A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DIVISION III STUDENT-ATHLETES’
TRANSITION OUT OF COLLEGE

Doctoral Dissertation

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this monumental effort to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Without the guidance and strength from my Heavenly Father, this endeavor would not have been possible. During the trials and tribulations of life, keeping my eyes on the Lord has been very helpful during my journey to complete my doctoral degree. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths (Proverbs 3:5 & 6). “I can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). To God be the glory!

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Furthermore, I also want to thank the following people for their support: Bryant Barr, Ron Foster, Melissa Rose, Nivia Cavic, Christopher Fernando, Elizabeth Tolman, Connie Castellano, Rafael Romero, Peter Perkins, Richard Fuller, William Durgin, Marybeth Lyons, Abbie Gorczynski, William Thistleton, Michael Manning, the entire crew at Paragon Athletic Club, and the members of St. Paul’s Baptist Church.
Abstract

Intercollegiate athletics is a major segment of numerous college and university communities across America today. Student-athletes participate in strenuous training and competition throughout their college years while managing to balance the rigorous academic curriculum of the higher education environment. This research aims to explore the transition of Division III student-athletes out of the college environment through applying phenomenological analysis as a qualitative tool to investigate the participants’ lived experiences. The role of Division III athletics in higher education, experiences specifically related to the Division III student-athlete population, and transition experiences as these individuals navigate out of the institution and graduate to pursue future goals will be highlighted. A goal of this study is to provide a foundation for strategic steps that can be taken by both faculty and administrative divisions of the college/university setting to address the Division III athlete population more efficiently. As the well-roundedness of all students is imperative for successful integration into adult American society, college life provides the perfect interplay between academics, social activities, and integration into the real world.

Key Words: student-athlete, Division III, higher education, student services, student wellness.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

A major tenet of the National Collegiate Athlete Association (NCAAA) Division III philosophy holds that “colleges and universities in Division III place the highest priority on the overall quality of the educational experience and on the successful completion of all students’ academic programs” (NCAA, 2017a). Furthermore, with more than 180,000 student-athletes at 450 institutions making up Division III, the largest NCAA division both in number of participants and number of schools (NCAA, 2017b), it is critical that higher education institutions prepare Division III student-athletes for life beyond college and sports. As the opportunity for entering professional athletics decreases outside of Division I competition (Brand, 2006; Duderstadt, 2000; Miller, 2003; Robst & Keil, 2000), support and advocacy for lower divisions becomes even more imperative. Upon termination of participation in intercollegiate athletics, most student-athletes will make a transition to a life outside of organized sports.

This combination – the likelihood of a non-professional sport career and finite eligibility – makes the transition process unique for college athletes (Brown, 2003; Fuller, 2014). To this end, these individuals need to be prepared to become positive contributors to society as they move to life outside of the athletic arena. Through the use of qualitative research methods, this study intended to thoroughly investigate the experience of transitioning to post-collegiate life for students in a Division III athletic program at a northeastern regional institution within a state university system. Given the positive impact that intercollegiate athletics has on the overall brand of higher education institutions, as well as the sacrifices made by young men and women
who participate in varsity sports at the college level, the findings of this research will help address the gap and complement the current literature pertaining to Division III intercollegiate athletes.

**Intercollegiate Athletics and the Higher Education Landscape**

**College Sports from Past to Present**

In order to most effectively illustrate motivation for this study, it is important to present the role of sports in the college arena overall. Such practice is indicative of due diligence pertaining to the area of research and provides an excellent overview of the trail that college athletics has undergone in the higher education environment.

Intercollegiate athletics in America has a rich tradition that continues to be a major identifying attribute of the higher education experience. The evolution of college athletics from colonial intramural activities focused on physical fitness into the multi-billion dollar enterprise that exists today did not occur without changing institutional perceptions and some controversy (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2009). The impact of athletics on the mission of the institution has always been a point of contention, with the commercialization of athletics in the 19th century igniting great debates amongst the leaders of colleges and universities (Flowers, 2009; Zimbalist, 1999).

As America began to value educating citizens, this allowed the country to advance to the level of our counterparts in England, creating a well-rounded, educated gentleman. The rise of intercollegiate competition eventually led to a noteworthy rivalry between Harvard and Yale, with the first noted athletic competition in the United States between their rowing teams in 1852. As time progressed, intramurals moved on to varsity competition, encouraging institutional
identities, recruitment practices, and governance under faculty and administration. As public popularity grew, the commercialization of college sports increased, and others began to capitalize on the public fascination with the competitions. Eventually, cultural change, advanced technology and the formation of the NCAA in 1906 contributed to the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics as we see it today (Vanover & DeBowes, 2013).

As sports became more organized in the higher education setting, it became imperative for higher-education professionals to properly define the actual term student-athlete and the different level of play on the collegiate level. As there are many forums in which a student can participate in sports while attending the college or university of his or her choice, there are specific categories designated by the institution as to the level or type of team on which the student performs athletically. In general, a student-athlete is an individual who participates in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the educational institution in which he or she is enrolled (Gerdy, 2000). Participation in sports on the collegiate level can happen in one of three different fashions: varsity, intramurals, and club. An athlete may or may not be supported by the institution by way of an athletic scholarship, but such a benefit is limited to varsity sports (Gerdy, 2000).

Today, varsity sports are regulated by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) or the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). These include major sports such as football, basketball, hockey and baseball. Varsity athletes compete with teams from other institutions and are at the center of the institution’s major revenue-generating sports. Intramural sports are teams created within the school. These teams play other recreational teams within the same institution and have no financial cost. Intramurals can range from basketball to ultimate frisbee. Finally, club sports are typically fee-based as the institution may not fully fund
the team’s expenses, and these non-varsity teams play against other institutions. The most popular example of a club sport on the college level is rugby.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to explore the experience of transition to post-collegiate life for students in a Division III athletic program at a northeastern regional institution within a state university system. Therefore, the overarching research question guiding this inquiry was “What are the lived experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college?” The motive for this study was to look at the preparation and development of these individuals who have made profound sacrifices for their institutions by way of physical, mental, spiritual, and social contributions in their sport of choice. As most Division III student-athletes do not make it to the professional level (Fuller, 2014), this study aimed to understand how their institution prepared them for life outside of athletic competition. Given that student-athletes identify primarily with sport participation (Blinde & Stratta, 1992), by looking into their preparation exiting the institution, this study contributed to and expanded the knowledge and understanding of Division III student-athlete experiences in higher education.

As Division I is literally one step away from professional athletics, individuals who participate are regularly committing themselves to athletic marketability. Though Division III does not compete at the same level, the sacrifice for participation is still a daunting, but enjoyable, task. For colleges and universities to dismiss the contribution of such a sacrifice may be perceived by many as exploitation (McCormick & McCormick, 2006). To avoid such an accusation, the preparation of these individuals should be of significant concern to upper level
administrators. “Student” is the first word in student-athlete; therefore it is imperative for higher education administrators to lead by example and display that they take this terminology seriously. A final goal of this study was to create strategic recommendations for student affairs practitioners who serve the Division III student-athlete population based on the findings/themes of the qualitative research. The desired outcome of speaking to Division III student-athletes is to understand their experience. Based on this information, this is an opportunity for change in higher education environments to meet their needs most effectively.

Although the focus was on Division III student-athletes, this research may have further implications for student-athletes in general. Overall, this activity was an effort to generate a strategic recommendations for a Division III institution within a state university system. The recommendations for the selected institution includes providing students with a well-rounded education to prepare them as future leaders in a dynamic and diverse world by demonstrating the interconnectedness of knowledge and cultures and emphasizing the importance of continuous learning. Additionally, this institution aims for academic excellence through intellectual achievement; collaboration; accomplishment in teaching, research, discovery, and scholarship; and innovative pedagogy both in the classroom and online. This study highlights the overall problem of practice, aligns with practical implications to support the strategic plan of the institution, and may also be applicable to similar institutions. Given that the majority of student-athlete research focuses on Division I revenue-generating institutions (Adler & Adler, 1985; Brede & Camp, 1986; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2006; Walters, 2017; Cooper, Cheeks, & Kenyatta, 2017), conducting this study contributes to the limited research area and the discovery of data to better serve the Division III population.
Justification of the Research

With the arrival of college graduation, the majority of intercollegiate student-athletes will seek employment or graduate school opportunities. More than 480,000 students across the United States compete as NCAA athletes, and just a select few within each sport move on to compete at the professional or Olympic level (NCAA, 2017b). As indicated by the NCAA (2017) in Table 1 below, the likelihood of moving on to professional sports is very small for college athletes, and the probability decreases as the student enrolls in lower designations, such as Division III.

Table 1: NCAA to Major Professional Team Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCAA Participants</th>
<th>Approximate # Draft Eligible</th>
<th># Draft Picks</th>
<th># NCAA Drafted</th>
<th>% NCAA to Major Pro*</th>
<th>% NCAA to Total Pro^</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Football</td>
<td>72,788</td>
<td>16,175</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Basketball</td>
<td>18,697</td>
<td>4,155</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Basketball</td>
<td>16,589</td>
<td>3,686</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drafts</td>
<td>Underclass</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Percent NCAA to Major Pro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baseball</strong></td>
<td>34,198</td>
<td>7,600</td>
<td>1,215</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men’s Ice Hockey</strong></td>
<td>4,071</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men’s Soccer</strong></td>
<td>24,477</td>
<td>5,439</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percent NCAA to Major Pro* figures are based on the number of draft picks made in the NFL, NBA, WNBA, MLB, NHL and MLS drafts only. Column percentages were calculated as (#NCAA Drafted) / (Approximate # Draft Eligible). *Percent NCAA to Total Pro* takes the number of pro opportunities from the “% NCAA to Major Pro” calculation and adds in some additional professional opportunities that we were able to quantify. So, for football, this calculation includes NFL, Canadian Football League and Arena League slots available to first-year professionals. For men’s basketball we accounted for NBA, NBA D-League and international opportunities. For women’s basketball, we assessed WNBA and international roster slots (NCAA, 2017c).
Given their participation in intercollegiate athletics, there is a threat of inadequate training for post collegiate endeavors as many student-athletes are so focused on sports without regard for an institutional exit strategy (Adler & Adler, 1991; Bailie, 1993; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Fuller, 2014; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wooten, 1994). Regardless of the positive attributes of intercollegiate sports participation, student-athletes are at a strong disadvantage because of their lack of preparation for life outside athletics.

Through a better conceptualization of Division III student-athletes’ experiences, higher education institutions can improve services to meet the needs of these students via academic resources, social and psychological support, student programming, preparation to handle the transition from the institution and out of organized sports, and to employment or graduate school. Furthermore, professors and administrators interacting with student-athletes will be better equipped through understanding the unique needs of this population and find student-athletes more engaged in the learning process as well as other college experiences. Additionally, with a positive and successful transition, both the individual students and society as a whole will reap the benefits via meaningful contributions to their respective communities. As found in the research, students can utilize knowledge obtained in the classroom in practical experiences to face challenges in their career and life after graduation (Henscheid, 2012). Gardner (1999) indicates that, “problems and needs associated with the transition out of college have received little attention from college and university personnel, and researchers” (p. 7). Henscheid (2008) urges higher education administrators to be intentional with providing resources for graduating seniors to promote closure for their transition out of college. Colleges will benefit from happier alumni, and students will gain many transferrable skills. While the present study focused on
Division III student-athletes, it is likely that some of the themes discovered may apply to other divisions as well or provide a starting point for future research into ways that higher education professionals can use Schlossberg’s Transition Model to understand and assist various student-athlete populations overall.

Colleges and universities need to provide Division III student-athletes with proper preparation and adequate exit planning in order to become positive contributors to society. As found in all student-athlete populations, when their eligibility expires, the overwhelming majority of college athletes must navigate the intricacies of life apart from college athletics (Brown, 2003; Fuller, 2014). As there is limited research on this population and most work has been done focusing on Division I institutions, this study will contribute to the scholarly research and enhance services for Division III student-athlete populations at higher education institutions.

**Deficiencies in the Current Research**

A primary motivation behind the selection of a Division III athletic program for this study was to investigate whether current institutional practices support the aforementioned NCAA Division III philosophy. Given the over commercialization of Division I athletics, this philosophy is unique to Division III as this division places a higher emphasis on the academic component of the student experience. Therefore, by gaining a better understanding of Division III student-athletes’ experiences, their preparedness for future endeavors can be explored. Unlike the commercialization that has oversaturated their Division I counterparts (Robst & Keil, 2000), Division III also indicates that as a division they “place special importance on the impact of athletics on the participants rather than on the spectators and place greater emphasis on the internal constituency (e.g., students, alumni, institutional personnel) than on the general public.
and its entertainment needs (NCAA, 2017a). Given the direct interest in student development through participation in Division III athletics, this study contributes to gaining a better understanding of how Division III institutions contribute to the student-athlete experience. In broad terms, this study explored the extent to which Division III institutions are living up to their philosophical principles as reported through the student-athlete experience or if there are insufficiencies. Through obtaining information on the Division III student-athlete experience, institutions can better assess the services that are provided to this special cohort and serve as an institutional verification tool regarding adhering to the Division III philosophy. Currently, outside of a private NCAA institutional audit specially verifying this information, such data is unknown in the research literature. Therefore, if this current study were not conducted, this area would continue to be neglected.

Within the student-athlete research area, most of the information pertains to Division I revenue generating sports (Brand, 2006; Duderstadt, 2000; Miller, 2003; Robst & Keil, 2000). This is clearly a problem, as most students who participate in college athletics perform at the Division III level. Despite the substantial number of Division III athletes, this group has received little attention in the literature (NCAA 2017a; Robst & Keil, 2000). In contrast, this research addressed Division III athletic institutions due to the neglect in this area. As mentioned earlier, Division III consist of the largest cohort of student-athletes. Therefore, as most of these individuals leave formal athletics to enter society, preparation for such a transition becomes critical.

