Do NCAA student-athletes view themselves as students or athletes?

The majority of NCAA student-athletes (62% of women and 53% of men) very strongly identify as both students and athletes. In other words, it is clear student-athlete identity does not refer to a single continuum with high identity as a student at one end and high identity as an athlete at the other. Rather, these identifications occur independently and non-exclusively.

Why is understanding self-identity important? NCAA research has shown academic outcomes (grades, graduation and eventual graduate degree attainment) are strongly related to identity as a student while in college, even after taking prior academic performance into account.

Having a very high athletic identity does not predict future academic problems, but having a low student identity does.

Other key findings:

• Similar proportions (about three-quarters) of men and women possess a strong athletic identity. However, women are much more likely to highly identify as a student in college (78% vs. 63%), which may partially explain why graduation rates are lower among men.

• NCAA divisions show virtually identical percentages of participants who report the combination of both very high student and athletic self-identity. However, Division III has fewer participants reporting the combination of high athletic/low student identity, with 8% and 18% for women and men, respectively.

Note: Athletic and student (often referred to as “academic”) identity assessed for approximately 20,000 student-athletes in the NCAA GOALS study. High identity defined as averaging 5 or higher on several items forming each identity composite (6-point scale).

For more information, visit www.ncaa.org/research.