



Student-Athlete Career Development

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Although not always recognized as such, “NCAA student-athlete” is a foundational career that provides opportunities to develop leadership, communication, teamwork, motivation, and organizational skills.

Unfortunately, many student-athletes lag behind their non-athlete peers with regard to career readiness, failing to recognize how sport-related skills are valued in the world of work.

The Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop is designed to help student-athletes understand how transferable skills developed during sport participation are valued in the workplace and to introduce career self-exploration skills that are a foundation of the career development process.

The *Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes Presenter’s Guide*, available at: www.SupportForSport.org, prepares presenters to lead a one hour evidence-based career self-exploration program for student-athletes via a step-by-step explanation and video tips. Workshop activities include introductions and completion of the Transferable Skills Inventory, a self-report instrument that yields scores for the following 11 types of transferable skills:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Ethics and Conduct
- Problem-Solving
- Self-Motivation
- Organization
- Physical Health
- Coping
- Execution
- Creativity

The workshop also includes student-athlete led large and small group discussions about transferable skills developed through sport and the applicability of these skills in professional settings. The workshop concludes with a discussion of what athletes learned in the workshop and subsequent steps in the career development process.

Evaluation of the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop by experts (i.e., academic athletic advisors, assistant athletic directors, coaches, directors of student-athlete development, graduate assistants, interns, life skills coordinators, psychologists, student athlete advisory committee (SAAC) advisors, and senior women administrators) at NCAA Division I, II, and III institutions around the country indicates that the workshop is appropriate for use by NCAA student-athletes. Further, the results of a controlled field trial indicate that student-athletes find the workshop appropriate/acceptable and that participating in the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop increases career self-efficacy.

The convenient availability of the *Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes Presenter’s Guide* online, the presenter-friendly format, and the athlete-centered focus of the workshop has the potential to affect student-athlete career preparedness across NCAA divisions, geographic regions, and resource availability levels.

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Problem Statement

“NCAA student-athlete” is a foundational career that provides opportunities to develop leadership, communication, teamwork, motivation, and organizational skills. Unfortunately, many student-athletes lag behind their non-athlete peers with regard to career readiness, failing to recognize how sport-related skills are valued in the world of work. This innovation-in-practice program was designed to enhance NCAA student-athlete career readiness by: (a) the refinement of an evidence-based pilot program designed for college student-athletes; and (b) a controlled field trial to test the effectiveness of the pilot program, which has been made available online to reach student-athletes across NCAA divisions, geographic regions, and resource availability levels.

Introduction

Student-athletes have been graduating from college in record numbers in recent years (Hosick, 2014), but they lag behind their non-athlete peers in terms of key career readiness factors (Hook, 2012; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). This lack of career readiness is somewhat surprising because student-athletes develop important skills through sport involvement (e.g., leadership, communication, teamwork, self-motivation, organization). These *transferable skills* (Bolles, 2014), learned in sport and applied in the workplace, are related to positive career outcomes (Mayocchi & Hanrahan, 2000). Research suggests that the unique demands of intercollegiate sport and the lack of awareness of transferable skills may contribute to student-athletes’ career development deficiencies (Ferrante & Etzel, 2009; Murphy, 1995).

To address career development shortcomings at the highest levels of sport, a career assistance program was developed and implemented with Olympic and Pan American Games competitors (Petitpas, Danish, McElvain, & Murphy, 1992). Positive feedback about this career programming inspired Shiina, Brewer, Petitpas, and Cornelius (2003) to develop a similar career workshop for college student-athletes. The content of the workshop was focused on helping student-athletes identify transferable skills acquired through sport and facilitating the transfer of those skills to career-related domains. Opportunities for verbal persuasion, vicarious learning and modeling, reduction of anxiety, and discussion of performance accomplishments were included in the workshop to enhance self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Shiina et al. (2003) compared the effects of several career workshop formats. The in-person workshop that included administration of the Transferable Skills Inventory, a questionnaire that facilitates identification of transferable skills, increased student-athlete career self-efficacy to a greater extent than a workshop without the Transferable Skills Inventory and a control condition. High career self-efficacy is related to positive outcomes such as increased career exploration and decreased career indecision (Betz, 2001). These findings suggest that a theoretically-grounded, evidence-based career development program designed specifically for student-athletes can have important and measurable effects.