As found by Richards and Aries (1999), most previous research has focused on public institutions with large-scale, revenue-generating sports programs (Division I), and few have focused on institutions that do not provide athletic scholarships, view athletics in harmony with
the educational purposes of the school, and possess student-athletes who are more representative of the student body as a whole (Division III). Given the gaps in the literature pertaining to Division III athletics, the implication from this study helps to address this lack of research and provides practical steps for assisting this population.

According to Watson (2005), although many student-athletes find participation in intercollegiate athletics to be rewarding, a growing number will also experience issues related to adjustment problems, emotional concerns, and psychological distress as a result of their participation. Over the years, the incongruence between academic affairs and the student affairs division (which oversees athletics) has been highlighted due to the lack of emphasis on the student aspect of the student-athlete title (Duderstadt, 2009). Given the lack of representation in Division III level research, there was a ripe opportunity for exploration. A better understanding of Division III student-athlete perspectives will provide insight for institutional improvements.

**Intended Audience/Stakeholders**

As the research shows an oversaturation of study on Division I athletes, and deficiencies for Division II, Division III, and community colleges, this study attempted to address an area in that void. Through specifically focusing on Division III athletes, the audience for this study would include internal stakeholders such as higher education faculty, student affairs professionals, intercollegiate sport practitioners (head coaches, assistant coaches, athletic trainers, sport psychologists), and scholars who investigate the experiences of students’ transitions out of intercollegiate athletics. External stakeholders will also benefit from such research, as these young men and women will also be contributing to society at large upon graduation (Brown, 2003; Fuller, 2014). As incorporating best practices in higher education is
imperative for student retention and success, a reciprocal relationship is established through the
success of athletic programs via contribution to enrollment strategies, institutional marketing,
and the successful graduation of Division III student-athletes.

**Definitions of Terminology**

Division III: A collection of more than 300 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)
colleges and universities that provide thousands of student-athletes the opportunity to
compete at a high level of athletics while excelling in the classroom and fully engaging in the
broader campus experience. This balance, in which student-athletes are recognized for their
academic success, athletic contributions and campus/community involvement, is at the heart
of the Division III philosophy (NCAA, 2017a).

Event: Any incident or activity that is disruptive or life altering in such a way that it causes a
change in the person’s normal day-to-day routine (Schlossberg, 1989).

Lived Experience: Experiences that reveal the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness one
has regarding events in which one has participated (Kleiman, 2004, p. 2).

NCAA: The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a member-led organization
dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes (NCAA, 2017d).

Nonevent: any event expected to happen, but does not (Schlossberg, 1989).

Phenomenology: The study of the shared meaning of a similar experience or situation by
individuals (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 449) that allows a researcher to determine how
ordinary members of society determine meaning in the world around them and how they
make meaning out of social interactions (Creswell, 1998, p. 53).

Prospective Student-Athlete: A student who has started classes for the ninth grade. In
addition, a student who has not started classes for the ninth grade becomes a prospective
student-athlete if the institution provides such an individual (or the individual's relatives or friends) any financial assistance or other benefits that the institution does not provide to prospective students generally (NCAA, 2017).

Self: Strengths and weaknesses of an individual (internal) dealing with a transition (Schlossberg, 1989). This can also be based on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and health, which may influence perception of the “Event”. Everyone also has their own self-perception and self-efficacy which impact perspective of life events (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1990; Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Situation: How an individual interprets/views a transition, the type of transition, the context of the event, and the impact of the event (Schlossberg, 1989). It is also important to consider if the individual perceives the transition as imposed or voluntary. A stressful life event is any event that exceeds an individual’s capacity to respond effectively (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1990; Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Strategies: Specific steps an individual takes to cope with a transition (Schlossberg, 1989). This includes action steps taken to avert, improve, or respond to the “Event” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1990). This addresses how the individual copes with the transition. What did he or she do? Finally, it has also been found that how an individual responds to a transitional event depends on the interaction and balance of situation, self, supports, and strategies (Goodman et al, 2006).
Student-Athlete: A student athlete (sometimes written student–athlete) is a participant in an organized, competitive sport sponsored by the educational institution in which he or she is enrolled (Gerdy, 2000).

Student Affairs: Student Affairs is a professional field of individuals working in staff and administrative roles in institutions of higher education with a focus to support the academic mission of the institution and encourage the holistic development of each student (UNESCO, 2002).

Support: External resources available to help an individual with a transition (Schlossberg, 1989). This may include family, friends, institutional resources, or community resources (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1990; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Supports are the resources an individual seeks out and utilizes in the time of need to assist with his or her Transition.

Transition: Any Event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, roles, or assumptions; an integrative process, involving moving in, moving through, and moving out of the changes one experiences throughout life (Schlossberg, 1989); occurrences or non-occurrences that produce certain changes in the individual’s perception of self or of the world that cause a new pattern of behavior that may or may not be effective (Schlossberg, 1981).

**Significance Statement**

The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of the college environment.

On a macro level, there are extremely high numbers of students who participate in college athletics every day across the United States (NCAA, 2017b). Therefore, it is imperative to look into their preparation for successful and meaningful lives beyond higher education
competitive sports, as most at the Division III level will not become professional athletes. This becomes especially important when the institution is benefiting financially from the efforts of these young men and women. For example, as it pertains to enrollment management, the research has found that a championship season was one factor amongst many that contributed to an undergraduate’s selected school of choice, and that there was an increase in total number of applications (Toma & Cross, 1998). In addition, the contribution of an athletic program’s success positively impacts institutional marketability. Admissions and fundraising numbers are important in determining institutional prestige, and spectator sports may well influence an increase in both the quantity and the quality of applications and the number and size of donations, especially from alumni (Fisher, 2009; McCormick & Tinsley, 1987).

Furthermore, Arpan, Raney and Zivnuska’s (2003) study of major US universities found that various non-academic aspects, for instance, athletics, contributed greatly to their reputations. Though Division III student-athletes are not generating the same financial revenue as their Division I counterparts, their athletic contributions to the school still have a positive financial impact. Success of athletic teams continue to be a marketing tool for admissions counselors and impacts the institution’s financial bottom line. To this end, as student-athletes leave their mark of influence on the higher education environment, their preparation for life after school as meaningful contributors to society becomes critical.

Overall, this study sought to broaden the knowledge area related to the use of coping strategies of Division III student-athletes attending postsecondary institutions and provide a better understanding of the transition process. In order for colleges and universities to provide programs and services to meets the needs of all students, postsecondary institutions must be aware of and understand the coping strategies used and the obstacles faced by particular student
groups. Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998) argued that given the limited research that examines the transition experiences of college students more research is needed.

Positionality

As a new scholar-practitioner, thinking about my identity and how it impacts my life journey is a subject that I find very intriguing. My personal background includes being the youngest male of four African-American children raised in a Christian-based family in Brooklyn, New York. I am a product of the New York City public school system, where I was also a student-athlete, before moving upstate to complete my undergraduate and graduate education. My educational training includes a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling, a Certificate of Advanced Study in School Counseling, a Master of Science in Educational Administration and Policy Studies – Higher Education Leadership, and a Master of Business Administration (MBA). As a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community, I am also a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion. Therefore, I am very sensitive to discrimination, as my identity affiliates me with two groups that have a history of marginalization in America (race and sexuality). To this end, I am fully aware of the biases that I bring to my work as a researcher and recognize that understanding and acknowledging these biases is imperative to my success as a scholar-practitioner.

With the foundation of my training in higher education consisting of psychological principles, diverse perspectives, and counseling techniques, I have been exposed to various academic platforms in which marginalization and multiculturalism have been explored. As a Student Affairs Director, I hold power as an advocate for students, faculty and staff, but as a scholar-practitioner I must also look to respectfully engage in the process of growth, even when it is uncomfortable and difficult. As a scholar-practitioner, I must be conscious of entering my
field of study with my “heavy backpack” of past experiences (Franklin, 2014). A “loaded backpack” hinders effective communication and active listening skills. Being aware of this information will make me more cognizant of my biases and reinforce the need for objectivity. Finally, the way I will identify and address my personal bias is to make sure I am considering opposing opinions. Taking this into consideration, as well as my own background, ethnicity, sexuality, race, religion, socioeconomic status and political views, it is my goal to remain aware of my personal view of the subject matter being explored as well as my approach to the research. As highlighted in the literature, positionality is a concept that acknowledges the complex and relational roles of race, class, gender, and other socially constructed identifiers of being (Parsons, 2008).

Creswell (1998) asserted that clarifying researcher bias from the outset of a study is a verification technique (p. 202). In this clarification, the researcher notes past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that may influence the study (p. 202). As a former athlete and lover of college football, I am personally biased toward ensuring that all athletes are given excellent treatment as this should also be the case for the entire student body. When it comes to sports, the level of commitment and expectation can be extremely intense. Given my love for athletics, it may be a challenge to detach my individual perspective and understanding while orchestrating research. Regardless, as a scholar-practitioner I must develop a commitment to the objectivity, reliability and validity of my research (Machi & McEvoy, 2012).

The literature states that our history and involvements may bring misinterpretations to our investigation (Briscoe, 2005). It is this bias that I must take into account as I conduct my research on Division III athletes. Growing up as an athlete and being a huge sports fan my entire life, my exposure to athletics has been significant. Having a personal understanding of the world
of the student-athlete predisposes me to advocate for quality treatment of this population. As Takacs (2002) states, “Few things are more difficult than to see outside the bounds of our own perspective; to be able to identify assumptions that we take as universal truths, but that instead have been crafted by our own unique identity and experiences in the world” (p. 169). As a scholar-practitioner, positionality and bias awareness is pivotal. As my positionality informs my context description, my identity makes me fully aware of things others may fail to notice or appreciate. Given my personal background discussed earlier, my experience contributes to my current worldview. In the face of objectivity as a new scholar-practitioner, I am encouraged to consider every side of a potential point of view. As an individual who is extremely passionate about diversity, inclusion, and advocacy, I must make sure that my convictions do not cloud my judgment. Overall, I relish learning and sharing with others. To work toward a just world means opening up my heart and mind to the perspectives of others (Takacs, 2002).

Gallagher indicates that one needs to understand that a hermeneutical situation is always a localized one (1992). Considering the similarities and differences in how one approaches a situation, no method can guarantee an absolutely objective interpretation of a scholar’s work because, as readers, we are conditioned by prejudices of our own historical experience (Gallagher, 1992). In the face of social justice, it is important to see how our own biases come into play, as well as how the biases of others impact the world. Given my love of intercollegiate athletics, I have to make sure my passion is not interfering with my research methodology.

Research seeks to reveal ways in which it is influenced by the lives, cultures, and positionality of researchers (Banks, 1993). As a researcher, creating strategic recommendations is a task that should be based on an unbiased research endeavor. My research is an effort to address Division III athletics and introduce an additional contribution to the scholarly literature.
As I move forward, being fully conscious of my own positionality will contribute to the diverse and equitable discourse that Franklin (2014) highlights as crucial to intellectual growth. Exposure to diverse ways of thinking will challenge our previous understandings of educational practice, showcasing our variances (Lesko, Simmons, Quarshie, & Newton, 2008). In addition, via the profound exposure to different points of view, including interpretive methods, this will increase both active thinking and intellectual engagement (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). As a scholar-practitioner, I must develop a commitment to the objectivity, reliability, and validity of my research (Machi & McEvoy, 2012).

In an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of Division III student-athletes and develop meaning from such experiences, qualitative research methods provide an excellent framework for the collection and interpretation of rich data sources. As a researcher and interviewer during the qualitative process in this study, my goals are engagement, rapport, accurate interpretation, and representation. Given that our fluid identities change our positionality over time (Franklin, 2014), entering interactions from an objective point of view encompasses a high level of sensitivity, open mindedness, and a willingness to learn and challenge oneself as a scholar-practitioner.

**Central Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experience of Division III student-athletes as they prepare for a successful transition out of the institution. More detailed information pertaining to the 4S system is discussed in the next section of this document. Specifically, this research attempts to explore how the institution has supported such a transition. In order to address the research questions, this exploratory and phenomenological study utilized a qualitative method in which the experiences of Division III student-athletes will
be explored as they transition out of the higher education environment. Phenomenology is the study of the shared meaning of a similar experience or situation by individuals (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 449) that allows a researcher to determine how ordinary members of society determine meaning in the world around them and how they make meaning out of social interactions (Creswell, 1998, p. 53).

The overarching research question for this study is:

“What are the lived experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college?”

Sub-questions include:

- How have Division III student-athletes utilized supports to assist with their transition out of college?
- How do Division III student-athletes describe their self-efficacy as they transition out of the college process?

**Theoretical Framework**

As individuals navigate life, transitions represent natural occurrences in one’s daily operations from birth to death. Whether perceived as positive or negative, trials and tribulations, peaks and valleys, highs and lows, and failures or successes, are a common bond of the human experience. The movement from one period to the next can elicit various responses depending on the individual’s perception of the change. In order to gain a better understanding of Division III student-athletes’ transition out of higher education, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1981) has been selected as the theoretical base to guide this research study. Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) stated the transition model allows practitioners to understand a student’s needs through a structured approach to predicting, measuring, and modifying reactions to
change. According to Schlossberg et al. (1989), the Transition Theory can be applied to students who are “young or old, male or female, minority or majority, urban or rural” (p. 13).

Transition Theory was generated because a “need existed to develop a framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they needed to cope with the ordinary and extraordinary process of living” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 213). Through the deliberate incorporation of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory into student services for Division III student-athletes, such practice would contribute to colleges and universities modifying the environment in an attempt to better serve this population. Beliefs and assumptions that underlie this framework are that the characteristics with which an individual enters the college environment, coupled with their experiences during college, contribute to the outcomes with which they leave college.

