenses to analyze my data revealed that high profile special admit athletes cannot be held accountable for their academic success because the need to keep them eligible, both in terms of utility to their teams and to mitigate sanctions from the NCAA, trumps their agency ability to take academic risks. Such athletes are sheltered from the consequences of their actions (or academic inaction) in order to protect their role as an asset to the University. While their utility is being protected by the AAC and the tracking mechanisms in place, the athletes, over their first year, also realize the constraints of their relatively low levels of academic preparation. Rather than directly address their preparation, the athletes and AAC

staff begin a complicit move toward protecting the egos of the athletes through supporting their ability and contributing failures to factors such as schedule constraints and laziness.

Academic Self-Handicapping and Academic Performance

The process of protecting one's ego from the realities of one's academic ability leads to a potential explanation for the systematic academic underperformance seen in athletes broadly and most specifically in high profile special admits. What often begins with an athlete putting in effort and seeing poor results in the quarter after Bridge results in the withdrawal of academic effort in order to manage the impression of himself as academically capable, but simply not trying. Self-handicapping behaviors emerge purposefully as tools to provide an explanation other than lack of ability for the athlete's academic failures. Such behaviors allow the athlete to protect the belief that he would succeed if only he tried. The most significant element in this finding is the role the staff members of the AAC play in supporting self-handicapping behavior as an ego protection mechanism. Rather than address athletes' lack of engagement as relating to their ability, they allow the conversations to revolve around the athletes' effort with the implicit belief that the athletes could succeed if they tried hard enough.

The AAC staff I interviewed knew that many of the special admit athletes they supported had not yet developed the skills to be successful in entry level courses for competitive majors. However, this knowledge was never conveyed to the athletes for fear of harming their egos. The resulting "take your shot" approach allowed athletes to throw their egos into the fire of competitive coursework during their winter quarter. As the athletes struggled to access academic content in the classroom and received lower than anticipated grades, the AAC staff provided tutoring and support while waiting for athletes to self-select out of tracks toward competitive majors. While athletes struggling academically felt like they might not belong at the University,

the staff stepped in to cheerlead them on academically. Part of that cheerleading manifested as impression management in an unusual form. While typically self-handicappers hinder their own success to manage other peoples' perceptions of their abilities, the staff of the AAC allowed their impressions to be managed as visible to the athletes while knowing that their academic preparation meant that they mostly had a false sense of academic confidence.

The staff of the AAC did differentiate some athletes as "lazy" while recognizing that others were simply not able to complete academic readings and assignments without significant support. The differentiations I saw in the high profile special admit populations were, in actuality, more along the lines of those who were resistant to versus dependent on support. Though they were all special admits, the athletes I interviewed fell on a spectrum of academic preparedness. Based on the staff's and my own observations during Bridge, it was clear that King and Ricky were going to need significant support to get through their coursework. On the other end of the spectrum, Darnell and Rob performed well in Bridge and seemed on their way toward becoming independent learners. As the year progressed, all of the athletes were tracked by the system with class checkers, Study Table hours, learning specialists or academic coordinators, and tutors who were able to distill the content of their classes. While athletes embraced the support and tolerated the tracking to varying degrees, athletes who seemed academically capable began to withdraw effort and self-handicap in similar fashion to those athletes who had far less academic preparation. The effort to work independently of the system was too great for an athlete like Rob, who had wanted to study on his own, and Darnell, who was annoyed by the class checking system and oversight. By the end of the year, athletes universally accepted the tutoring system and allowed it to substitute for their own studying. In sum, the

process that led athletes to handicap looked different based on their preparation, but the outcomes are relatively indistinguishable.

The Pedagogy of Teaching and Learning

In Chapter 8, I used Activity Theory to highlight the differences in learning experienced by athletes in the athletic and academic domains. The mostly active and hands-on learning in football practice contrasted to the mostly passive learning experienced in large courses during any student's first year at the University. The requirements for participation in the academic domain were low and allowed for athletes to disengage over time. The lack of engagement in the classroom setting was backfilled by the tutoring provided by the AAC in order to help maintain athletes' eligibility. While I focused on the systems-level analysis in the last chapter in order to understand how active and passive behaviors are fostered in different domains, I did not focus on the pedagogy of teaching and coaching that allows for these active and passive responses, and ultimately, very different levels of accountability.

I have presented the learning that takes place in and around football practice as active and engaging. However, presenting football practice as a near-ideal learning environment does not sit well with me. The pedagogy, or method and practice of teaching, used by the football coaches concerns me on several counts. The University has to ask if the coaching pedagogy represents acceptable treatment of undergraduate students. Are 'hard lessons' an acceptable form of teaching? Do they effectively shift the athletes' behaviors? Should athletes who fail to attend a class receive a physical punishment? Within these hard lessons, where is the line between learning a lesson and suffering abuse? When Ricky showed up for the morning Bridge class midsummer with his hands cut up as a consequence of that morning's hard lessons, was the line crossed? A few of the University's high profile players are, at the time of this writing,

facing indefinite suspension for their public behavior. The local sports news-writers have been grappling with their recommendations to reinstate the athletes or drop them from the team. Interestingly, one local writer argued that the players should be reinstated, but that they should be given a lot of extra time with the team's strength trainer as punishment. Hard lessons are not a secret; in fact, they seem to be an accepted coaching pedagogy for correcting athlete behavior.