Involving student-athletes in career planning is a challenge even when strong programming is available. Indeed, over 90% of the student-athletes interviewed by

Mahoney (2011) failed to use on-campus career centers in their career searches. Web-based psychoeducational materials that are available for program use by a range of campus professionals including coaches, counseling center staff, residence life professionals, and career center staff, may offer solutions to some of the limitations of career center-focused approaches. Online programs can offer rich content, tailored to professionals addressing student-athlete needs, in a cost-effective manner (Rhodes, Fishbein, & Reis, 1997). Combining online training of professionals with evidence-based in person workshop formats can provide student-athletes with the best of both worlds in terms of career preparedness.

In sum, student-athletes develop key career-related skills through sport participation, but often fail to recognize the value of these transferable skills and fall behind their non-athlete peers with regard to career development. The purpose of this innovation in practice was to prepare theoretically-grounded, evidence-based career development programming for widespread dissemination to student-athletes by: (a) refining an evidence-based pilot program designed for college student-athletes; and (b) conducting a controlled field trial to test the effectiveness of the pilot program, which has been made available online to reach student-athletes across NCAA divisions, geographic regions, and resource availability levels.

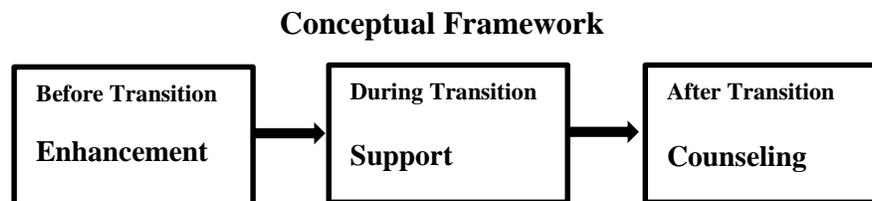


Figure 1. Life Development Intervention conceptual framework for proposed research.

The Life Development Intervention (LDI; Danish et al., 1993) model considers transitions, such as that of college student-athlete to worker, to be a developmental process. Programs that are offered before a transition has occurred, such as those teaching student-athletes about transferable skills to enhance career self-efficacy, are called enhancement strategies. Programs that take place during the transition in an effort to buffer the impact of the transition are support strategies. Finally, services that are provided after the event, perhaps as remediation for student-athletes who fail to find successful employment, are counseling strategies.

Athletes who participate in enhancement activities have been found to reap a number of benefits. Olympians who learned about and identified their transferable skills reported increased confidence in their abilities to transition into the world of work (Petitpas et al., 1992). Athletes who engaged in self-assessment saw themselves as more than “just athletes” and became better able to make informed decisions about their careers (Lavalley, 2005). Athletes who have not prepared for the emotional, psychological, and social changes that can occur as part of the career transition process are less likely to be in a position to plan effectively for their futures (Petitpas & France, 2010). Therefore, career-related enhancement services are particularly valuable for student-athletes.

In summary, the LDI model can be used to explicate key aspects of career development with regard to student-athletes. Enhancement strategies help student-athletes to increase self-awareness and prepare for their careers (Torregrosa et al., 2004). An enhancement-focused

approach to career development for student-athletes is likely to lead to greater student-athlete success and may reduce the need for subsequent remediation.

Data and Methodology

Study 1

Method. Instructional and presenter training materials for a career development workshop for college student-athletes, based on the work of Shiina et al. (2003), were developed, evaluated, and refined. Attention was paid to creating materials that are clear, easy to implement, and accessible via various electronic devices (e.g., computers, tablets). A sample of professionals likely to support and/or serve as facilitators of the workshop, reviewed the workshop materials for acceptability and ease of administration.

Lesson plan preparation. A detailed step-by-step lesson plan for the career development workshop was prepared. In accord with best practices, the lesson plan included: (a) introduction of the topic and student-athlete career workshop objectives; (b) the body of the workshop, which included explanation and checks for understanding via individual activities (e.g., completion of the Transferable Skills Inventory to facilitate elicitation of transferable skills learned through sport participation), and small- and large-group discussions; and (c) assessment/plenary review of what was learned and discussion of follow-up activities.