Also, all human beings are in a stage of transition. Whether individuals are entering, navigating through, or ending a transition, this process is a life-long cycle. From birth to death, the cradle to the grave, youth to old age, transitions are a staple component of the human experience. As transitions alter our relationships, roles, and beliefs, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory provides a model for understanding strategies used by individuals in transition. Schlossberg, et al (1995) argued, “transitions differ, but the structure for understanding individuals in transition is stable” (p. 26). By addressing the experiences of individuals in transition, this theory is intended to assist counselors in helping others assess and strengthen their resources. As Division III student-athletes are better equipped to identify and utilize such resources, this may contribute to better strategies for adjusting to and handling the transition that come throughout their college life and beyond.
In looking at the historical trajectory of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, it is important to provide historical context for a better understanding. Nancy K. Schlossberg developed her theory by collaborating with others and documenting findings from the literature. She first published her research and the beginning ideas for her Transition Theory in 1981 in “The Counseling Psychologist,” a peer-reviewed journal. At the time, she would describe her work “as a vehicle for analyzing human adaptation to transition” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-Dibrito, 1998, p. 110; Schlossberg, 1984). The theory presents factors related to transition, the individual, and the environment to determine the degree of impact the transition has on the individual at a particular time (Carroll & Creamer, 2004, p. 2). Initially her theory was targeted towards counseling professionals, as it “provides insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular time” (pp. 212-213). Schlossberg (1984) identified a primary goal of her theory as operationalizing variability, or rather, developing a framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they need to cope with the “ordinary and extraordinary process of living” (p. vii). Schlossberg described her model as a vehicle for “analyzing human adaptation to transition” (p. 2), stating that adaptation is affected by the interaction of three sets of variables: (1) the individual’s perception of the transition, (2) characteristics of the pre-transition and post-transition environments, and (3) characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition; where each set of variables could include components that might be considered assets, liabilities, a mix of the two, or neutral in their influence on the ability of the individual to cope with a particular transition.
In 1984, Schlossberg published a book-length treatment called *Counseling Adults in Transition*, and in 1989 she joined two other student development theorists, Ann Q. Lynch and Arthur E. Chickering, to write *Improving Higher Education Environments for Adults*. Chickering and Schlossberg continued to work together and in 1995 developed a workbook for utilization in college first year seminar courses called *Getting the Most Out of College*. As a pioneer in the transition theory field, Schlossberg’s theory introduce the idea of situation, self, support, and strategy. She also introduced the moving in, moving through, and moving out model of the higher education student experience (Schlossberg, 1989). To this end, these concepts are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

According to Evans et al., (1998), student development plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of college students. Understanding student development theories allows student affairs practitioners to have more options and tools when interacting with students, providing rationales for student programming, building alliances with staff members, connecting with faculty, and recognizing opportunities. As found by Schlossberg (1989), transitions are occurrences or non-occurrences that produce certain changes in the individual’s perception of self or of the world that cause a new pattern of behavior that may or may not be effective. It is important to note that “a transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual’s perception of the change. A transition is only a transition if it is so defined by the person experiencing it” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 7). Furthermore, “the more the event alters an adult’s roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships, the more he or she will be affected by the transition” (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 58). Transitions are a process over time, and assimilation and appraisal are continuous (Schlossberg, 1984). The ratio of assets to liabilities helps to explain “why individuals react
differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times” (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 57).

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory speaks to the Division III student-athlete population as this cohort will be leaving the college environment in pursuit of future endeavors. Furthermore, the application of this theory provides an excellent strategy for addressing change within the college student population. In their discussion of theory related to the field of student affairs, Evans, et al. (2010) indicate that Schlossberg’s openness to criticism and her willingness to revise and extend her theory since its inception has resulted in a practical resource for assisting college students in dealing with change (p. 225). Additionally, “qualitative research might present a better place to start in that transitions could be viewed holistically, as perceived by individuals experiencing them” (p. 226).

To understand Schlossberg’s Transition Theory more specifically requires some explanation (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, pp. 33-39). Schlossberg (1984) suggests that a transition can include “change in relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles with the setting of self, work, family, health and/or economics” (p. 43). Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman (1995) indicate that “the transitions can differ, but the structure for understanding individuals in transition is stable” (p. 26). Such transitions can be anticipated (predictable), unanticipated (unpredictable) or a nonevent (expected, but do not happen). For anticipated events, an individual can plan accordingly, such as a Sweet Sixteen party or graduating from high school. Unanticipated or unexpected life events typically surround emergencies or crisis, with no ability for premeditated planning, such as a heart attack, or the death of a child. Finally, nonevents transitions are expected, but do not occur, such as adjustment to not getting married, not experiencing parenthood, or not buying a home. Goodman, et al. (2006) found that the
reality that the event will not occur may modify an individual’s self-perception or the way in which one responds.

**The 4S System**

According to Sargent and Schlossberg (1988), there is a basic systematic process of mastering change (p. 60). This process consists of the 4S’s: situation, self, support, and strategy (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Leibowitz, Schlossberg, & Shore, 1991; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1990). When it comes to acclimating to a life event, Transition Theory is based on the “4S’s”—a system designed to assist individuals in understanding change. Often referred to as “taking stock” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Evans et al., 1998), this process involves an individual assessing resources, such as their “situation, supports, self, your strategies” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Powers, 2010). As indicated by Goodman, et al. (2006), Schlossberg (1984), and Schlossberg, et al. (1995), there are four major factors that influence how an individual copes with the transition: situation, self, support, and strategies, referred to as the “4S system”.

In addressing the experience of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college, the 4S system will be incorporated in this study to help the researcher better conceptualize the transitions of the individuals. “Situation” pertains to how an individual interprets/views the transition. “Self” applies to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual (internal). “Support” describes external resources available to help with the transition. And “Strategies” addresses how the individual will cope with the transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1990).
Finally, it has also been found that how an individual responds to a transitional event depends on the interaction and balance of situation, self, supports, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). Understanding their situation, self, support, and strategy will provide great insight into the lived experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college.

Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out

When focused on the college student population, another area of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is the idea that individuals navigate the transition process by phases labeled “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, pp. 1, 73, 233; Evans et al., 1998, p. 111; Goodman et al., 2006, p. 166; Powers 2010). Bridges (1980) and Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) identified three phases in an educational transition: moving into the college environment, moving through it, and moving out. Each phase of the transition demands change, and each student experiences change in response to both old and new responsibilities.

When moving into a new situation, an individual must become familiar with new roles, relationships, and routines. This is related to a person being confronted with a transition or change. Therefore, it is a good idea for institutions to implement orientation programming to help individuals know what is expected of them (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Next, in the moving through phase, “Adults confront issues such as how to balance their activities with other parts of their lives and how to feel supported and challenged during their new journey” (p. 57). This step involves daily management of going through change. Finally, moving out is when people end one series of transitions and start to look forward to the next thing. In other words, everything involving the end of the individual’s transition. Komives and Brown (n.d.) associated the moving out process with the end of a cycle or transition in which the individual asks “where
do I go from here?” (p. 5). Eventually, the transition becomes integrated and a period of stability is re-established (Schlossberg, 1981). As this study focused on Division III student-athletes transition out of college, the most useful component of the theory for this study would be the 4S system and the “moving out” stage of the transition process.

**Higher Education Research Using Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

For the context of this research study, Division III student-athletes in the higher education environment were examined. Similarly to this current study, there have also been numerous studies utilizing Schlossberg’s Transition Theory dedicated to higher education. There is significant evidence of contemporary scholars who have made contributions to the field applying Schlossberg’s theory in the higher education arena. Themes within the higher education research include a focus on the undergraduate and graduate student experience, cultural diversity, and employees’ transition from the college environment.

Investigating the student experience, Rock (2002) explored student approaches to the college admissions process; Anderson (1993) used the theory to look at family reaction to students not getting promoted to the next grade and coping resources; Champagne and Pepitas (1989) researched developmental interventions for adult students; Graham (1994) used in-depth interviews to study the transition process of adult undergraduate students transitioning into a public four-year institution; Wiesenber (2001) used Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and mattering scale to study a group of graduate students taking a long distance online course; Bowie (2001) used Schlossberg’s theory to explore the experiences of 8 women as they left graduate school; and Pearson and Pepitas (1990) found that athletes experience a great deal of stress related to unexpected injuries or being cut from the team unexpectedly, which is evidence of
utilization of the theory in intercollegiate athletics. When it comes to cultural diversity, Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998) emphasized that Schlossberg’s theory places emphasis on the individual’s perspective and that individual’s situation, making the theory applicable to the integration of cultural and individual differences. And as for transitioning from the college environment, Goodman and Pappas (2000) developed an instrument using Schlossberg’s theory to survey college professors and found that control and timing were valued when it came to satisfaction with retirement (situation).

Overall, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory has been used and supported to understand a plethora of individual transition areas including high school to college, adult, elderly, male student drop-outs, welfare recipients at post-secondary institutions, college drop-outs, athletes transitioning out of sports, transfer students, and college graduates.

Critics of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

Over the years, numerous individuals have augmented Schlossberg’s theory, including Aslanian & Brickwell (1980), Sugarman, (1986), and Bridges (2003), and several articles have been written which complement Schlossberg’s model of counseling adults in transition. In addition to this reinforcement, others had also expressed a difference of opinion regarding tenets of the theory. For example, Graham (1994) studied the transition process of adult undergraduate students transitioning to a public four-year institution to understand the adequacy of the Schlossberg framework. Though Schlossberg did not weigh her tenets, Graham’s findings indicated that some components of the framework (self) were more important than others. In addition, Rodin (1990) argued that a person’s belief that he/she can control the situation affects the outcome of the transition. Furthermore, Evans, et al. (2010) asserts that “research studies
supporting the validity of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory are scant, particularly in higher education” (p. 225) and that “until further research is conducted, however, it is impossible to affirm that the transition process occurs in the manner in which Schlossberg and her colleagues have outlined it” (pp. 225-226).

Overall, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory continues to be viable. The basic concepts involved in Schlossberg’s theory are easy to understand and to explain to others. As a scholar-practitioner, I have found the framework practical and applicable to various populations, as indicated by previous research studies. As transitions throughout life are guaranteed, life events can be predictable or unpredictable. Therefore, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory provides a viable framework as well as a practical tool for comprehending transitions as well as how different individuals manage change. As for the current study, this theory can help shed new light and engender change for the Division III student-athlete population by helping address the void of research in this area. Furthermore, through having a better understanding of the experiences of this population, higher education personnel can think strategically about how to better meet their needs for a successful transition toward the next phase of their lives.

**Conclusion**

Under the guide of the 4S’s system, the aim of my study was to explore the experience of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of the institution. After careful examination, it has been discovered that each tenet of Schlossberg’s transition would not be applicable to this study. As “moving in” focuses on the college enrollment/admission process and “moving through” looks at the athlete’s time during the college experience, these areas of exploration would be counterintuitive for this study. Given that “moving out” is dedicated to everything as a
student leaves the college environment, this would be the most pertinent area for the
development of an exploration of Division III student-athletes transition out of the institution.
As found, using theory as a backdrop, there is less room for superfluous questions (Fowler,
2015).

A thorough exploration of Schlossberg’s theory provides an improved understanding of
the college student experience, the three stages of the college experience (moving in, moving
through, moving out) and the 4S’s system for dealing with transition. Schlossberg has
specifically focused on the college student population in her research, and this focus serves as an
excellent resource to guide my current study. Overall, the theory is user-friendly in that all
aspects were easy to decipher and comprehend. The concept of “moving out” was particularly
relevant to this study, as all participants will be completing the senior year of their higher
education experience as a Division III student-athlete, and the researcher is seeking out common
themes among participants.

As the seminal authors (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995) have dedicated research to
specifically understanding the transitions of the college student population and the model chosen
for this study, this provides a solid stamp of fortification that this theoretical framework is the
proper selection. When it comes to the development of research questions, theory provides focus
for the collection of appropriate data and omission of irrelevant inquires (Fowler, 2015). Given
the context of this study, it will incorporate such practice by only focusing on the “moving out”
stage applicable to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. In addition, the overarching research
question and sub-questions all address the Division III student-athlete transition experience and
are framed around the 4S system. This reinforces the selection of Schlossberg’s Transition
Theory (1981) as a framework. Overall, there is a direct correlation between Schlossberg’s
Theory and the research questions, as all questions were crafted with Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as a point of reference. To this end, as discussed later in this document, this study will adopt a phenomenological analysis orientation in order to understand the experience of Division III student-athletes as they prepare for a transition out of the institution.

By addressing the lack of research on Division III student-athletes (Robst & Keil, 2000), and incorporating the application of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1981), this collaboration contributes to the exploration of Division III student-athletes. Overall, the motivation for selecting this theory can be broken down into two distinct areas: 1) Schlossberg’s utilization of a theory with an exact focus on the college student population; and 2) precise phases within the theory are relevant to the college student experience (“moving in, moving through, and moving out”). Analysis further clarified the tenets of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory in the development and guidance of the research study and provides an excellent theoretical framework to use as a lens throughout the research process. The theory offers a systematic approach for assisting individuals in transition. The theoretical framework is commonly referred to as the backbone of a research project, and it is imperative for the conceptualization and analysis of scientific data (Powers, 2010). Upon the selection of a theory which aligns with the problem of practice/research question, this study will be descriptive and exploratory and will utilize qualitative methods to focus on the collection of data.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The assessment of the needs of student-athletes and the evaluation of their experiences creates a solid foundation for future practical applications in the higher education environment. Gaining a better understanding of the Division III student-athlete perspective provides rich data to utilize for addressing forthcoming needs. In all, limited research has been undertaken to understand the Division III level of college athletics and the challenges confronting universities and athletic departments operating at this level (Nite, 2012). Overall, this approach reinforces the oversaturation of Division I studies, the lack of representation in other Divisions (Robst & Keil, 2000), and indicates the deficiencies and justification for this current exploration.

Williams, Coles and Allen (2010) suggest it is important to recognize the Division III collegiate experience. Given their appreciation for the educational integration of amateur athletics, Division III institutions are thought of as relatively pure examples of what college sports at their best should be (Simon, 2010). Division III administrators support that student-athletes be held to the same standard as the overall student population (Emerson, Brooks, & McKenzie, 2009). According to Pauline (2010; 2012), high school sport recruits who participate at the Division III level considered academics more thoroughly in the selection of their intercollegiate athletic fit than those at Division I and II institutions. Bass, Pfleegor, Katz, and Schaeperkoetter (2014) posit that four different types of Division III institutions exist: Academically Elite, Large Public, Mission-Driven Privates, and Liberal Arts colleges and universities. As mentioned, Division III institutions do not award athletic scholarships and commit themselves to assuring that athletes are not treated differently (Naughton, 1997). Due to this lack of athletic emphasis, Division III institutions are less likely to enroll student-athletes
who are not serious students. To this end, most Division III schools rely heavily on the school’s academic standing to attract student-athletes (Robinson, 2010).

