



NCAA GOALS Study of the Student-Athlete Experience

Initial Summary of Findings

January 2016

What is GOALS?

GOALS (Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations and Learning of Students in College) is an NCAA study of the experiences and well-being of current student-athletes. The GOALS study was designed to provide data to NCAA committees, policymakers and member institutions on a range of issues important to today's student-athletes. Similar studies were previously conducted in 2006 and 2010.

Survey

The current GOALS survey covered the following general topics:

- College athletics experience
- College academic experience
- College social experience
- Recruitment
- Health and well-being
- Time commitments
- On-campus support
- Finances
- Opportunity to provide open-ended comments

A number of items have been repeated across the three administrations of the survey, allowing for trends to be examined. New items in the current study include questions on youth sports participation, parental aspirations, burnout, involvement/interest in study abroad and internships, and athletics department programming desired. Survey responses were received from over 21,000 student-athletes at nearly 600 schools across Divisions I, II and III.

Initial Findings

College Choice

- Athletics continues to play a prominent role in college choice across divisions. This includes quality of athletics facilities and presence of a particular coach.
- Men's and women's basketball stands out as a sport where the decision to enroll or to transfer (especially among Division I men) often depends on the coach at that college.
- Although most domestic prospective student-athletes (PSAs) visit campus prior to enrolling, many international PSAs (especially in Division II) do not. This is noteworthy given the large increases in international student-athletes participating in many NCAA sports and the role they fit within a school/team plays in student-athlete retention.
- Most student-athletes across NCAA divisions expressed satisfaction with their college choice and the athletics experience within their division. Lowest satisfaction levels were generally seen in high-profile Divisions I and II sports where unrealistic professional expectations may be highest.
- NCAA student-athletes generally reported that their expectations about college academics and time demands were accurate. Expectations about the athletics and social experience were more often reported as being less accurate.

Student-Athlete Time Commitments

- Current college student-athletes are reporting more time devoted to athletics pursuits than was reported in 2010. This in-season increase occurred across divisions and for both men and women.
- Change in median time spent on athletics:
 - Division I: 32 hours/week in-season in 2010, 34 hours/week in 2015.
 - Division II: 30 hours/week in 2010, 32 hours/week in 2015.
 - Division III: 27 hours/week in 2010, 28.5 hours/week in 2015.
- FBS football players continue to report the highest weekly in-season time commitments (median=42 hours/week, up from 39 hours/week in 2010). FCS football and Division I baseball also reported 40 hours/week or more. Among women's sports, Division I softball reported the highest figures (39 hours/week).
- Across sports and divisions, the typical college student-athlete is also reporting more time spent on academics.
- Change in median time devoted to academics:
 - Division I: 35.5 hours/week in-season in 2010, 38.5 hours/week in 2015.
 - Division II: 35.5 hours/week in 2010, 38.5 hours/week in 2015.
 - Division III: 38.5 hours/week in 2010, 40.5 hours/week in 2015.
- Two-thirds of Divisions I and II student-athletes (half in Division III) said they spend as much or more time on athletics during the off-season as during their competitive season. Seventy-five percent or more of student-athletes in baseball, football and men's and women's track in Divisions I and II reported spending as much time on their sport in the off-season as they do in-season.
- Although time spent on athletics has increased, 2015 reports of missed class were generally low and very similar to those seen in 2010.
- Most student-athletes across divisions expressed satisfaction with the number of contests in their sport, with approximately one-quarter wanting even more of them (including high percentages in ice hockey, Divisions II and III men's golf and Division I men's soccer).
- Sports where student-athletes were most likely to express a desire for fewer competitions included tennis, softball and women's volleyball.
- Division I women were most likely to state a preference for spending less time on athletics.
- Nearly two-thirds of men and three-quarters of women (highest in Division I) expressed a preference for more opportunities to visit home and family.
- High percentages of study participants expressed a desire to have more time for socialization and relaxation. This was especially true among those student-athletes with a high combination of academic and athletics time commitments (e.g., women, Division I student-athletes).
- The median self-reported weekly time spent socializing/relaxing during the athletics season was 17.1 hours in 2015, down from 19.5 hours in 2010 (difference of about 2 hours and 22 minutes).
- Student-athletes in the 2015 GOALS study reported sleeping an average of 6 hours and 16 minutes on a typical in-season weeknight. That is down 13 minutes from what student-athletes reported in 2010 (6 hours and 29 minutes). However, student-athlete assessments of their sleep quality are very close to those reported by college students generally.