Refinement of materials for the Transferable Skills Inventory. The Transferable Skills Inventory (Shiina et al., 2003) helps student-athletes identify skills they have learned through sport that may be applicable in career-related domains, including:

- Communication skills -- the ability to listen, cooperate, and build relationships with others.
- Teamwork skills -- the ability to work within a team.
- Leadership skills – the ability to motivate and lead others.
- Ethics and proper conduct – the ability to behave responsibly, serve as a role model, and play or work within the rules.
- Problem solving skills – the ability to analyze situations, gather information, and make good decisions.
- Self-motivational skills – the ability to self-motivate and to strive for success.
- Organization skills – the ability to organize time and set effective goals.
- Physical skills and knowledge – the ability to stay physically fit and understand physical limits.
- Coping skills – the ability to manage emotions and cope with setbacks.
- Execution skills – the ability to follow instructions, stay on task, and get the job done.
- Creativity skills – the ability to design new ways of doing things, notice patterns, and organize information in novel ways.

The Transferable Skills Inventory (TSI) subscales show high levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .86 to .93 in a pilot study of 313 student-athletes). A user-friendly TSI scoring system was created so that workshop participants could interpret their scores during the workshop and have ongoing access to their results.

Participants. Individuals ($N = 28$; 21 females and 7 males; mean age = 32.25 years) who serve in a variety of roles at colleges and universities around the country (19 states represented), including academic athletic advisor, assistant to the athletic director, associate athletic director, coach, graduate assistant, intern, and life skills coordinator, participated in the study. Participants represented NCAA Division I ($n = 23$, 82%), NCAA Division II ($n = 2$, 7%), and NCAA Division III ($n = 3$, 11%) institutions and described themselves as White ($n = 19$, 68%), African-American/Black ($n = 8$, 29%), and Asian ($n = 1$, 4%).

Procedure. After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, participants completed an online informed consent document and were directed via an Internet link to the study website. Participants reviewed the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes Presenter's Guide and online videos and then completed the Treatment Acceptability Questionnaire (TAQ; Hunsley, 1992) with reference to the NCAA student-athletes they serve. The TAQ is a 6-item scale designed to assess the acceptability of psychological interventions. Participants also responded to open-ended questions with regard to the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop.

Results and Discussion. The mean for the TAQ for this study was 30.89 ($SD = 2.93$), which is comparable to values indicating acceptable behavioral interventions (Hunsley, 1993). Participants' qualitative responses were examined to identify program strengths and areas of the program in need of further development. Examining the themes from these responses, there was great enthusiasm for the workshop, particularly the TSI assessment and the interactive nature of the workshop. Favorable comments were also made about the empirical evidence supporting the utility of the workshop, the availability of online training materials including the presenter's guide, the presenter-focused workshop training videos, and the ease of implementation.

Some suggestions for improvement were to reorganize the videos, to create a series of workshops on career topics, and to integrate the workshop programming with career services. Modifications to the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop were made based upon the feedback from Study 1. That is, the presenter training video clips were organized in sequence to be readily available to viewers and new material pertaining to career services was added to the presenter's guide. Specifically, suggestions were made to invite interested career center staff to participate in the workshop and for student-athletes to discuss the availability and role of their on-campus career centers in the career process. Additional workshops were not created, as the purpose of this project was to evaluate one particular workshop. Nevertheless, the suggestion was considered an indication of the importance that these professionals placed on career issues for student-athletes.

Study 2

Method. The Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop was subjected to a controlled field trial to determine the extent to which the program was acceptable to and effective in enhancing the career self-efficacy of NCAA student-athletes.

Participants. Participants were 158 college student-athletes (66 males and 90 females; 2 did not indicate gender) across NCAA divisions (132 from Division I and 23 from Division III; 3 did not provide Division level) attending colleges and universities in Kentucky, Massachusetts,

Oregon, and Washington, DC. They reported that they were members of baseball, basketball, beach volleyball, cross country, football, golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, rifle, rugby, sailing, soccer, softball, tennis, track and field, and volleyball teams (participants could indicate involvement on more than one team). The majority of the participants were white ($n = 129$, 82%) and not Hispanic or Latino ($n = 134$, 85%). African-American/black ($n = 23$, 15%), Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander ($n = 8$, 5%), Asian ($n = 5$, 3%), and Native American ($n = 2$, 1%) participants were also included. Few participants had previously participated in a career workshop ($n = 24$, 15%) or a stress management workshop ($n = 20$, 13%) The sample size of 158 participants was adequate to detect a statistically significant effect of the magnitude obtained in the Shiina et al. (2003) study (Cohen's $d = 0.34$).