Intercollegiate athletics is a major segment of numerous college and university communities. Student-athletes participate in strenuous training and competition throughout their college career while balancing the rigorous academic curriculum of the higher education environment (Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Watson & Kissinger, 2007). Sports play such a significant role in American higher education that even students who do not formally participate in organized sporting activities continue to engage on the intramural level. Though colleges and universities continue to generate substantial revenue from athletic events, activities, and team success, the overall well-being of the student-athlete must also be acknowledged. College and universities must not neglect the overall development of their student-athletes as this would not only be a huge disservice to both the individual student, but also with the lack of training and skills for post collegiate life, to society at large.

As indicated in the research, student-athletes represent a unique, clearly identifiable, college-student subpopulation. Although student-athletes often enjoy celebrity status based on their athletic aptitude and on-field success, this acclaim obscures the unique challenges they encounter when balancing their dual roles on campus (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). In addition to managing many of the same academic, emotional, and personal goals and concerns as their non-athlete peers, student-athletes must also manage several unique challenges associated with their athletic participation (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). A student-athlete’s responsibilities include: balancing academic and athletic demands, coping with physical injury, dealing with role conflict predicated on athletic participation, developing outside social and leisure interests, forming interpersonal relationships, managing sport-related career transitions, and maintaining
optimal physical conditioning (Astin, 1978; Danish, Petipas, & Hale, 1993; Lanning, 1982; Parham, 1993; Pearson & Petipas, 1990; Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989; Pinkney, 1991). The junction of these factors may contribute to emotional, physical, or developmental challenges for student-athletes.

In this literature review, the world of the Division III student-athlete population is thoroughly explored. The organization of this chapter is structured following three streams of literature. First, in order to provide context, the role of intercollegiate athletics in higher education institutions will be highlighted, followed by an exploration of Division III. Second, the student-athlete experience will be emphasized, covering benefits of athletic participation, challenges for student-athletes, diversity issues commonly faced by this population, and inadequate institutional practices. Third, effective services for student-athletes are presented, as well as student-athlete identity factors, senior year concerns, and student-athlete transition out of college information. Finally, a summation of the literature review will be presented including implications for how the information relates to addressing the problem of practice.

**Division III Empirical Studies**

According to Winkler (2008), one of the striking features of the literature in this area is that it is very limited. Division III athletics has simply not been a focus of much of the research. Because of this lack of focus, little is known about Division III student-athletes. Regardless, a few studies conducted on Division III student-athletes has provided some preliminary insight.

Two of the most extensive studies on Division III student-athletes were conducted by Shulman and Bowen (2001) and Bowen and Levin (2003). Both of these studies examined student-athlete academic performance at prestigious Division III universities. Shulman and Bowen found that
student-athletes had considerably lower SAT scores than non-athletes, and they underperformed academically compared to non-athletes (Winkler, 2008), for all sports and for females as well as males. Bowen and Levin’s study indicated that student-athletes had substantially lower SAT scores than non-athletes and earned far lower grades. Furthermore, student-athletes earned significantly lower grades than what might have been expected on the basis of their incoming academic credentials and demographic characteristics. Overall, while the postulation might be that student-athletes at Division III institutions do not have the same academic problems as those at Division I institutions, the limited amount of research provides mixed results, with the most recent and extensive research contradicting the assumption (Winkler, 2008).

Kline (1997) studied Division III student-athletes in order to examine potential differences in academic achievement between athletes (a student who participated on at least one varsity sport team for a total of four years), partial athletes (a student who participated on at least one varsity sport team for no less than one year but no more than three years), and non-athletes (no varsity sports team participation). He found that both male and female athletes performed at a lower academic level than partial athletes and non-athletes, but the differences between the groups, based on grade point average, were not statistically significant (Winkler, 2008). Richards and Aries (1999) studied Division III student-athletes at a small, northeastern university. The research found that student-athletes reported significantly more complications than non-athletes in being taken seriously by professors. However, they found no noteworthy differences between the two groups in GPA. A study of Division III student-athletes focused on grades and graduation rates and found that student-athletes had higher GPA’s and graduation rates than non-athletes (Winkler, 2008).
The Student-Athlete Experience

Benefits of College Sports Participation

There are many benefits to participating in college sports. For example, Shulman and Bowen (2001) found that many athletic programs, especially those at small, private institutions (Division III), seem to be doing a good job of adhering to the university mission. Cockley and Roswal (1994) indicated that feelings of empowerment and the ability to make changes cause faculty to be more satisfied with athletics. Similarly, Lawrence (2009) asserted that faculty who believe academic issues are resolved through collaborative decision making also feel a sense of shared governance is in place with intercollegiate athletics. A sense of control, responsibility, and consistency between the educational mission and athletic mission promotes a sense of faculty satisfaction (Lawrence, 2009; Lawrence, Ott, & Hendricks, 2009; Trail & Chelladurai, 2000).

James Duderstadt, former University of Michigan president, states that “college sports provided an opportunity for teaching people about character, motivation, endurance, loyalty, and the attainment of one’s personal best – all great qualities of great value in citizens” (Duderstadt, 2000, p. 70). Partaking in college sports has been related to growth in interpersonal skills, positive self-esteem, perseverance, motivation, self-reliance, self-discipline, team work, cooperation, confidence, competitive spirit, how to deal with failure, leadership abilities, growth in personality, social identity at the institution, membership in a valued social group, and overall satisfaction with the college experience (Cantor & Prentice, 1996; Lapchick, 1987; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007; Ryan, 1989; Taylor, 1995).

Intercollegiate sports have been successful in building a sense of community, despite the belief that college campuses “have become a group of ‘multiple communities’ where our
disparate goals work against the creation of a common campus community” (Kerr, 1982, p. 373). Athletics programs have been successful because they have focused on the shared athletic experience rather than the differences that separate their community. Overall, athletics is a unique element of holistic education (Adler & Adler, 1991; Bonfiglio, 2011; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Brand, 2006; Lapchick, 1987). Ryan (1989) states that the benefits of college athletics, “challenge negative media stereotypes about student athletes, suggesting that the extent of perceived problems with college athletics has been overstated” (p. 128).

Though participation, confidence, responsibility, and competence are fostered by athletics. In addition, a true sense of psychological and emotional intimacy with others is established through athletic participation, and student-athletes indicate that sports positively affected their self-concept and improved their life circumstances (Walters, O’Donnell, & Wardlow, 2009). As researched by Lapchick (1989), Sperber (1990), Telander (1996), and Thelin (1994), the attractiveness of a university is often focused on how well the athletic teams perform. There can be little doubt that intercollegiate athletics is one of the significant filters through which the public looks at American postsecondary education. Finally, Cantor and Prentice (1996) “claim that athletics provide students with a social identity, with clarity about themselves and their place at the university, and membership in a valued social group” (p. 211).

Overall, though there are many benefits to being a student-athlete as depicted above, it is also important to note that being a student-athlete comes with its fair share of challenges. Such challenges can be experienced across all divisions and across various sports.

**Challenges for Student-Athletes**

As 25% of student-athletes on non-revenue sports teams and 71% of student athletes on revenue sports teams tended to feel exploited by their university, showing adequate support for
this population is very important (Van Rheenen, 2011). Similar to any student, college student–
athletes across America have to deal with issues of financial matters, roommate issues, sexuality
issues, drug and alcohol issues, parental divorce, and eating disorders, along with other issues.
In addition to these concerns, student-athletes have to balance these issues with academics,
projects, internships, and a strenuous practicing and game schedule. This can lead to a
tremendous amount of pressure for students and lead to the suppression of imperative issues that
need to be addressed (Parham, 1993). The proper investigation and assistance with such issues
can lead to a well-rounded, healthy student moving on toward further education or the
workforce.

Approximately 10% of American student-athletes require serious counseling resulting
from their dual-role issues (Ferrante & Etzel, 1991; Hinkle, 1994; Parham, 1993; Pinkerton,
Hinz, & Barrow, 1989). Paraham (1993) identified six demands or challenges confronting
college student-athletes: balancing athletic and academic endeavors; balancing social activities
with the isolation of athletic pursuits; balancing athletic success or lack of success with
maintenance of mental equilibrium; balancing physical health and injuries with the need to keep
playing; balancing the demands of various relationships, including coaches, parents, family, and
friends; and dealing with the termination of an athletic collegiate career. These challenges
clearly demonstrate the need for adequate advising and counseling for student-athletes.

In addition to the guidelines for the college/university student in general, the NCAA also
has other requirements for the student-athletes themselves. There are stipulations regarding
grade point average, enrollment status, course requirements, and employment. Given the
aforementioned, the liberties and restrictions placed on student-athletes differ from their peers
who are not athletes. Lastly, individual colleges and universities may also incorporate their own rules and regulations for student-athletes.

Regardless of the benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation, college sports continues to have its critics and challenges. Intercollegiate athletics can be looked at from two different perspectives. It creates opportunities for individuals, but it also allows for abuse of the educational system (Chartrand & Lent, 1987). College student-athletes might encounter more obstacles than their non-athlete peers do as they work towards graduation. The athletes' attention may be drawn away from academics, as well as social aspects of the college experience (Parham, 1993). The time and energy needed to fulfill one of these roles may hinder the other role. According to Blann, Bredemeir and Shields, Kennedy and Dimick, Sowa and Gressard, and Stone and Strange (as cited in Pascarella et al., 1999) "evidence suggests that intercollegiate athletic participation may be negatively associated with such outcomes as involvement and satisfaction with the overall college experience, career maturity, clarity in educational and occupational plans, and principled moral judgment" (p. 1).

In addition, there is an overabundance of stereotypes that come with being a student-athlete. This includes being classified as a "dumb jock" to majoring in "easier degrees" as opposed to their peers (Renick, 1974; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981). Many believe that intercollegiate athletics serve as a supplementary enterprise which has no place in providing students with learning experiences that are consistent with the educational mission of institutions (Benford, 2007). Faculty have the most at stake in preserving academic culture and standards and protecting the integrity of higher education (Earl, 2004). If current practices of mirroring Division I continue, more college athletic departments will mirror the world of professional, market-driven athletics (Knight Foundation, 2001).
Faculty must work to effectively control athletic programs that are answering to the whims and pressures of the marketplace (Knight Foundation, 2001). The focal point for individual faculty members and for the entire enterprise of higher education should be preserving academic integrity (Brand, 2006).

In addition to managing many of the same academic, emotional, and personal goals and concerns as their non-athlete peers, student-athletes also must manage several unique challenges associated with their athletic participation (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). More specifically, these responsibilities include balancing academic and athletic demands, coping with physical injury, dealing with role conflict predicated by athletic participation, developing outside social and leisure interests, forming interpersonal relationships, managing sport-related career transitions, and maintaining optimal physical conditioning (Astin, 1978; Danish, Petipas, & Hale, 1993; Lanning, 1982; Parham, 1993; Pearson & Petipas, 1990; Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989; Pinkney, 1991). To this end, the junction of these factors may contribute to emotional, physical, or developmental challenges for student-athletes.

These multiple demands on their time often limit the interactions student-athletes have with individuals unaffiliated with the institution’s athletic department. For many student-athletes, this lack of time for developing social relationships with students outside the athletic department can be a source of much distress. As a result, demands of athletic participation often lead to feelings of social isolation (Harris, Altekruse, & Engels, 2003) and in some cases, increased feelings of stress and anxiety (Stone & Strange, 2000).

In addition, collegiate athletic programs, particularly the administration, coaches, and athletes at Division I schools, are facing the frustration of the “dumb jock” phenomenon. Winning, which has become paramount, takes a toll on the individuals involved. Successful
football and basketball programs are especially important to the image of most large universities as a source of pride and prestige to alumni, administrators, faculty, and students. Although colleges and universities imply that the academic, personal, and career needs of their student-athletes have high priority, the opposite appears to be true at many institutions. Meeting the needs of these students seems second to the need to gaining and maintaining a winning athletic program at many institutions of higher education (Pinkney, 1991; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981).

Given that approximately 38.9% of NCAA student-athletes compete at Division III institutions and student-athletes comprise 24% of the student body at Division III institutions, with 40% classified as female and 23% as an ethnic minority (NCAA 2017), it is important to note that in addition to general challenges experienced by student-athletes, diversity concerns are also included in the challenges faced by this cohort.

**Diversity Issues within Intercollegiate Athletics**

Constructing racially and culturally diverse educational environments provides beneficial social and learning developments in higher education (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2011). Hirko (2009) proposed that athletes perceive their involvement in intercollegiate athletics as quality interracial interactions which benefit their experience and education. Furthermore, athletics provide a sense of community for the student body and those affiliated with the institution, with large numbers of non-athlete students experiencing racial diversity through intramural athletics (Brand, 2006; Fisher, 2009; Lawrence, Ott, & Hendricks, 2009; Mixon & Trevino, 2005). As camaraderie and identity are a significant aspect of the student-athlete experience, the termination or interruption of the aforementioned experiences may impact these individuals as they exit the institution.
Regardless of the positive residual effects of diversity on intercollegiate athletes, as this section will indicate, there are many challenges facing student-athletes of diverse backgrounds. Marginalized groups in America today constantly have to deal with direct discrimination from those in power. This can be seen from the haves to the have-nots as well as the upper class to those who are considered lower class. This privilege has always been a dominant force to be reckoned with as those with less power make an attempt to pursue a similar interest. On a large scale, this aforementioned dynamic has plagued American society from our founding. In relation to college athletics, similar themes have been depicted by the experience of both women and minority students. When it comes to faculty attitudes toward student-athletes overall Asian/Pacific Islander, White, and Hispanic (Latino) faculty members were more resentful (Comeaux, 2011).