After hearing accounts like Ricky's, in which a football coach verbally attacked him for his appearance, which ultimately led his teammates to shave the sides of his head, it is hard to accept the verbal abuse some coaches use as part of their pedagogical approach as anything other than abuse of power. If, for a moment, we put Ricky in a classroom and envision a faculty member verbally attacking him in a public setting, it is hard to believe that such a verbal assault would be tolerated by the academic community. In that case, the University should ask if such differences in teaching pedagogy across the different domains of the campus are acceptable. Significant to such an exploration of acceptable pedagogy are the power dynamics implicit in the athletic domain that are absent in the academic domain. Coaches "control your scholarship and they're dangling that across your head. They control your dreams, basically, if you want to go to the NFL." The coaches control athletes' scholarships and their playing time. The dynamic leaves no room for athletes to complain or speak out against their coaches' behavior. The athlete will lose a year or two of eligibility if he leaves, and even his ability to leave is controlled by the coaches. The current system allows for abuse without recourse. There is a need for the athletic department to discuss coaching and teaching pedagogy with its coaches. My data show that the athletes are experiencing abuses of power of which the athletic department may not be aware.

While the football coaches are power brokers, the staff members of the AAC are service providers. Although the staff share the goal of developing athletes into independent learners, in

supporting the high profile special admits, the staff is stuck in a contradiction between their goal and their actions. The staff of the AAC has little power to change the forces driving the systems around them. They understand that "football runs this program. We all eat when football is well." The driver that keeps football doing well is having athletes that can compete at the highest level. The AAC's job is to keep them eligible to play and moving toward graduation. However, the goal of creating independent learners requires athlete accountability and academic consequences, both of which are absent when eligibility drives the work. Given the contradiction inherent in the system, I am not sure there is a single philosophy that drives the work of the AAC. An issue the AAC may need to grapple with is how they can introduce athlete accountability into the system without hurting the business end of the football program and the broader ecosystem.

Tutoring, Accountability and De-evolution

The tutoring services provided by the AAC represent the greatest affordance that the athletes receive. In reality, the affordance of tutoring support plays a large role in the athletes' disengagement from the academic domain, although it is intended to provide a pathway into the academic domain and the skills needed to eventually engage independently in the academic domain. When the tutoring system is evaluated in the most critical light, it is providing lecture notes, summarized readings, assignment facilitation, and occasionally information from past exams, which taken in sum, render redundant the need for athletes to engage in any academic work outside of their tutoring sessions. In this light, the AAC is almost operating as a shadow university for the high profile special admit population. The tutors are able to distill five credit courses into two hours of tutoring material per week. The skill and ability to condense and reframe the most critical course content is impressive and the product of significant time and

energy. Many tutors support the same course for years, learning the ins and outs of the content

and learning what is most essential to comprehend to pass or succeed in the course. While the

tutors are creating a great efficiency for the athletes, the fact that five credit classes can be

distilled into two hours calls into question the University's rigor and the ACC's means of

maintaining the eligibility of the teams' most valuable assets. During his spring interview, King

surprised me with a critique of the University's education system. He argued that vast majority

of his classes were like the "banking system," making reference to a reading he had completed

nine months earlier in Bridge, an excerpt from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[46]

King claimed he had only taken one class all year in which, "you actually have to think to

get…the answers right…it makes you think more than other classes…it's not just remembering

stuff." King's critique his education at the University using Freire's work raises the issue of

current teaching and tutoring practices ensnared in eligibility maintenance within intercollegiate

athletics as replicating systems of oppression within the greater society because what happened

to King during his first year at the University. The irony of King's comment is that by spring he

was severely struggling with his course work, yet able to critique the pedagogy of the institution

using a theory he had learned from a dense reading almost nine months prior. As his critique

suggests, the deficiency in the system does not reside in King himself.

The systems have reached equilibrium. The ACC works to keep athletes eligible and

will, when necessary, spoon feed them the material they need to know to pass their courses

through highly developed tutoring support structures. The tutoring allows athletes to keep their

egos protected; by intentionally not completing work outside of the tutoring sessions, athletes

can clear the minimum bar of eligibility while presenting an image of themselves as being much

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[46] Freire's work is critical of the teacher – student dynamic in which teachers are seen as carrying all of the knowledge and the students are seen as vessels to be filled.

more capable, and simply disinterested in engaging further with the academic material. Despite the best efforts of very talented and caring professionals working at the AAC, the system has devolved to a point where eligibility maintenance is the key driver of the learning that takes place for high profile special admits. The de-evolution is a predictable adaptation to the constraints acting on the pathways of these high profile special admits and the service providers at the AAC. The big question moving forward for the AAC and the University is how to protect themselves from falling into the trap in which the UNC Chapel Hill academic support center became ensnared. The answer lies in taking a critical look at current practices and assessing the rigor of independent studies classes that come dangerously close to UNC's "paper classes" along with an assessment of the tutoring program to develop greater accountability on the part of the athlete.