Procedure. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for the research. Workshops were organized on campus by professionals who work with student-athletes (e.g., assistant athletic director for student-athlete development, assistant coach, lecturer, life skills coordinator). Workshop presenters were directed to www.SupportForSport.org where they reviewed the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes Presenter's Guide and related videos. Because a control workshop on stress management was also conducted, presenters were sent an electronic and paper version of the Stress Awareness for Student-Athletes Presenter's Guide. Presenters prepared for the workshops, selected dates to present the workshops, arranged space for the workshops, recruited student-athletes to participate in the workshops, administered the workshops, and collected and submitted research data. Workshop presenters were paid an honorarium of \$200 for their involvement in the research.

At the start of the workshops, student-athlete participants gave informed consent, provided demographic information (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, and sport) and completed the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Short-Form (CDSE-SF; Betz & Taylor, 2001), an abbreviated version of the Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Short-Form (CDMSE-SF; Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). The CDSE-SF is a 25-item instrument with items such as, "Figure out what you are and are not ready to sacrifice to achieve your career goals" and response options ranging from "no confidence at all" to "complete confidence" on a 10-point confidence continuum. Betz and Taylor reported adequate internal consistency for the CDSE-SF. Coefficient alpha for the CDSE-SF in this study ranged from .92 on the pre-test to .95 on the post-test. The concurrent validity of the CDSE-SF has been documented through significant correlations with self-efficacy (Betz & Klein, 1996) and as reported by Taylor and Betz (1983) and Robbins (1985).

Student-athletes assigned to the experimental group participated in the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop. Student-athletes in the control group participated in a stress-awareness for student-athletes workshop for an amount of time equivalent to the length of the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop. All participants concluded their involvement in the study by completing the TAQ and again completing the CDSE-SF, and a brief open-ended questionnaire to assess perceptions of the workshop attended. That is: What are your overall impressions of the workshop? What did you like about the workshop? What would improve the workshop? What else would you like us to know about the workshop?

Results and Discussion. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was performed to compare the experimental and control groups in terms of post-workshop career self-efficacy while controlling for baseline career self-efficacy. All assumptions of the data for conducting an ANCOVA were met. Results of the ANCOVA indicated a significant difference between the

Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop group and the control group, $F(1, 143) = 4.45$, $p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, with the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes group scoring higher on career self-efficacy after the workshop compared to the control group. Treatment acceptability as measured by the TAQ ($M = 26.26$, $SD = 3.78$) was within the range indicating that the career workshop was an acceptable behavioral intervention (Hunsley, 1993).

Student-athletes that participated in the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop were asked four open-ended questions regarding the workshop: “What are your overall impressions of the workshop?”, “What did you like about the workshop?”, “What would improve the workshop?”, and “What else would you like us to know about the workshop?” Although several of the participants found the pre-test and post-test assessments to be tedious, feedback about the workshop itself was favorable. Student-athletes reported that they found the workshop valuable, interesting, and enjoyable. In particular, they liked the Transferable Skills Inventory, group discussions, and athlete-specific nature of the workshop. Suggestions for improvement were to extend the workshop over multiple sessions, conduct the workshop with larger groups of athletes, provide more examples of jobs and careers, and provide online information. One participant described the workshop of little value and repetitive but the vast majority of participants found the workshop inspiring and useful and were looking forward to taking next steps in the career process. As noted in the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes Presenter’s Guide, future workshop presenters may find that involving career center staff in the in Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes may be effective as upon completion of the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop career center staff are likely to find an eager and prepared student-athlete audience.

Campus-Level Programming Implications

Student-athlete graduation rates are at record high levels. Unfortunately, not all graduates are prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation. Student-athletes may be overrepresented in this unprepared group, as student-athletes have been found to lag behind non-athletes with regard to career development. Career development programming designed specifically for student-athletes such as the Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes workshop available for free online at: www.SupportForSport.org can be used by to enhance student-athlete outcomes. Such materials may be incorporated into outreach programming at institutions that have strong career programming and may serve as foundational programming at institutions with limited resources. The development and dissemination of theory-based, empirically-validated materials via the Internet makes it possible for high quality career development programming to be implemented across NCAA divisions, geographic regions, and resource availability levels.

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