Academic Experiences

- More than three-quarters of NCAA men and women (slightly higher among women and in Division III) reported that their overall academic experience has been positive.
- A majority of student-athletes reported feeling positive about their ability to keep up with their classes while in-season (approximately 60 percent in Division I, 65 percent in Division II, 70 percent in Division III).
- While over a third of student-athletes said that athletics participation has prevented them from taking desired classes, these numbers are down more than 10 percentage points in many Division I sports. Such improvements may be related to enhanced online options for course-taking (59 percent of Division I, 54 percent of Division II and 27 percent of Division III participants reported taking online courses through their college). Most student-athletes who say athletics has impacted course choices report not having regrets about those choices.
- Slightly higher numbers of Division I student-athletes are indicating in 2015 that their athletics participation has prevented them from enrolling in their desired major, but few say they regret their choice.
- Over two-thirds of student-athletes report having developed a close personal relationship with at least one faculty member, while more than 80 percent within each division believes their coach cares whether they graduate.
- Ten percent of Divisions I and II student-athletes have/will participate in a study abroad program. Thirty-three percent of Division I student-athletes and 22 percent of Division II student-athletes say they would like to participate, but cannot because of their athletics commitments.

Finances

- More than two-thirds of Divisions II and III student-athletes said college costs were an important consideration in making their college choice. These numbers were lower in Division I, particularly among football and men's and women's basketball participants.
- About one-third of Division I student-athletes and nearly one-half of Division II student-athletes have concerns about how finances will impact their ability to complete their degree. More than two-thirds of the student-athletes on athletics aid in Divisions I and II say that quitting their sport would make staying at their current college a problem financially.
- Seventy-eight percent of student-athletes (60 percent in Division I men's basketball and football) indicated that they usually have enough money to buy the things they need.

Campus and Team Environment

- Most student-athletes have a strong sense of belonging at their college, feel that their coaches and teammates have created an inclusive team environment, and feel that their coaches and teammates are accepting of people from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds. However, student-athletes of color (especially women) are slightly less likely to find the campus and team environments inclusive and accepting.
- When asked how comfortable they would feel approaching others about a team issue or problem, student-athletes across divisions reported feeling most comfortable speaking with their team captains and coaches as opposed to faculty or administrators.

- Student-athletes view other members of the student body as being less supportive of athletics than are faculty and school administrators.
- Although most student-athletes said they frequently socialize with nonathletes at their college, increased numbers within each division reported that all of their closest friends are college teammates.
- Student-athletes, like many college students, are highly connected to their parents. Forty-eight percent of NCAA men and 62 percent of women communicate with their parents at least once per day.

Volunteerism

- Nearly 90 percent of current student-athletes reported engaging in community service, which is a slight increase from 2010. Forty-nine percent of men and women engage in service a few hours per month or more (up from 44 percent in 2010).
- Coaches are requiring service at higher rates. In 2010, 50 percent of student-athletes reported being required to participate in service hours by their coach or team. That number rose to 58 percent in the 2015 survey.

Youth Sports Experiences

- Many NCAA student-athletes, especially in sports like ice hockey, tennis (Division I and Division II only) and soccer, began specializing in their sports at what experts consider a very early age (e.g., before age 12).
- Student-athletes in many sports played that sport year-round growing up and participated in the sport on both club and high school teams. Many NCAA athletes think youth in their sport play in too many contests and a number of them (especially men) wish they had spent more time sampling other sports when they were young.
- Many current NCAA student-athletes had high parental/family expectations of playing college and/or professional/Olympic sports that started at a young age. This is especially true among participants in certain Division I and Division II sports. These family expectations may fuel unrealistic professional expectations expressed by the student-athletes themselves in the GOALS survey.