The way the systems work now, the tracking systems in the academic domain leave athletes responsible for being present, but not for being engaged in learning course material. There are no requirements to which athletes are accountable to receive tutoring. For the athletes who want to be held accountability for their academic domain, like Rob and Darnell early in the year, they struggle upstream against the tracking and support systems. Ultimately, the combination of the three factors - the athletes' academic preparation, the athletic schedule, and universally low expectations of special admits - prevents them from being able to break out of the model where failure leads to self-handicapping behaviors and a perpetuated cycle of reduced academic effort. While the systems' affordances and constraints have a huge effect on the athletes' pathways, are the athletes at all culpable for their academic underperformance? Is being "lazy" and simply staying eligible acceptable? We have traveled far beyond the deficit model in building an understanding of athlete underperformance, but the degree to which an

athlete could over perform academically within the system is debatable. It is plausible that a special admit could survive the tracking systems and intensive tutoring of their first year without developing reduced effort and self-handicapping behaviors? One special admit football player whom I spoke with in his sophomore year told me about his high academic work ethic and resilience. When I asked him about what factors contributed to his success, he mentioned that instead of living with athletes, he lived with students at large who attended the same church. One of his roommates was working toward becoming a biology major and was always studying. The athlete mentioned that watching his roommate's academic effort inspired him to apply himself as well. There are ways to become an academically successful special admit athlete, but the cards are stacked against those who endeavor to do so.

Recommendations

The following recommendations look at how accountability can be built back into the system of support, and how high profile special admit athletes may be able to progress toward becoming independent learners. The academic underperformance of such athletes is tied to the constraints and affordances acting on them. Therefore, the recommendations offered reflect possible shifts in the constraints and affordances to offer more athlete agency without compromising the goals of winning, graduating athletes, and meeting compliance standards. These recommendations focus on changes that can be made without shifting the broader context of constraints affecting intercollegiate athletes beyond the reach of their institution.

1) Changing the Schedule

The athletes and staff members I spoke with expressed that the athletes' schedules were a primary constraint. Specifically within football, the practice schedule in and out of season keeps athletes tethered to the University for all but approximately four to five weeks per year. I would

recommend reducing the number of weeks per year that the athletes have formal scheduled practice, and recommend that the athletes be expected to train on their own accord, knowing that they will be held accountable for their fitness at the end of each break. Similarly, fewer hours per day should be blocked out on the athletes' schedules. A hypothetical future meeting should not block athletes from classes they wish to take. Football related meetings could be restricted to certain windows of time and allow athletes some flexibility in their day as certain institutions have successfully done with other sports. Importantly, offering more time to train independently and freeing time held on daily schedules for possible meetings would likely not affect the football program's performance negatively. Moreover, the increase of self-regulation and agency for athletes may help them develop into more successful players, students, and people.

2) Tutoring and Learning

I would recommend evaluating the tutoring services not simply through the lens of compliance as is often done, but through the lens of teaching and learning. The current model encourages tutors to teach the course material to athletes. Ideally, a tutor would not teach; rather, athletes would have already engaged in lecture and with the readings, allowing the tutorial work to clarify and deepen understanding, not initiate it. Currently, tutoring sessions may begin with a question about the athletes' completion of the reading. If the athletes reply that they failed to do the reading, it leaves the tutor to spend the remaining time teaching the material with no negative consequences to the athlete. Over time, tutors stop asking, and the passivity of the athlete becomes the default. To add accountability into the tutoring structure, athletes would have to know what was expected of them, and there would have to be consequences for not coming prepared to tutoring. This model would require the tutors to be driven by a philosophy of deepening athletes' understanding of the material, not simply imparting their own expert

understanding. The tutors would have to be willing to stop saving athletes (and their eligibility) by telling them what they need to know to pass the test.

A deeper layer to this insertion of accountability in tutoring emerges when we think about what happens to athletes who struggle with content acquisition on their own. A new philosophy of tutoring would need to include a respect of effort independent of ability. A goal of tutoring might be to help the athletes learn how to struggle with difficult material, not simply the easier task of teaching difficult material to them. The use of tutoring to support athletes' struggle through difficult material is the hallmark of Bridge's success. The dynamic could be difficult to replicate consistently across the year, but aiding the transition from support in Bridge to the general tutoring support might help to mitigate the learned passivity practiced now in tutoring sessions during the school year.

3) Acknowledge the Preparation Gap and Frame It as a Challenge

One potentially productive shift in AAC practice might be to have honest conversations with athletes about their academic strengths and weaknesses, acknowledging what hard work will be needed to raise the athletes' skill level in various areas. By addressing ability as not fixed, the athletes might be more likely to adopt a growth mindset that might help prevent them from developing self-handicapping behaviors.[47] A tough issue to debate will be when the conversation about relative ability should take place. Should athletes know when they are signing up to attend the University that they will be academically underprepared relative to their non-special admit peers? Is it ethical for the football program to recruit athletes interested in

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[47] Psychologist Carol Dweck's book *Mindset* (2006) addresses how individuals who think that their abilities are fixed traits are more likely to self-handicap out of fear of failure. In contrast, individuals with a growth mindset see that their current ability level does not prevent them from achieving much more later than they are capable of now. Ironically, it seems as through the high profile special admit athletes I talked to for this research had a growth mindset toward their academic goals and relatively fixed mindsets toward their academic abilities, in which they overestimated their current abilities and self-handicapped to prevent having to reassess.

studying business without being clear about the groundwork they would need to cover before

attaining the necessary levels of knowledge and skill to begin the entry course work? If their

preparation prevents them from starting down a successful path toward business now, should the

recruiting process be transparent about the limited time that athletes have to choose a major

before the NCAA requires that they declare and make continued progress toward that degree?