Athletes who are women or students of color, or both, like other college athletes, play the dual role of student and athlete. However, these two groups also share the distinction of being two of the most visible of historically underrepresented groups in higher education. As a result, they inherit the status of minority, which can affect their perceptions of themselves and the perceptions of others (Person, Benson-Quaziena, & Rogers, 2001). Many may assume that by the incorporation of Title IX, the equal opportunity and access law for intercollegiate athletics, discrimination has been resolved, but this is not necessarily the case. Though blatant/overt discrimination may not be prevalent, prejudice practices are still alive across college and university campuses today. In addition, many people have adopted covert practices of discrimination as this is an easier tactic and harder to raise specific complaints about by slighted students. The issue of marginalization is due to ignorance of the dominant group. Through education, some of the hurtful practices toward minority groups may be extinguished.
Before Title IX, less than 1% of money spent on collegiate athletics was dedicated towards women’s programs, so the requirements of the new law made for immense changes in funding. Women’s participation in college sports has increased significantly. Title IX not only increased the number of women participating in college sports, but it also raised the level of competition. Additionally, women athletes have often been stereotyped for their sexuality as lesbians, and they have experienced hostile responses and resentment due to Title IX (Person & LeNoir, 1997). Student athletes of color, like other athletes, spend a significant amount of time, both in and out of season, involved in athletics and related activities. Such activities can decrease enthusiasm for academics because of fatigue and injuries related to sports. Issues that are particularly challenging for students-athletes of color are social and academic integration, performance pressure in their sport, and racism and sexism on campus (Person & LeNoir, 1997).

It has been found that the impact of student and faculty contact is contingent upon the nature of the interaction for Black and White student-athletes, and that Black and White students did not benefit equally from their faculty interaction (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007). In relation to higher education professionals, these findings show how race can play a major role in a student athlete’s college experience. For example, faculty who provided help achieving professional goals had a positive impact on college grade-point average for White student athletes, whereas this variable did not enter the equation for their Black counterparts. Faculty were more likely to provide help to White students with study skills. There is considerable social distance and alienation from campus life perceived by Black students on predominantly White campuses, and they feel discomfort from their lack of knowledge and experience interacting with students and faculty different from themselves (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007).
As this study is looking into the student-athlete experience as they transition out of the institution, positive or negative experiences surrounding diversity may influence this transition (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2011). For example, feeling embraced or discriminated against may speak volumes to the student-athlete experience and impact how they feel about ending their college career. In summary, the aforementioned information contains critical information for administrators, coaches, academic support personnel, and other educators at American universities and colleges with athletic programs. In relation to the research, the findings show both pros (Adler & Adler, 1991; Bonfiglio, 2011; Bowen, 2001; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Brand, 2006; Cantor & Prentice, 1996; Cockley & Roswal, 1994; Duderstadt, 2000; Kerr, 1982; Lapchick, 1987; Lawrence, 2009; Lawrence, Ott, & Hendricks, 2009; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007; Roswal, 1994; Ryan, 1989; Sperber, 1990; Taylor, 1995; Telander, 1996; Thelin, 1994; Trail & Chelladurai, 2000; Walters, O’Donnell, & Wardlow, 2009) and cons (Benford, 2007; Bowen, 2001; Brand, 2006; Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Earl, 2004; Ferrante & Etzel, 1991; Hinkle, 1994; Parham, 1993; Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989; Renick, 1974; Shulman & Knight Foundation, 2001; Van Rheenen, 2011; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981) to the student-athlete experience, as well as how race and gender can play a major role in a student-athlete’s college life.

Outside of the glitz and glamour of camaraderie and team building, the life of a student-athlete may be plagued with confrontation, stereotyping, and harassment. Obtaining this information is critical to having a balanced understanding of the potential experiences that a student-athlete may be facing on the college campus today. To this end, there are inadequate institutional practices that have impacted the higher education setting and been found to been ineffective in the research literature.
Inadequate Institutional Practices in Higher Education

Though many colleges and universities across the country adopt diversity and inclusion policies for the institution in general, there seem to be few guidelines specifically related to the department of athletics. The upper administrative offices of these colleges and universities assume that such institutional policies cover student-athletes by default of them being enrolled at the school in general. Although student-athletes are encouraged to adhere to strict rules and regulations regarding their participation in college athletics, such as study hours, weight-training, practice hours, and so on, there does not seem to be much information in the research that highlights information about specific, inadequate institutional policies and programs in universities regarding student-athletes.

Rather, the research tends to discuss issues based on student-athletes’ verbal reports, structured surveys, and performance levels (academic assessment, graduation rates, and retention). To be more specific, current research has not identified any direct institutional policy or program that adversely interferes with student-athlete performance. Negative impacts of institutional professionals on student-athletes tend to be based on the practices taking place in the college or university setting, not institutionally-wide adopted policies or programs. This includes issues such as typecasting student-athletes as only athletes as well as discrimination against student-athletes. The lack of proper support of student-athletes, given their additional responsibilities, is primarily highlighted in the current research as well as issues pertaining to equal access and opportunities for student-athletes.

In addressing inadequacy amongst higher-education professionals, it is important to adopt an historical perspective. According to Shriberg and Brodzinski (1984), during the late 1970s, advising and counseling of student-athletes focused on three main areas: class scheduling,
academic tutoring, and time management. Despite several developments to a more progressive approach, the support mechanism at many colleges and universities continues to focus solely on maintaining academic eligibility and graduation rates rather than on enhancing the academic, personal, and athletic development of the student-athlete.

Some unfortunate practices include faculty and staff who continue to stereotype student-athletes as incompetent individuals who are irresponsible and overindulged by the campus masses. When it comes to such racial stereotyping, Coakley (1998) used the phrase “race logic” to describe the phenomenon of conceptualizing different expectations regarding athletic ability and success for Caucasian and African-American athletes. Second, at many top institutions (Division I), many athletes are given unclear messages about their role. For example, there may be informal indications that their scholastic achievement should be prioritized after athletic practice and competition.

Coaches and administrators at all levels of collegiate sports may focus more on winning than on what is in the general best interest of student-athletes (Coakley, 1998). As coaches determine the aspects relevant to training and competition, they can positively or negatively influence an athlete’s attitude, mental state, and performance (Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003). For an institution to be more effective overall, a practical approach to advising and counseling college student-athletes in general is to classify their needs into four areas: academic advising, life-skill development, clinical counseling, and performance enhancement (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Additionally, approximately 10% to 15% of college student-athletes experience psychological issues that could warrant professional counseling (Hinkle, 1994; Murray, 1997; Parham, 1993). Compared with campus-wide averages of 8% to 9% reported in the 2005 National Survey of Counseling Center Directors (Gallagher, 2005), these estimates
suggest that college counselors would benefit from a better understanding of the factors affecting the physical health, mental health, and well-being of college student-athletes. Furthermore, at the University of New Mexico, following a decade-long study of the school’s athletic regimes, some of the findings disclosed were as follows: only 5.7% of the football players and 7.3% of the basketball players earned degrees in four years; of 525 football players, only 110 earned degrees, with 302 dropping out, transferring, or being academically suspended; of 1,537 male athletes in sports, only 444 earned degrees (“sports editorial”, 1980; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981).

Overall, as a final point of clarification, the current research findings do not imply that all of the current institutional policies and procedures in higher education today are adequate (Broughton & Neyer, 2001; Coakley, 1998; Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003) but the research also does not indicate that they are specifically inadequate. To this end, the research tends to focus on the high representation of neglect by higher-education professionals when it comes to the full understanding of the pressures faced by student-athletes as well as a lack of comprehension regarding diversity and sensitivity issues relevant to the student-athlete population. Several studies have been highlighted in the literature which inform the beliefs regarding inadequate institutional services in higher education relevant to the student-athlete population (Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003; Gallagher, 2005; Hinkle, 1994; Murray, 1997; Parham, 1993; Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984; Coakley, 1998; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981). As this study aims to understand the Division III student-athlete experience, being privy to insufficiencies allows the researcher to have a better understanding of how poor institutional practices have impacted the overall student-athlete tenure in the higher education setting. As post-secondary practitioners who serve the student-athlete population play a
significant role in their college life, it is important to understand areas that have been historically challenging in order to propose recommendations for future policy and procedural changes.

**Institutional Services for Student-Athletes**

**Effective Support Mechanisms in Higher Education**

Throughout the United States, NCAA compliance officers ensure that colleges and universities adhere to policies and regulations enforced on the national level. When it comes to institutional wide concerns, an ideal program would incorporate adequately trained higher-education professionals who have a profound understanding and ability to address student-athletes’ personal, academic, and athletic concerns. Major areas that should be addressed include academic advising, life skills development, clinical counseling, and performance enhancement, to name a few (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Though the research does not highlight the commonality of such programs, this section will address effective practices, programs, and policies for student-athletes in the higher-education setting.

In research conducted by Broughton and Neyer (2001), commendable examples of higher-education institutions leading by example include Ohio State University and Washington State University. Both of the aforementioned institutions display their commitment to a positive contribution to student-athletes’ success in a variety of ways. Common practices at these schools include employing a full-time psychologist who is specially trained in student-athlete issues, supervision of a full-time postdoctoral student who is developing professional competency in working with student-athletes, interns in training to enhance their skills with the student-athlete population, collaboration with the sports medicine staff, academic advisers, and the university counseling center to ensure issues are addressed, consultation with a life-skills coordinator to provide expert information for seminars, and an in-service training to professionals on campus.
who need training in the issues of student-athletes (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Overall, the person in charge of the psychological services of the student-athletes is appropriately trained in developmental, clinical, and performance enhancement counseling.

Another noteworthy institution that has an exceptional commitment to the success of their student-athletes is the University of Florida. Exemplary programs encourage student exposure and involvement in areas and activities that may bring greater career and life satisfaction (Shurts & Shoffner, 2004). An example of such a program is the University of Florida’s Collegiate Achievement Mentoring Program or C.A.M.P. Gator. In this program, student-athletes complete comprehensive leadership-training curriculum and, in turn, serve as leadership mentors to at-risk middle-school children in the community. The hallmark of this program is an opportunity for student-athletes to make a difference in the community while further enhancing their own leadership, goal setting, and public-speaking abilities (Storch & Ohlson, 2009).

The University of Florida has also developed a counseling program for student athletes and an academic course specifically for freshman-level athletes. Athletic counselors at the University of Florida perform two major activities: 1) identify areas of personal, vocational, and academic concerns, and 2) guide and assist athletes with these concerns. Advanced graduate students in the University of Florida Counselor Education Department are typically enrolled in the Student Personnel Services for Athletes program to build their skill set regarding this population (Storch & Ohlson, 2009).

The freshman-level course deals with the growth and development of the student-athlete and explores topics like interpersonal skills, communal living, university support services, effective leadership, career development, academic planning, effective social skills, time management, and skills in meeting the press (Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981).
Storch and Ohlson (2009) also highlighted that the NCAA has made a significant attempt to address the creation of the well-rounded student athlete. In 1994, the NCAA began CHAMPS (Challenging Athletes’ Minds for Personal Success). The program was designed to enhance the quality of student-athletes’ academic experiences. These skills are transferable to all students in institutions of higher education. Five areas were identified as key components to address the needs of the student-athlete population: 1) academic excellence, 2) athletic excellence, 3) personal development, 4) career development, and 5) service (Storch & Ohlson, 2009).

Even though the literature indicates adequate practices in the higher education setting regarding assistance to intercollegiate athletes, there are still important factors that play a role in the student-athlete experience, particularly of strong influence during their final year. These factors include athletic identity and senior year’s concerns as they transition out of the institution.

**Athletic Identity**

Upon the completion of participation in college sports, the majority of intercollegiate athletes will transition to life outside of sports (Brown, 2003). As athletic retirement approaches, some athletes are overcome with a sense of “uncertainty about a future without sport” (Wilson, 2007, p. 163). Dealing with retirement from sports, some athletes might experience emotional and psychological difficulty (Bailie, 1993; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), while others may experience senses of relief and freedom (Coakley, 1983). Early frameworks of athletic retirement included thanatological models, which likened retirement from sports to a social death (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Rosenberg, 1982), and social gerontological models, which emphasized aging and life satisfaction with respect to retiring (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Rosenberg, 1981).
Though some adults are able to effortlessly advance through numerous life and role changes, others experience identity crisis and distress in response to these changes (Lee & Gramotnev, 2007; Weiss, Freund, & Wiesse, 2012). According to the research, factors believed to influence disengagement from sport and realignment of priorities and life goals include athletic identity (i.e., the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role), social support, pre-retirement planning, mode of exit, and the loss of special/preferential treatment (Adler & Adler, 1991; Bailie, 1993; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1985; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Fuller, 2014; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994; Wooten, 1994).

Involvement in sport played a vital role in developing friendships, and athletes spoke about “camaraderie” and just being “one of the guys” (Ingebritsen, 1996, p. 101; Lally, 2007, p. 92). Camaraderie is the “communal sense of a common striving toward team goal” with bonds formed that resemble a “sisterhood” or “brotherhood” (Hinitz, 1988, p. 143; Wilson, 2007, p. 152). Approaching graduation may cause restlessness or anxiety for seniors. College seniors may legally be considered adults, but in regard to behavior and psychological development, they are not (Yazedjian, Kielaszek, & Toews, 2010). College seniors commonly voice feelings of discomfort, stemming from job uncertainty (Yazedjian et al., 2010). According to Coakley (2009), a main challenge facing athletes transitioning out of intercollegiate athletics is the task of reconstructing their identities in terms of something other than sports.

**Senior Year Concerns**

The senior year of college represents a monumental transition characterized by numerous experiences including preparing to leave behind the freedom of the college experience and to assume ownership of adult roles, anxiety due to not being able to anticipate coming changes in priorities, fearing the unknown and the pressures of developing career plans and becoming
financially independent, and unanticipated transitions, such as losing the structure afforded by the student lifestyle, leaving behind social networks, and feeling pressured by societal expectations (Hunter, Keup, Kinzie, & Maietta, 2012; Lane, 2013; Overton-Healy, 2010; Yazedjian, Kielaszek, & Toews, 2010).