Ethical Leadership of Coaches

- Scales were included in the GOALS survey to assess student-athlete opinion on the ethical leadership and abusive supervision by their coaches.
- Although most student-athletes rate their coaches at similarly high levels as expressed in 2010, we see that women and Division I student-athletes are more likely to be critical of their coaches in these domains. Men's and women's basketball players were the most likely to express concerns about being treated disrespectfully by coaches.

Mental Health

- College campuses have generally seen an increase in the number of students experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. The 2015 GOALS data highlights similar concerns among student-athletes, with about 30 percent self-reporting that they have been intractably overwhelmed during the past month (increases noted across each division versus the 2010 GOALS study).

- Approximately one-third of student-athletes (higher in Division I and in certain sports like football; lower in Division III) noted struggling to find energy for other tasks because of the physical demands of their sport. Nearly one-quarter (same divisional and sport pattern as noted above) reported being exhausted from the mental demands of their sport.
- Seventy-three percent of student-athletes believe that their coach cares about their mental well-being. This figure is slightly higher in Division III and lower in some sports (e.g., 55 percent in Division I women's basketball). Although many student-athletes say they would feel comfortable talking to coaches about mental health issues, such comfort is much lower among women.
- About 40 percent of student-athletes who sought help for a mental health issue reported high levels of satisfaction with the care they received from team or college personnel.

Post-College Careers

- Across sports, student-athletes generally expect to earn their degree and the vast majority indicate that their families also expect graduation. High numbers of student-athletes anticipate attending graduate school at some point in the future.
- Many student-athletes have completed or expect to undertake an internship of some type during college. These figures are highest in Division III (two-thirds) and lowest in Division I baseball, basketball and FBS football (one-third). Relatively high percentages of student-athletes in some Division I sports (e.g., 30 percent in FBS football) said they would like to do an internship but cannot because of their athletics commitments.
- Forty-three percent of all student-athletes believe it is likely that their job after college will involve sports. The numbers are particularly high for Division I men's (75 percent) and women's (59 percent) basketball players.

Impact of College Athletics

- Ninety percent of student-athletes credit their college athletics experience with having a positive impact on increasing their personal responsibility, honing their teamwork skills, and enhancing their work ethic. High percentages also reported that college sports has had a positive effect on their leadership skills, their values and ethics, self-confidence, time management, understanding of diverse cultures, study skills and commitment to volunteerism.
- About 90 percent of student-athletes across divisions said that team success is important to them, but also that they have the opportunity to compete frequently and at a high level. Nearly 80 percent noted that being viewed as a team leader is important to them.

Additional Programming Desired

- Student-athletes in the study were presented with a list of topics and asked which ones they wished their coaches and athletics administrators would talk about more frequently. Across divisions and gender, the most requested topics were those related to (a) academic success and especially preparing to get a job after college; (b) maximizing athletic performance (e.g., proper nutrition and how to get good/more sleep); and (c) balancing academics/athletics while keeping sports in perspective.

Study Background

- Student-athletes were surveyed during spring 2015 by faculty athletics representatives (FARs) at NCAA institutions. A few schools provided supplementary data collection during fall 2015.
- FARs at each NCAA institution were asked to survey all members of one, two or three pre-specified teams. The sampling plan was developed by NCAA researchers to ensure a representative national set of student-athlete responses. FARs had the opportunity to administer either online or paper versions of the survey. Both required in-person administration using standardized procedures. More than half of NCAA schools participated.
- Study protocols were designed to ensure the anonymity of participants within the administration setting and the confidentiality of their responses among NCAA researchers.
- Once 2014-15 Division I and Division II academic census data become available (spring 2016), we will be able to tie survey responses for many participants to academic outcomes and examine how various noncognitive factors relate to student-athlete academic success and retention.
- Principal study investigators are Dr. Thomas Paskus and Dr. Lydia Bell of the NCAA research staff.
- NCAA research staff will present initial findings at the 2016 NCAA Convention. Additional materials and reports will be released throughout the winter/spring via our website (www.ncaa.org/research) and the @NCAAREsearch Twitter feed.