Coaches should be more forthcoming about both athletic and academic competition the athletes

will face when they enter the University. Ideally, the athletes who are interested in such

competition will be more likely to be successful on and off the field.

4) Eliminate Tracking for Tracking's Sake – Study Table

My final internal recommendation is to eliminate Study Table. Since that program

operates more like a detention session than a study hall, giving the athletes those hours back and

allowing them to self-regulate that time might have a positive effect on the athletes by giving

them more of their own time to manage. I would recommend keeping a quiet space for athletes

to study in or around the AAC, and potentially having a tutor onsite to help anyone with

questions. By shifting Study Table to being an optional resource, athletes who are resistant to

tracking will have some more freedom to fashion academic identities independent of AAC. In

addition, by giving athletes more agency within their experience and asking them to self-regulate

more frequently and to a greater degree, athletes will be able to make choices and be active in

their education, which may lead to greater investment and academic identity development.

The recommendations above are not massive in scale or scope. I intend to make

recommendations that are adoptable as practices within the AAC and athletic department, and

which may have far-reaching positive effects on the athletes' experiences. Football still needs

players on the field; and to win games, they need to recruit the best players they can find. The

systems of affordances and constraints are driven by the business model of the football program. That will not change. However, the experience of the athletes in the system can shift significantly by making alterations to the current system that will allow athletes to be accountable for more of their academic learning without risking their eligibility. Simply stated, the AAC can expect more out of the athletes they support. In order to reduce or even eliminate the academic disengagement and self-handicapping behaviors exhibited in my data, raising expectations for academic work must be paired with the honest sharing of the reality of athletes' academic preparation.

Broader Systems-Level Recommendations

As opposed to the more readily adoptable recommendations above, coordinated efforts across multiple institutions would be required to engender the durable, systems-level changes needed to avert the de-evolution of athlete academic support centers into "shadow universities" for special admit athletes who cannot engage with the academic domain within their own institutions. Within Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions, a balancing act between eligibility, winning, and learning is taking place. I recommend taking a broad look at the ways in which the system constrains athletes, and at the system constraints acting on athlete academic centers. If, as this research shows, the lowest common denominator of those constraints is the need to keep athletes eligible, then what can be done to expand the agency of the athletes and centers by reintroducing academic accountability into the system? This rhetorical question leads one to consider how the constraints acting on the system can be lessened. An FBS football program is not likely to stop operating as a business, but its schedule can shift as recommended above. Even within the business model, a university has an ethical choice in how far it allows its business model to affect the recruitment and forcing out of athletes. Though the over recruitment

error the coaches made was presented as an anomaly, athletes like Darnell should not pay the price for coaching errors. Looking at the near 30% of special admits who transfer out for "athletic reasons" by their junior and senior years at the University,[48] one wonders if those athletic reasons were based on the athletes' desire to play elsewhere or the teams' desire to free up scholarships. Future research should explore the reasons why special admits transfer. Along the same vein, I recommend rethinking the policy on releasing athletes to play elsewhere. If athletes transfer out of their institution with a 2.6 GPA or better, they do not negatively affect the team's APR score. If an athlete has felt misled by the coaches in the recruitment process, should an institution keep him at the institution against his will?[49] The question does not have an easy answer, but it points to the recommendation of inserting ethics and coach accountability into the recruitment process. What would happen if coaches had to offer an athlete a scholarship with no athletic obligations out of their own pocket in order to free up an existing scholarship? I bet there would be fewer recruiting errors resulting in athletes being forced off the team.

Big Picture Policy Recommendations

The NCAA should not micromanage athletes' academic progress. In speaking with the advisers and AAC staff, it became clear that they found eligibility certification both stressful and tedious. In effect, the NCAA policies governing eligibility, such as the six credit rule, push the AAC staff to focus on eligibility rather than learning. If the NCAA shifted its policy to simply reflect a base number of credits that need to be passed each year, along with percentages toward degree completion calculated on an annual basis, the cloud of micromanagement would be lifted and the AAC staff would have more flexibility to talk about course learning rather than credit passing.

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[48] Data on graduation and transfer rates was provided by the Director of the AAC.

[49] An additional complication to this issue is that coaches can leave whereas athletes essentially have non-compete agreements based on the intellectual property (plays, etc.) they have acquired at their institution.