The concerns of college seniors go beyond simply getting a job. For example, college men are less likely to express their concerns and seek assistance during a graduate/professional school search (Taub, Servaty-Seib, & Cousins, 2006). Kreig (2012) found that undergraduate seniors have additional layers of concerns and perceptions. In particular, seniors’ stress levels are uniquely different from first-year students given transition demands of graduation and job placement. Seniors are stressed with the responsibility of transitioning to adulthood. Achieving adulthood is typically characterized by obtaining “stable employment” (Skipper, 2012, p. 26). The biggest concerns college seniors typically share are their career plans after graduation and the inevitable change and sense of loss as they move forward (Pistilli, Taub, & Bennett, 2003).

**Student-Athlete Transition Out of the Institution**

The evolution from college senior to graduate is a transition that thousands of students experience each year across America. This is a time of anxiety and excitement for many, as they move to the next stage of life. As mentioned, college seniors may classify as adults by law, but in regard to behavior and psychological development, they are not (Yazedjian, Kielaszek, & Toews, 2010) as college seniors commonly voice feelings of unease, stemming from uncertainty (Yazedjian et al., 2010). While under the stress of academic responsibilities, it has been found that seniors are stressed with the responsibility of transitioning to adulthood (Skipper, 2012).

Gardner (1999) argues that though there is acknowledgment “for specific interventions to help students successfully make the transition into the college environment, the problems and
needs associated with the transition out of college have received little attention from college and university personnel, let alone researchers” (p. 7). Though focusing on student-athletes, this fact alone reinforces the significance of this study. To this end, higher education faculty and administrators need to ensure that the concerns of college seniors are addressed accordingly. Henscheid (2008) urges higher education administrators to be intentional with providing resources for graduating seniors to promote closure for their transition out of college (p. 79).

**Summary**

Given all of the complexities faced by student-athletes, better conceptualization of their experiences in the higher education environment can lead to more effective service by institutional personnel. By investigating past research, valuable insight was gained into the problem of practice of this doctoral study. The focus of this literature review was to provide a deeper understanding of intercollegiate athletics and the student experience while also gaining a better conceptualization of Division III sports. Morse and Richards (2002) addressed the necessity of surveying the literature in order to “get a grip” on what is known and to identify gaps in the current body of knowledge. Surveying the literature allows a researcher to gain an understanding of what information has already been studied, what information is weak, and what has already been proven or learned. Additionally, reviewing the literature allows the investigator to recognize previously reported patterns and concepts (Morse & Richards, 2002).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher analyzed literature that provided insights into the world of intercollegiate athletics. The literature in this section provided a historical perspective of the role of athletics in the college environment from past to present, benefits and challenges faced by student-athletes including diversity issues, and areas of concern for students-athletes
transitioning out of the institution, including athletic identity and senior year concerns. Overall, this literature review presented evidence of the college-athlete experience and made an attempt to increase awareness of such experiences. Currently, much of the literature fails to focus specifically on Division III student-athletes, and the research has found that such a deficit of information reinforces the need for the current study.

The literature reviewed for this study served as a catalyst for the researcher to investigate the experience of a Division III student-athlete population at a northeastern state institution included in a comprehensive system. As most Division III schools are small liberal arts colleges, looking at a state institution speaks to the unique characteristic of this study and the benefits to students at such schools. Different bodies of literature have been investigated and discussed to provide a valuable context for the research project. Improved assistance of college athletes may be provided once higher education professionals become more familiar with the experiences of this population. Though there is a surplus of information about NCAA Division I athletics, there is a serious dearth of knowledge about NCAA Division III. A comprehensive search of the literature has found limited information pertaining to Division III athletics and indicates the need for further exploration. In all, this review has highlighted the need for more research in gaining a better understanding of the student-athlete experience on the Division III level and higher education in general.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Research Design

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to investigate the research question, “What are the lived experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college?” This study looked at the preparation and development of these individuals who have made profound sacrifices for their institutions by way of physical, mental, spiritual, and social contributions in their sport of choice. This chapter discusses and clarifies the methods that was utilized in this study, including the rationale for using a qualitative approach, the research paradigm, an explanation of phenomenological tradition, the participants, recruitment and access, data collection procedures, data storage, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. As a wide-ranging review of the literature reinforced the need for more research in the area of Division III student-athletes, the findings of this research will help address this void and complement the current literature pertaining to the Division III population.

Qualitative Methodology

As the overarching research question takes into account the personal stories of the participants, qualitative research has been selected as the most appropriate method for this investigation. A qualitative study is “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1994, pp. 1-2). It “turns the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 36). Through the utilization of qualitative methods, this study will be both descriptive and exploratory. The rationale behind the selection of a qualitative research method is
the focus on inductive reasoning: collecting thick, rich description to infer theories and themes, and understanding what and how in complex, context-based, and holistic ways (Creswell, 1994).

Furthermore, according to Pascal, Johnson, Dore, and Trainor (2010), when conducting qualitative research, the investigator should consider the nature of truth in a person’s reality. The key to qualitative investigation lies in socially constructed meanings learned from individuals in their interactions with the environment. The researcher studies the participants and attempts to make sense of phenomena developing in the data. Overall, qualitative studies enable discovery by providing a deeper understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2007; Uprety, 2009). To this end, the researcher has selected qualitative methods in order to gain a deeper comprehension of Division III student-athletes’ experiences as they transition out of the higher education environment.

Participants in this study all experienced the same phenomenon, of being a Division III student-athlete transitioning out of college, and were asked to share their conscious experiences within the frame of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. Qualitative methods refer to a broad class of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative findings are generally presented in everyday language and often incorporate participants’ own words to describe a psychological event, experience, or phenomenon (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), all of which is applicable to understand the Division III participants in this study. Additionally, as a rationale for the selection of qualitative methods, it is also important to highlight that Creswell (1994, 2007) has listed a number of reasons a researcher may elect to use a qualitative research methodology over quantitative, including the desire to explore a problem, study a group or population, gain a complex and detailed understanding of an issue, or hear silenced voices.
Overall, a qualitative approach was selected for this study as the researcher is interested in the experience of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of the institution. In order to best understand such experiences, it is critical to hear the perspectives of the participants directly. Qualitative interviews are an opportunity for an investment from each participant, and they provide a great source to collect valuable information. Merriam (1998) described qualitative research as an “umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of natural settings as possible” (p. 5). In contrast to the quantitative alternative, Maxwell (1996) suggested that the strength of qualitative research is derived from “its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than on numbers” (p. 17).

**Research Paradigm**

The term paradigm has been defined as “a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 22) or the philosophical intent or motivation for undertaking a study (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 38). Furthermore, a *paradigm* has also been defined as a “set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world” (Filstead, 1979, p. 34). The selected paradigm guides the researcher in philosophical assumptions about the research and in the selection of tools, instruments, participants, and methods used in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). In order to explore the experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of the higher education setting, this research was placed within the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm.

According to MacKenszie and Knipe (2006), the interpretivist/constructivist researcher typically relies on qualitative data collection methods or a combination of qualitative and
quantitative (mixed methods). Growing out of the philosophy of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey’s and other German philosophers’ study of interpretive understanding called hermeneutics (Mertens, 2005, p. 12 citing Eichelberger, 1989), constructivism assumes that the meaning of experiences and events are constructed by individuals, and therefore people construct the realities in which they participate. From this stance, research aims to elicit and understand how research participants construct their individual and shared meanings around the phenomenon of interest (Charmaz, 2006).

Interpretivist/constructivist approaches to research have the intention of understanding “the world of human experience” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36), suggesting that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). The interpretivist/constructivist researcher tends to rely upon the “participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2003, p. 8) and recognizes the impact of their own background and experience on the research. According to Creswell (2007), one uses interpretive qualitative research to study problems that seek to understand the meanings of individuals or groups as they identify with a social or human problem. Interpretive constructionist researchers work to figure out shared meanings yet recognize that each person will interpret the experience in their own unique way based on previous life experiences and socio-cultural influences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Interpretive qualitative research emphasizes the subjectivity of people’s behaviors and the person’s interpretations are based on daily experiences that have meaning for them. Thus meanings are not discovered; rather they are constructed by human beings as they engage in and make sense of their world. The role of the researcher is not to discover this meaning; instead they interpret and present their findings (Merriam, 2002). Constructivism adheres to a relativist position that assumes multiple and equally valid realities (Schwandt, 1994). Essentially,
constructivists hold that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, rather than it being an externally singular entity (Hansen, 2004).

As proponents of constructivism–interpretivism emphasize the goal of understanding the “lived experiences” (*Erlebnis*) from the point of view of those who live it day to day (Schwandt, 1994, 2000), the higher education setting provides an excellent venue for exploring the experience of Division III student-athletes. The constructivist position espouses a hermeneutical approach, which maintains that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection (see Schwandt, 2000; Sciarra, 1999). Such reflection can be stimulated by the interactive researcher–participant dialogue. Qualitative research and the seeds of constructivism–interpretivism can be traced back to Kant’s (1881/1966) *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to Hamilton (1994, p. 63), Kant’s position was that “human perception derives not only from evidence of the senses but also from the mental apparatus that serves to organize the incoming sense impressions” and that “human claims about nature cannot be independent of inside-the-head processes of the knowing subject” (Ponterotto, 2005).

**Research Tradition**

In order to successfully examine the research topic, this study adopted a phenomenological research approach in order to gain insight into the experiences of Division III student-athletes as they prepare for a successful transition out of the higher education institution. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) conjectured that phenomenology is the primary philosophical tool for the study of experience. Therefore, the researcher intends to conduct a phenomenological approach in this study.

Phenomenology is the study of the shared meaning of a similar experience or situation by individuals (McCaslin & Scott, 2003) that allows a researcher to determine how ordinary
members of society determine meaning in the world around them and how they make meaning out of social interactions (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenological research seeks to report on the meaning of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for a group of people (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Giorgi (1994) states that in a phenomenological study the research must be descriptive, engage in reduction, and discover the essence. Using a phenomenological research design has been deemed appropriate for exploring the transition out of college for Division III student-athletes for two primary reasons. First, the goal of a phenomenological study is to describe the meaning of a lived experience of a concept or phenomenon for several individuals (Creswell, 2007). Second, phenomenology allows the researcher to understand the essence of the phenomenon from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010; Powers, 2010).

As indicated by Powers (2010), all research methods are grounded in certain philosophical beliefs (Donalek, 2004). Qualitative research represents a diverse set of philosophies and human sciences, representing disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology and philosophy (Maggs-Rapport, 2001). According to Dowling (2007), there are a number of schools of phenomenology, and even though they all have some commonalities, they also have distinct features. Furthermore, the many perspectives of phenomenology locate their various forms in the positivist (Husserl), postpositivist (Merleau-Ponty), interpretivist (Heidegger) and constructivist (Gadamer) paradigms (Racher & Robinson, 2003).

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology draws heavily on the writings of the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and those who expanded on his views, such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Spiegelberg, 1982). Phenomenology has also been found to be popular in the social and health sciences, especially sociology (Borgatta &
Borgatta, 1992; Swingewood, 1991), psychology (Giorgi, 1985, Polkinghorn, 1989), nursing and
the health sciences (Nieswiadomy, 1993; Oiler, 1986), and education (Tesch, 1988; van Manen,
1990). Though phenomenology also incorporates the efforts of Descartes, Kant, and Brentano
(Moustakas, 1994), it continues to have others who point to different arguments for the use of
phenomenology today (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990; van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology originates from the 20th century philosophical movements (Donalek,
2004) in Germany before World War I (Dowling, 2004). Edmund Husserl is credited with the
development of phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004; Maggs-Rapport, 2001; Orleans, n.d.; Plano-
consciousness is unavoidable; whether or not its presence is acknowledged, its presence is felt (p.
376). Another distinction regarding phenomenology is that phenomenologists believe persons
cannot be detached from their own presuppositions (Groenewald, 2004), and therefore the
researcher should acknowledge all biases and beliefs regarding the phenomenon through
Husserl’s goals are strongly epistemological, and he regarded experience as the fundamental
source of knowledge (Racher & Robinson, 2003). For Husserl, the aim of phenomenology is the
rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential
understanding of human consciousness and experience (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) was also born in Germany, and his hermeneutic
phenomenology, like Husserl’s, is concerned with human experience as it is lived. In contrast,
he differs from Husserl in his views of how the lived experience is explored, and he advocates
the utilization of hermeneutics as a research method founded on the ontological view that lived
experience is an interpretive process (Racher & Robinson, 2003).
Merleau–Ponty later built on the writings of Husserl and Heidegger. In his work, “Phenomenology of Perception,” the proposed goal of phenomenology is to rediscover first experience, which he terms as the “primacy of perception” (Racher & Robinson, 2003). The goal of Merleau–Ponty’s “phenomenology of origins” is to help us view our experience in a new light, not relying on the categories of our reflective experience; i.e., a pre-reflective experience (Moran, 2000). Finally, Gadamer, with his work “Truth and Method,” followed on the work of Heidegger. The two central positions advanced by Gadamer are: (a) prejudgement (one’s preconceptions, prejudices or horizon of meaning that is part of our linguistic experience and that make understanding possible) and (b) universality (the persons who express themselves and the persons who understand are connected by a common human consciousness, which makes understanding possible) (Gadamer, 1989; Ray, 1994). Gadamer (1989) argues that the detachment of our fruitful prejudices that facilitate understanding from our prejudices that obstruct our understanding occurs in the process of understanding itself. Therefore, in his version of phenomenology, understanding is derived from personal involvement by the researcher in reciprocal processes of interpretation that are inextricably related with one’s being-in-the-world (Spence, 2001).