As mentioned in Chapter 8, the NCAA appears to be selectively enforcing its rules, and the rule that likely has the greatest effect on athlete welfare, the 20/8 Hour Rule, seems to go unenforced. I recommend that leagues and conferences, if not the entire FBS, commit to common enforcement of the 20/8 Hour Rule to ensure both an equal playing field for all and some additional athlete autonomy. The athletics arms race has to stop somewhere. Intercollegiate athletics is at a tipping point in which athletes are pushing back on their minimal stipends by unionizing and rejecting the "student athlete" identity the NCAA perpetuates in order to defend the amateurism of college athletes. The athletic scheduling demands and expectations cannot continue to increase without more athletes at more institutions starting to question their role and relative value within the system. The NCAA, governed by its member institutions, will be forced to evolve – hopefully in the direction of reducing the constraints acting on athletes and academic centers.

The only major constraint I have not touched on in my recommendations is the issue of relative preparation. I believe that athletes who can gain admission to the University through their special talent in athletics can and should be at the University. The problem lies not in the athletes' preparation, but in the recruitment messaging and initial contact with the academic domain that set them up with false expectations and a heightened sense of their abilities when they enter the institution. The messaging that they can play as freshmen and major in business (or other competitive majors) forces the AAC staff to navigate most special admits toward more realistic majors, and to steer those with the greatest need or lowest remaining academic motivation to the few remaining safe harbors. Significantly, athletes' frustration at falling short of their athletic goals, coupled with the realization of the academic preparation gap, leaves many adrift, withdrawing effort through self-handicapping behaviors to protect what is left of their

egos. I recommend being frank and candid in the recruitment process about the inherent challenge of academics, and about the competition for majors. In almost all cases, athletes' innate inabilities are not what bar them from success in highly competitive majors. Rather, it is the system's constraints on their schedules, low expectations as pushed by eligibility maintenance, the need to declare an intended degree quickly based on NCAA policy, and false expectations they have upon entry that limit their academic growth, risk taking, and potential at the University.

Fundamentally, athletes need to be held accountable for engagement in the academic domain, and to achieve this, athletes who do not engage need to be able to fail. For the system to change, the culture creating the constraints must shift along with the culture that responds with affordances. Without these big picture changes, more high profile special admits will be stuck in the no man's land between the academic and athletic domain during their first year, failing to launch into the academic world at the University.

Discussion of Limitations and Complications

Although the scale and scope of this research is substantial when compared to other qualitative research on college athletes, there are so many more points of data that could be valuable. One major limitation of my study is that I observed only athletes within the AAC, or hybrid space. I relied on interview data to generate a picture of subjects' experiences in athletic and academic domains, but did not observe my participants in their transitions between the domains. One reason for this limitation was my own lack of access to locker rooms and practice spaces. The writing course offered through Bridge provided me the greatest access to a classroom setting to triangulate the interview data on experiences in the academic domain.

While my observations expanded to all athletes operating around the AAC, my selection of subject participants for my more targeted interviews throughout the year may have been a limitation. While I purposively recruited all athletes during the Bridge course, I was limited to the football players who were willing to participate, which was not necessarily a representative sample of special admit football players at the institution. The racial and ethnic make-up of my subject pool was not representative of the football team as a whole. The team has a substantial Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population, none of whom are represented in this work. Another issue related to race and ethnicity is that the timeframe for this research was limited to a single year, which meant that the Graduation Success Rate for these athletes will not be known for some time to come, preventing an analysis of GSR by race and ethnicity in comparison to the national average.

The background of the athletes is a significant part of the equation of their academic success once they are at the University. Although I talked to each subject about his family and hometown, I did not get a detailed sense of the expectations the families of the athletes had for them. While some athletes mentioned a parent wanting to see him graduate, I do not know the detailed rhetoric of academic versus athletic expectations of athletes' families.

The last limitation of this study also points the field in the direction of future research. Realizing the extensive use of academic self-handicapping, and the ways in which the support staff is complicit in athletes' ego protection and impression management strategies provided a possible explanation for the academic underperformance of high profile special admit athletes. However, all of my interviews were reflective, asking the athletes to explain what had happened to them. Because of that reflective nature, I cannot be certain that the athletes are not just using their laziness as an explanation of their failure rather than purposively self-handicapping so that

they would have an explanation ready. The attribution of laziness for their failure is different from intentionally avoiding obligations or reducing effort to protect their egos. One recommendation for future research would be to increase the frequency of interviews and interactions with high profile special admit athletes so that the intention of laziness can be more clearly understood. Future researchers could also use existing self-handicapping measures inserted into interview questions to develop an understanding of the complexity and variability of self-handicapping behavior within the athlete population.

Final Thoughts

The tensions at the intersection of athletics and academics in higher education within the context of the United States' educational system are growing. The conflict between the revenue generated by universities' most prestigious athletes compared to their limited stipends, which do not fully cover their annual expenses at their institutions, is becoming part of a national conversation. The tension between amateurism and revenue generation has always been defended by the NCAA and other invested parties by claiming that athletes receive an education in exchange for their efforts on the field of play. However, this research shows that the growing constraints acting on the systems limit athletes access to the educational experience they are promised. As the tensions within and between the systems mount, football players at Northwestern are unionizing for stipend increases and health care benefits, and faculty at UNC – Chapel Hill are calling for more extensive investigations of academic scandals to protect the academic integrity of the institutions.[50] These current issues call into question whether being a "student athlete" is a viable dual identity for high profile special admits at moderately to highly selective institutions.

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[50] For reference to the Northwestern football team unionizing, see Patterson (2014). For reference to the UNC History Department's call for more accountability, see Kane (2014).

This research has revealed the importance of field work and gaining a local understanding of high profile athletes' experiences. The media surrounding big-time college football presents athletes as focused on football and not academically minded. However, this stereotype did not ring true for many of the athletes I interviewed. While Clayton and Kevin were the closest to embodying the stereotype because of their high positions within the football team, the athletes with low positional power on the team tended to enter with high levels of academic interest. That interest faded over time as their entry into the academic domain was cut off. By presenting a local understanding of high profile special admits experience and connecting it to be systems-level problems in intercollegiate athletics, I demonstrate the need to shift away from the narrative of the dumb jock as overcommitted to athletics and disinterested in academics. That over simplification is problematic. The acceptance of the dumb jock identity allows for universities and administrators to relieve their own guilt over the use of athletes in the business of intercollegiate athletics by perpetuating the belief that the athletes are at least getting to do what they love in playing their sport, and that gaining some education is better than none. This research reveals that in reality, many first year high profile special admits find themselves both languishing on the bench and in the classroom, struggling to find their footing in either an athletic or academic domain.

The issues outlined above and throughout this dissertation are rooted in the constraints and affordances acting on the systems in which athletes are embedded. The result is a need for both campus-level and system-level change. The strength of the AAC and the athletic department is that members of both organizations care about the welfare of athletes. I hope that the data I have presented and the recommendations I suggest help both the systems at the

University and other peer institutions implement changes to their practices to develop athletes as independent learners across the athletic and academic domains.

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Appendix A

Athlete Interview Questions – Fall, Winter, and Spring

Fall Interview questions: Athletes

Athletes:
Lead-in –
When you were looking at colleges, what made you choose the [University]?

What were some other colleges you looked at?

What is it like being a student athlete at the [the University]?
- Tell me about your athletic experiences…
  - What did you expect college athletics to be like?
  - How has your experience here been similar or different from your expectations?

What are your athletic goals?
  - Now
  - Three years?
  - Five years?

- Tell me about your academic experiences…
  - What did you expect your academic experience to be like?
  - How has your experience here been similar or different from your expectations?

What are your academic goals?
  - Now
  - Three years?
  - Five years?

- I want to talk a bit more about your academic experiences…
  - How prepared do you feel you are for the academics at [the University]?
  - How prepared do you feel relative to your teammates?
    - Relative to the non-athletes on campus?

- [Athlete Academic Services] offers different types of support for athletes, can you tell me about the services you use at [the AAC]?
  - Advising?
  - Tutoring?
  - Learning Specialist?
  - Study Table?
  - Are there others I'm missing?

Can you tell me about a typical day? For example, walk me through your day yesterday…
- What are the things you have to do in a week?

        o Athletically?
        o Academically?

- Are there things you are supposed to do that you try to avoid?
  - Athletically?
  - Academically?

- Are there things that you do not have to do that you choose to do anyway?
  - Athletically?
  - Academically?

If you do not do the things you are supposed to, like go to class, what happens?
- Who holds you accountable (gets you in trouble)?
- If you do not turn in an assignment, what happens?

Where do you feel most comfortable on campus?
- Least comfortable?
- How comfortable in [the AAC]?

How comfortable do you feel in the various places on campus?
- Library (example?) (Study elsewhere on campus?)
- Large lecture class (example?)
- Small seminar (example?)
- Walking across campus (example?)
- Dorm / apartment? (Where do you live and with whom?)
- [AAC] (example?)
- Locker room (example?)
- Practice time / space (?)
- Game / competition time / space (?)

What's the best class you've taken at the [the University]?
- What made it the best? (examples)
- Worst class?
- What made it the worst? (examples)

Have you connected with people outside of athletics? If so, who?

How would you rate your academic motivation (your desire to excel academically at the UW)?

In terms of your academic motivation, how to you think these folks would rate you?
- Teammates
- Athletes not on your team
- Non-athlete students
- Professors (examples if varies)
- Teaching assistants
- Advisers

- o Learning specialists
- o Tutors
- o Coaches

If you are interested in and motivated to learn – how do the people react to you?
- o (Leave open ended, but ask about teammates if it does not come up)

How would you rate you academic ability (your ability to excel academically at the [University])?

In terms of your academic ability, how to you think these folks would rate you?
- o Teammates
- o Athletes not on your team
- o Non-athlete students
- o Professors (examples if varies)
- o Teaching assistants
- o Advisers
- o Learning specialists
- o Tutors
- o Coaches

Do you feel like you can participate in academic discussions in class?
- o On campus?
- o In [the AAC]?
- o Locker room?
- o Practice / Game space?

Is the way you do your academic work in [the AAC] similar or different than the way you do it on upper campus?

I've asked you a lot of questions about your academic and athletic experience at the [the University] – in trying to understand your experience, are there things that you think are important for me to know that I did not ask already?