Though there are different perspectives, the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology rest on some common ground, as presented by Creswell (2013): the study of lived experiences of persons, the view that these experiences are a conscious one (van Manen, 1990), and the development of descriptions of essences of these experiences (Moustakas, 1994). At a broader level, Stewart and Mickunas (1990) emphasize four philosophical perspectives in phenomenology:

- A return to the philosophical tradition of searching for wisdom and understanding
• Philosophy without presuppositions – suspension of all judgment (Epoche)
• The intentionality of consciousness – consciousness always directed toward an object, as inextricably related to one’s consciousness of it
• The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy – the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual

Moustakas (1994) explains that “in phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p. 52). Moustakas further explains that “Husserl’s approach is called ‘phenomenology’ because it utilizes only the data available to consciousness – the appearance of objects” (p. 45). Rather than viewing the material world as fact and the internal world of the mind as unknowable, phenomenology views the material world with uncertainty and internal perception as reality. What is said to possess objective reality actually only exists through representation in the mind, indicating that “objective reality” is, in truth, subjective reality (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, another core element of phenomenological methodology is a freedom from suppositions called the Epoche. In the Epoche, we set aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things. We “invalidate,” “inhibit,” and “disqualify” all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience (Moustakas, 1994).

**Division III Athletics**

The NCAA formally created Division III athletics in 1973 in response to concerns over the reorganization of the NCAA structure. The early history of the NCAA consisted of a single-divisional configuration, with all schools competing in a single, large, Pangaea-like division (Katz & Seifried, 2014). Division III was created largely as a response to environmental forces (i.e., increasing size discrepancy between public and private universities) that resulted in the
growing dissatisfaction of the NCAA’s smaller members. Historical examinations of Division III athletics indicate the division was designed to emphasize a combination of the scholastic, athletic, and communal experiences of student participants. From the initial founding in 1973, the design purposely established distinct differences between the operating procedures and philosophies between the divisions (Katz, Pfleegor, Schaperkoetter, & Bass, 2015).

More than 170,000 student-athletes at 444 institutions make up Division III, the largest NCAA division both in number of participants and number of schools. Division III athletes do not receive financial assistance (Aurand, 2007). The Division III experience offers participation in a competitive athletic environment that pushes student-athletes to excel on the field and build upon their potential by tackling new challenges across campus. Academics are the primary focus of Division III student-athletes. The division minimizes the conflicts between athletics and academics and helps student-athletes progress toward graduation through shorter practice and playing seasons, a lower number of contests, and regional competitions that reduce time away from academic studies. Participants are integrated on campus and treated like all other members of the student body, keeping them focused on being a student first (NCAA, 2017a).

As a non-profit organization, the NCAA puts its money in equipping student-athletes to succeed on the playing field, in the classroom, and throughout life (NCAA, 2017d). Division III annually receives 3.18 percent of NCAA revenues, as guaranteed by the NCAA Constitution. Approximately 75 percent of the Division III budget is devoted to support the division’s 28 national championships, providing postseason competition experiences to more than 18,000 student-athletes each year (NCAA, 2017). The remaining 25 percent supports member schools and conferences through non-championship programming, educational resources and initiatives (NCAA, 2017). Finally, "One Institution, One Vote" is the long-standing philosophy of the
Division III governance structure. The democratic style in which all member schools vote on and hold themselves accountable to various policies and procedures has been in place since the division was established in 1973. Bylaws governing Division III and its 450 member schools and 43 voting conference offices are adopted through a membership-driven legislative process that culminates annually in a voting session during the NCAA Convention (NCAA, 2017a).

According to the 2013-2014 NCAA Division III Philosophy Statement:

> Colleges and universities in Division III place the highest priority on the overall quality of the educational experience and on the successful completion of all students’ academic programs. They seek to establish and maintain an environment in which student-athletes’ activities are conducted as an integral part of the student-athlete’s educational experience, and which coaches play a significant role as educators. They also seek to establish and maintain an environment that values cultural diversity and gender equity among their student-athletes and athletics staff (NCAA, 2017a).

Overall, Division III athletics places a higher emphasis on academic success of student-athletes and values a beneficial relationship between education and athletics in a complementary fashion. In contrast to the financially driven Standard Model in Division I athletics, and as the most valuable for student-athletes and the higher education institution, Division III athletics falls under an Integrated Model (Brand, 2006). This model supports the campus community from social, economic, and academic perspectives. Therefore, within a campus community, academic endeavors and athletics could not only coexist but could support and enhance one another (Brand, 2006). According to the NCAA, Division III institutions also:
Assure that athletics programs support the institution’s educational mission by financing, staffing and controlling the programs through the same general procedures as other departments of the institution. Further, the administration of an institution’s athletics program (e.g., hiring, compensation, professional development, certification of coaches) should be integrated into the campus culture and educational mission (NCAA, 2017c).

Specifically, if budgets were cut on a college campus, the athletic department would suffer shortfalls like all other areas of campus (Carroll, 2006; Snow, 2006). Furthermore, Division III institutions place greater emphasis on the academic values of participation in sports, and typically, athletes in these institutions are not treated any differently than other members of the student body (Naughton, 1997). Staff in intercollegiate athletic departments have a duty to ensure benefits to the students under their guidance, as the importance of sports in the life of the university continues to be an American tradition. On the Division III level, staff members are held accountable for student-athlete grades, graduation rates, winning games, and, with regard to small colleges, recruiting a large percentage of the freshman class (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Weatherall, 2006).

Overall, due to their significant contribution to the institution, it is paramount that higher education professionals develop strategies to support Division III student-athletes. As indicated by Meyer and Sweeney (2005), participation in major collegiate athletics requires stringent academic training and competition schedules (including travel), and, in turn, student-athletes may experience greater pressures when they attempt to focus on everyday college social relationships. Watson (2003) also suggested that, depending on the sport and the competitive level of the institution, student-athletes commonly must invest as much time during the academic
year to sport-related activities (games, practices, training, and meetings) as an individual performing a full-time job.

Participants

In an effort to explore the experience of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college, it is imperative to have a dependable approach for communicating with potential participants. Therefore, purposeful homogeneous and criterion sampling were used to select participants for this study (Creswell, 1998). In criterion sampling all participants meet a common criterion. Criterion sampling is useful for quality assurance and is essential for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998). For this study, this would include individuals enrolled in an undergraduate degree program and classified on the roster with the athletic department and the NCAA as a Division III student-athlete. Homogeneous sampling is when participants share a common experience. Therefore, all participants selected will be registered for the final semester of their senior year. As found, a defining feature of phenomenology includes the exploration of the phenomenon with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. When it comes to participant sample size, a group is identified that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15 (Creswell, 2013) or 5 to 25 individuals (Polkinghorne, 1989). As participation in the research is on a voluntary basis, the aforementioned recommendation will be utilized accordingly.

Recruitment and Access

In order to recruit participants for this study, the researcher followed established protocol and procedure to obtain approval from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as approval from the Institutional Review Board of the research site. Potential
subjects were identified via the institutional athletic department, with the Student Researcher soliciting nominations by the Director of Athletics.

The recruitment and access process for this study was completed in stages. In the first stage, the researcher solicited nominations via email to the Director of Athletics (see Appendix B). The purpose of the email was to keep record of all interactions regarding the study. The names of all student-athletes who met the study criteria was sent to the Office of the Registrar for verification of enrollment as a senior in their final semester, but selected nominees remained confidential. In the second stage, the researcher generated an email to designated nominees regarding their participation, requesting volunteers, and politely communicated that each participant was entered into a drawing for a chance to win a $100 Best Buy gift card (see Appendix E). During this screening process, no interview question was asked and all who did not meet the designated criteria via verification by the Office of the Registrar were eliminated (see Appendix C). In the case that a nominee declined to participate, the researcher contacted the Director of Athletics for additional recommendations. Only one email was sent to potential participants. To decrease the appearance of coercion, no verbal recruitment was done. The student researcher will only used the husky.neu.edu email address for all parts of the study.

The researcher agreed with Cresswell (2012) and Chenail (1995) that ethical practices should be a foundation of all research studies. Therefore, the researcher conformed to ethical practices for this study. The researcher required signed consent forms, to be filed and organized with the totality of data storage. The researcher was sensitive to the background and views of all participants and informed them that they could withdraw from the project at any time or select not to reply to any question that made them uncomfortable during the interview process. Finally, the researcher acknowledge that all participants were volunteers and there was no prior
knowledge of the participants’ backgrounds. As stated in the data storage section below, all study-related audiotapes/audiofiles, consent forms, email communications, and documents will be properly protected.

Data Collection

The appropriate data that is typically collected for a phenomenological study is qualitative information that highlights the experiences of individuals with the phenomenon under exploration. Moustakas (1994) reports that typically in the phenomenological investigation the long interview is the method through which data is collected. The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions. As found, a defining feature of phenomenology includes the exploration of the phenomenon with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. The researcher should adopt a data collection procedure that involves interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, but this is not universal as some phenomenological studies have involved varied sources of data, such as poems, taped conversations, formally written responses, journals, music, arts, observations, and other artifacts (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990). Overall, through qualitative interviews or the review of other sources, the goal of phenomenological data collection is to tap into sources that generate the best representation of an individual’s experience with a phenomenon.

As interviewing is the primary technique for gathering data in phenomenological studies (Powers, 2010), Groenewald (2004) stated that the qualitative interview is literally an “interview” or an interchange of views between two people with a common interest (p. 13). Additionally, Edward (2006) asserted that phenomenological inquiry allows participants’ knowledge to be considered data (p. 1). Finally, the creation of the right atmosphere is
imperative in conducting a phenomenological study. Often the phenomenological interview begins with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere. The interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively (Moustakas, 1994). Saldana (2011) also discusses the environment the researcher should create, stating “I advocate that the researcher always enter the interview with an attitude of courtesy and respect. The goal is to establish an atmosphere and working relationship of comfort, security, and equity” (p. 39). Saldana also points out that it is important to honor the contributions the participants make to the study, demonstrating to them that they, not the researcher, are the experts on the phenomenon.

Data Storage

Cresswell (2012) indicates that it is tremendously important to store data safely and recommends that all data collected as well as study-related materials should be managed carefully. For the purpose of this study, the researcher cautiously managed information collected and establish a data management system. This was executed by incorporating critical principles regarding data storage and handling well suited for qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). This included taking precautions and always developing backup copies of computer files (Davidson, 1996), not keeping data on a shared computer or in a public domain, utilizing high-quality recording devices during interviews, and developing a master list of all field notes, audiotapes, and data transcriptions, to be saved on an external drive. As data management is vital when it comes to conducting qualitative research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), the researcher maintained the integrity of all data records by utilization of designated pseudonyms, applying indexes, dating all documents and audiotapes/audiofiles accordingly, and storing information in
the researcher’s private office in a locked file cabinet. Such practice is to ensure participants’ anonymity and confidentiality, as well as protection of information from damage, loss, or theft (Aldridge & Medina, 2008). Finally, all data and corresponding materials related to this study will be locked and stored for a period of seven years. Once the seven-year period has elapsed, the data and corresponding materials will be permanently destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

This section provides a clear and specific description of how data is analyzed using basic inductive techniques applicable to qualitative research and phenomenological studies. In conducting analysis of data collected in the tradition of phenomenology, it is imperative to adopt recommended procedures. Such practice ensures that the findings represent valid and practical information. The data analysis process for a phenomenological research has been presented by Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological analysis, covered by Creswell (2013). Using the transcripts of the research participants’ interviews, the following data analysis procedures have been recommended, including the sequencing involved in analysis and specific techniques.

The first step is to describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experiences of the phenomenon. This is an attempt to set aside the researcher’s personal experiences (which cannot be done entirely) so that focus can be directed on the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). Through Epoche (or bracketing), an investigator sets aside his/her experiences as much as possible to take on a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994).

Next, a list of significant statements is developed. This process entails finding statements in the data (sentences or quotes in the interview transcripts or other data sources) about how the
individual experienced the phenomenon, listing these statements and treating each statement as
having equal worth (horizontalization of the data), and working to develop a list of non-repetitive
and non-overlapping statements.

Third, take the statements and group them into larger units of information, called
“meaning units” or themes. Through developing clusters of meaning from significant statements,
the researcher finds themes. Fourth, these significant statements and themes are used to write a
description of “what” the participant experienced (textural description), as well as writing about
the context or setting that influenced how the participant experienced the phenomenon (structural
description).

Finally, from the textual and structural description, the final step of analysis is to write a
composite description that presents the “essence” of the phenomenon. To give the data context,
the primary focus is on the common experiences of the participants and informs the readers of
“what” the participant experienced with the phenomenon and “how” they experienced it
(Creswell, 2013). In addition to supporters of Moustakas (e.g., Giorgi, 2009), the presentation of
the “essence” can take a structured analytic approach as presented by Riemen (1986) or a less
structured analytic approach as presented by van Manen (1990). Structured approaches analyze
the data for significant phrases, developing meaning clusters into themes and presenting
exhaustive descriptions of the phenomena. Less structured approaches entail considering
phenomenological reflections as a means to yield an explicit structure of the meaning of the lived
experience (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) posited that without rigor, academic
research becomes fiction and loses its utility. The authors referred to research reliability and
validity as the process of establishing trustworthiness. While reliability and validity are common concepts in quantitative studies, there is no consensus on terms or procedures that should be used in qualitative studies, partially due to the variability of methodologies and contexts (Creswell, 2007). However, Creswell does put forth eight validation strategies that are frequently used by qualitative researchers, including prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field; triangulation; peer review or debriefing; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study; member checking; providing rich, thick descriptions to allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability; and external audits. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) encourages qualitative researchers to use at least two validation strategies in any given study. For the purposes of this study, three methods of verification were selected: 1) clarifying researcher bias, 2) member checking and 3) providing rich, thick descriptions to allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability.