If you could give some recommendations to the folks who teach, coach and support student athletes, what would it be?

Overall, what did you think about the questions I asked you – did I capture what your experience is like at the [University]?

Winter Interview questions: Athletes

Reflect on your first season of Football
- How did it go?
- What lessons did you learn?
- Did you achieve your athletic goals?
- Looking forward to winter training?
- What do winter workouts entail?
- Looking forward to Spring ball?

Reflect on your first quarter of classes
- How did it go?
- What lessons did you learn?
- Did you achieve your academic goals?
- Looking forward to winter classes?

Tell me more about your first quarter classes
- Student took:
- What did you learn in each?
- What did you think about the instructor
- Did your grade reflect what you learned?
- What% of the reading did you complete for each class?
- Did you have a tutor for the class?
- Was he/she helpful?
- Did you take notes in class?
- Were there other athletes in your class?

How has your schedule shifted for winter
- What does a typical day look like now?

What are your expectations for your winter quarter classes?
- What are you taking? (list)
- How prepared for your classes do you feel now?
- What are your academic goals for this quarter?
- What major are you thinking about? In September you mentioned:
- Have you discussed majors with an adviser or [AAC] staff?

What does it mean to be a [University] football player now?
- How are you seen on campus?
- In classes?
- Last time we talked, I asked you how you think people perceive student athletes –what do you think now? Are there stereotypes about athletes at the [the University]?

Support and oversight
- What does [Sam] do? (study table, check classes)
- What do you think of having your classes checked?
- Would you go if they were not checked?
- Did you have any hard lessons this fall? If yes, why?
- Did you ever get in trouble for missing tutoring / class / assignments?
    - If yes, who from?
    - What happened?

Things in [the AAC]
- What happens during study table?
- Are you in the room, or computer lab, tutoring?
- Is study table useful?
- What would you change?
- Tell me more about the tutoring you receive
    - Good?
    - Too much?
- Who is your adviser?
    - How often do you meet?
    - Talk to you about eligibility?
    - Are you concerned about your eligibility?
- Do you work with a learning specialist?
    - How often do you meet?
    - Talk to you about eligibility?
    - Are you concerned about your eligibility?

Structure
- Are there things you have to do, but don't like to do?
    - Athletically?
    - Academically?
    - Are there things you can get out of doing?

Compensation
- Are you on scholarship?
- Is the compensation sufficient?
- Should football players be paid? All athletes?
- What do you think of the NCAA?
- What is your understanding of the rules they have in place that govern student athletes?
- Does the NCAA affect the classes you can take? Major? Work? Eligibility?

Anything else happen since the last time we spoke that I should have asked you about?
Lastly, is there a name other than your own that you would like to go by in my notes / writing?

Spring Interview Questions: Athletes

Catch up from winter:

- How did spring ball go?

- In the winter you mentioned dividing the team into sub-teams for competition, how did that go?

- What are your thoughts on football heading into next fall?

- In winter you were taking _____, did you meet you academic expectations? Why or why not?

- Are you taking summer classes?

- Training here? What does summer look like?

Demographic questions:

- What is the parental education of your mom or legal guardian 1?

- Of your dad or other legal guardian?

- Are you the first person in your family who might earn a college degree?

- How do you describe your race or ethnicity?

Campus engagement / relationships:

- Are there any other clubs or organizations you are involved in?

- Where do you plan to live this summer? Next year?

- With other athletes? (why or why not?)

- Who do you tend to spend time with? (Athletes / non-athletes)

- Among that group – do your friends tend to be of a similar racial ethnic background to you?

- Why do you think you hang out with the group that you do?

- Do you hang out with non-athletes of your same race / ethnicity?

- Do you see divisions of friend groups on the football team?

- How is the team divided?

- On campus, what do you wear to class? Do you ever take off the sweats? Do you feel different in non-athletic gear?

- Are you living up to your academic potential? (why or why not?)

- Are you living up to your athletic potential? (why or why not?)

- What kind of relationship do you have with your position coach? (head coach) (strength coach)
- What has your relationship been like with your academic adviser?
- You originally mentioned wanting to major in _____ and during the winter you mentioned _____
    - What is your intended plan of study now?
    - If things shifted, how did that shift occur?
    - What led to your decision to change majors?
    - How do you feel about the change?
    - What are you taking now?
    - Walk me through how you chose classes for this quarter…
    - Any difference in how you picked classes for fall?
    - If you have to pick out your schedule on your own, could you do it?

- Have you ever been pressured by an athletic representative (coach, team, adviser, etc.) to take a course with a certain professor because he /she requires less work?
- Have you ever been pressured by an athletic representative (coach, team, adviser, etc.) to take a certain class because it required less work or time?
- Have you ever been pressured by an athletic representative (coach, team, adviser, etc.) to declare a particular major because it required less work?

Reflections:
- One year into school – are academic s similar or different to what you expected last summer?
- Looking back now, how prepared were you for academics at [the University]?
- Are you still intending to graduate?
- What does your academic goal look like now?
- Do you care how much you learn in a class?
- Does anyone who you work with in [the AAC] care about how much you learn in a class?

Climate:

- How do you feel about the campus climate? (respect)

- How do you feel about the athletic department climate? (respect)

- How do you feel about the climate of your team? (respect)

- Are there people who are not respected on campus, in athletic dept. or on your team?

- Have you been a part of or witnessed any offensive or hostile situations since you arrived on campus? (if so, what was the situation about?)

- Do you feel like you have faced any discrimination on campus? (based on student athlete identity?) (racial / ethnic identity?)

Best and worst of year:

- What was the best experience you had on campus all year?

- Worst?

- Best experience in athletics all year?

- Worst?

- Social / academic (whichever not answered above)?

- Worst?

Faculty interactions:

- What are your experiences with faculty?

- Ever meet outside of class?

- Do you participate in class? When? What type of class? When do you stay quiet?

- Do you think faculty are interested in you?

  - In how much you learn?

  - Do you feel supported by faculty?

  - Do you think faculty favor or discriminate against athletes?

Staff and tutors:

- Working with the staff at [AAC] – what have your experiences been like?

- Do you feel supported by the staff?

- o Do they care if you learn?
- o Do they care if you graduate?
- o Same with coaches – supported?
- o Care if learn?
- o Care if graduate?

- o Tutors – what do you think about the tutoring you receive?
- o What's the best part of having tutors?
- o What's the worst think about having tutors?
- o Anything you would change about tutoring?
- o What would happen if you didn't have the support of the tutors?
- o How would you change how you study / work?

- o What% of your readings are you getting done for each class now?
- o Are you reading more or less now than you did in the fall / winter? Why?
- o Do you think you have to complete your readings to be successful?

Overall:
- o Based on athletics – how happy are you that you are at UW? (why)
- o Based on academics – how happy are you that you are at the UW? (why)
- o Socially – how happy are you that you are at the UW? (why)

Did you come up for a name I can refer to you by in my research?

Would you mind if I looked at your academic outcomes for spring quarter?

Appendix B

Staff Interview Questions

Questions:

What is the goal of [Bridge]?

How do you think [Bridge] went this summer?

What did you think of this summer's cohort?

Any standouts? Who is leaving and why?

How often to specials not make it at [the University]? Grad rate?

Mentioned concern over the next group entering [Bridge] – why?

Are their guys with credentials too low to be successful?

How close to the minimum standards are various special admits?

Specifically, what resources do you provide?

How do you think college athletes experience academics in [the AAC] versus elsewhere on

campus?

How is [the AAC] different in its approach to support?

Why do you work with student athletes?

Can you tell me about the factors that influence how you tutor or advise your student?

For instance, if a special admit wants to be pre-med or go into business, how do you advise him /

her?

What do you do to encourage the students you work with?

What push back have you faced?

Can you give me an example of a student you have worked with who you had a lot of success

with?

How about an example of a really challenging student?

- What do you think was the difference between the two?

- What type of student tends to be successful and who tends to fail?

How do you hold student athletes accountable for completing their academic work?

- What are the things student athletes have to do academically?

- What do they try not to do / get away with?

Do you feel pressure to make sure student athletes stay eligible to participate in athletics?

- Follow up on how they deal with pressure – if yes.

Tell me about your interactions with coaches, faculty, and staff who do not exclusively work with athletes?

What would you change about [the AAC]?

- What would you keep the same? (strengths and weaknesses of center)

- Do you think the system of support works?

- Does it work for some better than others? If so, who?

Goals of various systems: Athletic Dept, Football team, [the AAC], Campus / university, NCAA?

Appendix C

Observation Guidelines

Observation Guidelines:

- Watch student athlete interactions with peers for:

    o Language around academic work (positive, negative, etc.)

    o Language around caring about academic performance

    o Levels of support or distraction of academic work

    o Discussion on identity

    o Assessments of academic ability

    o Conversations around athletics, individual and team performance

    o Conversations around classroom experiences, work with faculty and staff

- Watch student athlete interactions with staff for:

    o Discussions on academic performance

        ▪ Grades focus (e.g., "passing") or learning skill focused

    o Language around academic work (positive, negative, etc.)

    o Language around caring about academic performance

    o Levels of support or distraction of academic work

    o Methods of encouragement

    o Assessments of academic ability

    o Conversations around athletics, individual and team performance

    o Discussions of identity

- Watch Staff interactions with peers for:

    o Assessments of academic ability of the student athletes

    o Use of language to describe the student athletes

- Watch individual student athletes for:

    o Evidence of engagement with academic work

    o Task orientation

Vita

Anne Browning was born in Tacoma, Washington and managed to stay out of trouble by playing sports. She went on to both play soccer and row at Harvard as a two-sport college athlete. She then began studying the intersection of athletics and academics at the University of California at Berkeley when she saw the tensions inherent in fielding competitive Pac-12 teams at a highly selective university. After earning her Masters degree, she spent several years training with the United States rowing team, then hung up her oars and started working at the University of Washington (UW) where she currently serves as the Director of Academic Support Programs supporting the full spectrum of UW undergraduates. Her love of sports kept her research focused on athletics within the context of higher education, and she hopes that her research will help improve the educational experience of intercollegiate athletes on and off the field of play.