First, clarifying researcher bias should be automatically included as a validation practice as it is directly in line with the idea of separating and addressing one’s experiences and understandings of the area being explored. As mentioned earlier in this document, the researcher included his own experiences and assumptions which might influence this research study primarily in the positionality section of Chapter 1. Creswell (1998) asserted that clarifying researcher bias from the outset of a study is a verification technique (p. 202). In this clarification the researcher notes past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that may influence the study (p. 202). Overall, the researcher’s positionality statement addressed this section accordingly. Second, the researcher participated in member checking while analyzing the data. Upon completing the individual textural description, the researcher followed up with the participants, emailing completed transcripts, to ensure accuracy of information collected
accordingly. This activity was be followed by the researcher analyzing the transcriptions appropriately and performing a stringent cross-referenced review of emergent themes against the data collected. Finally, as another goal of qualitative research is to provide rich, thick description of what was experienced and how it was experienced contextually, utilizing direct quotes from the participants, this study includes thick, rich descriptions in the findings chapter, as well as other sections focused on the setting and participants. This attention to detail allows readers to determine how the information might be applicable in other environments (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations

Limitations are factors that limit the transferability of the findings of a research study (Bryant, 2004). When it comes to the generalization of this current study, there were five limitations that are important to address. First, this study took place at a Division III northeastern institution within a state university system, therefore data was limited to the collaborating institution. Second, the small number of student-athlete volunteers who participated in this study limited the assortment of experiences and understandings. Therefore as the study was based on participants’ own experiences, the capacity to generalize the findings of this study to other students on a macro level may be restricted. Third, by collecting data through interviews, the researcher relied solely on self-reported data. As the selected student-athletes make meaning of their experiences, results may vary if different participants were included in the study, even different participants at the same institution. Fourth, homogeneous and criterion sampling is essential to a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998, p. 118), therefore as a much more narrow population is selected, this may decrease the generalization of the findings. Fifth, findings are subject to multiple interpretations as qualitative studies use different aspects of reality as data,
and it is the combination of these data and different perspectives that allow for different interpretations (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 5).

**Summary**

Using Schlossberg’s Transition Theory as a model, semi-structured interviews were utilized to gain a better understanding of how Division III student-athletes experience the conversion to post-collegiate life. This chapter provides detailed information pertaining to the research design, including methodology, paradigm, tradition, participants, recruitment and access, data collection, data storage, analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and limitations.

As noted in Chapter 1, the “moving out” phase of the theory had a significant influence on the interview protocol since this phase played a significant role in the shaping of appropriate and relevant questions. Additionally, the questions provided insight into institutional resources valued by Division III student-athletes, provided the opportunity for an explanation of their confidence/self-efficacy as they move to the next phase of their life journey, and gave a clear picture of action steps taken as they navigate their transition out of higher education. Overall, via qualitative research methods, the goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of Division III student-athletes’ perceptions of institutional support as they transition out of higher education and to create empirically-based strategic recommendations that reinforces the research findings.

Even to ask a question about some phenomenon assumes some perspective, worldview, or disciplinary orientation. Identifying a theoretical framework not only makes that worldview explicit but also provides tools in terms of concepts and models for structuring the investigation (Merriam, 2015). Incorporating the “moving out” stage supports how the theory selected helped inform the problem of practice identified. As research has found, a scholar is well advised to use
a theoretical framework not only because it situates the author within a scholarly conversation but also because it helps focus the study (Fowler, 2015). Specifically, the researcher broke down the interview protocol to understanding the Division III student-athlete experience as they move out of the higher education arena. Through qualitative interviews, this study aimed to understand the participants’ voices, utilizing Schlossberg’s theory as a framework. As mentioned in the research, the nature of the overarching research question contributes to the study methodology. These questions could only have been investigated through a qualitative design that allows for participant perspectives and understanding of phenomenon to be revealed (Merriam, 2007; Patton, 2002).
Chapter 4: Presentation of Data and Analysis

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate the lived experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college. The goal of this research was to understand the experience of Division III student-athletes attending a mid-size, four-year public institution within a state university system in the northeastern region of the United States through the lens of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory.

This chapter discusses the research site, the method of data collection, application of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, summary of participants, interview procedures, the transcription process, analysis procedures, coding, the identification and documentation of emergent themes, and essence of the phenomenon. The researcher provides a clear and specific description of how data was analyzed using basic inductive techniques applicable to qualitative research and phenomenological studies.

In conducting analysis of data collected in the tradition of phenomenology, it is imperative to adopt recommended procedures. Such practice ensures that the findings represent valid and practical information. Using the transcripts of the research participants interviewed, the data analysis process for this phenomenological research follows procedures presented by Moustakas (1994), including the sequencing involved in analysis and specific techniques. In addressing the essence of the experience, the findings of this study are presented based on the research objective and the identified themes accordingly. Each participant section is written in the voice of the participants, in order to ensure accuracy and authenticity.

Overall, the findings of this study contributes to the limited literature on Division III student-athletes. Using a phenomenological research design allows the researcher to understand the essence of the phenomenon from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.
(Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 239). In this particular study, the phenomenon is transitioning out of college as a Division III student-athlete. Additionally, Plano-Clark and Creswell stated that “using a phenomenological design is useful when little is known about the meaning of the phenomenon” (p. 239). As cited earlier, given the limited research on Division III student-athletes, the researcher failed to uncover substantial literature, which indicates that very little known about the phenomenon of Division III student-athletes transition out of college.

**Restatement of Research Question**

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) offered a model for counseling adults in transition. The model offers a framework for identifying and understanding the perceived demands and coping strategies used by individuals in transition. Using this model, the overarching research questions for this study is “What are the lived experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college?”

**Research Site**

In order to effectively justify the selection of the research site, it is important to provide an overview of the history of Division III athletics in the higher education setting for context and deeper understanding. American colleges and universities compete on various levels depending on several factors. According to Fletcher, Benshoff, and Richburg (2003), the majority of four-year institutions that have athletic programs are members of the NCAA, which requires member institutions to abide by specific policies, procedures, and bylaws. The NCAA is organized into three divisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III. Division I consists of 350 colleges that boast the highest enrollment, largest athletic budgets, and award the most generous number of scholarships. There are 300 colleges that compete at the Division II level with more than 17,000
students and 444 institutions that make up Division III, the largest NCAA division in both number of participants and number of schools (NCAA, 2017).

As the scholarly literature highlights the distinguishing challenges for student-athletes from past to present, such information speaks to their experience in the college environment. As the research question for this study focuses on the Division III student-athlete transition out of college, the student-athlete identity and schedule is paramount to their experience (Lee & Gramotnev, 2007; Weiss, Freund, & Wiesse, 2012), specifically balancing athletic participation and academic progression (Parham, 1993). Therefore, it is imperative to note the differences in the student-athlete experience in comparison to the general student body, as this provides great insight into this cohort. As the selected site provides access to Division III student-athletes transitioning out of college, this opens the door to a rich data source relevant to this research endeavor. It is also important to note that the research site is classified as a Predominantly White Institution. Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Christopher Brown & Elon Dancy, 2010). With the research site being 75.4% white, the PWI classification would be most applicable.

**Method of Data Collection**

**Application of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

The foundation of this study was based on Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, which includes the 4S’s identified as situation, support, self and strategies, as an individual navigates a transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Furthermore, though there are three phases pertaining to this theory (moving in, moving through, and moving out), the final stage of “moving out” has been deemed the most applicable to provide a conceptual framework for transitioning out of college
for Division III student-athletes. To figure out if there were patterns or similarities among the research participants, transcripts were reviewed, analyzed, and coded in their entirety. Responses from each participant were analyzed and coded by individual interview question, followed by the identification of recurring themes which emerged through the research participants’ interviews.

**Interview Procedures**

In order to collect data for this study, one on one semi-structured interviews were conducted for a one hour duration. All research questions for this study were open-ended in nature, giving the participants freedom to explore their thoughts, feelings, and responses as they needed. It also provided an opportunity for the researcher to fine-tune questions and improvise, creating follow-up questions in an effort to gather fuller, richer textural-structural description and eventually the themes and essence of their experience transitioning out of college as a Division III student-athlete.

Each interview took place at a comfortable time and location selected by the volunteer participant, with all logistics arranged via email with the researcher. As the purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand and reveal the lived experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003), narrative data were utilized within this study. The researcher verbally reviewed the interview procedures, highlighting rights of the research participants, utilization of pseudonyms, benefits/risk, referral to the health & wellness department if needed, and protection of information. Upon conclusion, the researcher and participant applied their required signatures to the informed consent form to proceed forward, and the participant was provided with a copy of the documentation.
In an attempt to provide a relaxed environment conducive to disclosure of information, the researcher and participant spoke momentarily before each interview commenced. This was conducted via the utilization of friendly ice breaker questions. The motive for the light dialogue was to establish rapport and to increase the comfort level for each participant. Moustakas (1994) indicates that researchers can and should speak with study participants in an informal, friendly manner to create a social dialogue prior to the interview. This allows for a “relaxed and trusting atmosphere, allowing the participants to speak freely, and creating the environment necessary to effectively complete the interviews through an exchange of information, thought, emotion, and experience (p. 114)”.

After the ice breaker question were completed, the researcher proceeded to open-ended questions that were guided by the over-arching research question for this study. Upon the conclusion of each interview, the researcher thanked each participant for their time and discussed future reviewing of the interview transcript for verification purposes. During verification, participants were provided with an opportunity to revise or add information, as well as give a further explanation of information if necessary, before giving the final confirmation of accuracy.

**Transcription**

The transcription for this research study was orchestrated single-handedly by the researcher. To initiate the data analysis procedure, the researcher utilized audio recordings and adhered to verbatim accounts of the questions and answers exchanged during the one-hour interview. Given the small sample size, personally transcribing the interviews without the use of electronic technology provided an opportunity for the researcher to become more intimate with the data. The researcher carefully listened to each audio recording and compared them to the transcripts to confirm quality. Interviewing and transcribing personally provided an opportunity
for the researcher to be fully cognizant of the participants’ responses, and to recall the feelings of
the participants as they shared their experiences. It allowed for delicate distinctions to be
exposed and the formation of fuller descriptions. After each transcript was completed, it was
emailed to the participant with an invitation for clarification or the further exchange of
information.

Analysis Procedures

Epoche

As discussed in the previous chapter, the first step in phenomenological data analysis is
to describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. The researcher begins with
a full description of his or her own experiences of the phenomenon. This is an attempt to set
aside the researcher’s personal experiences (which cannot be done entirely) so focus can be
directed to the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). Through Epoche (or bracketing), an
investigator sets aside his/her experiences as much as possible to take on a fresh perspective
toward the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994).

Clarifying researcher bias should be automatically included as a validation practice as it
is directly in line with the idea of separating and addressing one’s experiences and
understandings of the area being explored. Overall, the researcher has included such experiences
and assumptions that might influence this study primarily in the Positionality section of this
document. Creswell (1998) asserted that “clarifying researcher bias from the outset of a study is
a verification technique. In this clarification the researcher notes past experiences, biases,
prejudices, and orientations that may influence the study” (p. 202). Overall, the positionality
statement has address this section in detail accordingly. Furthermore to limit bias, the researcher
utilized a researcher journal and analytic memos which allowed for the recording of personal
thoughts and perspectives as an observer throughout the study.
In order to mitigate the influence of bias on the results of this study, there were several steps the researcher incorporated in order to ensure the accurate collection of data and to maintain the ethical integrity of the research:

A. Established clear boundaries by the researcher being identified as a doctoral level Scholar-Practitioner in training for the purposes of this study

B. Making sure not to influence the research participants by the framing of the research questions (avoid priming by being sure not to ask questions in a particular pattern to produce a certain response. Safeguard against guiding the responses of the research participants)

C. During interviews, use the respondents’ language and avoided summarizing what the respondents said in the interviewers’ own words

D. Ensured that the research questions were clear and accurately target the information desired (had the IRB act as an independent/outside body to review the interview protocol)

E. Transcribe accurately and did not take what the research participants said further (adhered to what the data presented and did not manipulate results)

F. Utilized questions aimed at capturing the respondent’s true point of view

G. Ensured confidentiality to show respect and to avoid socially desirable answers

H. Explained to research participants that their answers will not be held against them (Creation of a safe environment to encourage genuine responses from research participants)

I. Kept the interaction conversational to avoid rushed or habituation answers

J. Avoided influencing participants by being conscious about sharing the researcher’s background
Bias is defined by Harper (1991) as allowing a particular influence to have more importance than it really warrants. Through the incorporation of quality questions, and remaining aware of researcher Positionality, this minimized researcher bias and enabled honest responses from research participants. In the Positionality section the researcher highlights past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that may influence the study. Researcher bias was verified by McMillan (2004) who indicated that “attributes of the researcher such as age, gender, race, hostility, and physical appearance may influence research results” (p. 213).

According to Sam Wineburg (2001), the narcissist sees the world – both the past and the present – in his own image. Mature historical knowing teaches us to do the opposite: to go beyond our own image, to go beyond our own brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born. When we acquire the skill of understanding how we know what we know, we acquire a key to lifelong learning (Takacs, 2002).

**Horizontilization**

The coding for this study was also completed single-handedly by the researcher and with the use of color-coded highlighting to separate material and quotes. Given the small number of volunteer participants, the process of personal transcribing, without the use of computer software, allowed the researcher to become more intimate with the material. A list of significant statements was developed. This process entailed finding statements in the data (sentences or quotes in the interview transcripts) about how the individual experienced the phenomenon, listing these statements, treating each statement as having equal worth (horizontalization of the data), and working to develop a list of non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements (Moustakas, 1994). Overall, the process of coding is that of “narrowing data into a few themes” (Creswell, 2007). As research has found, qualitative codes are essence capturing and essential
elements of the research story, that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity (pattern), actively facilitate the development of categories and analysis of their connections (Saldaña, 2015).

In all, phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses. Descriptions retain, as close as possible, the original texture of things, their phenomenological qualities, and material properties. Descriptions keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, and retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 58-59). This phase in the analysis process is moving to emergent themes. Uncovering emergent themes is a natural process, aligned with the understandings of Husserl (1970), who believed that “to arrive at essence, a researcher must discover knowledge by reference to the things and facts themselves, as these are given in actual experience and intuition” (Oliva, 2011, p. 47). Though the next step in the analysis procedure is the documentation of emergent themes, it is also important to provide a deeper description of the participants through the presentation of detailed information. This information, found below, provides more insight and context pertaining to the individuals who reported on the share experienced in this phenomenological study.

**Participant Profiles**

As discussed earlier, when it comes to participant sample size, a group in a phenomenological study may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15 (Creswell, 2013), 5 to 25 individuals (Polkinghorne, 1989), or 3 to 10 participants (Dukes, 1984). In support of the aforementioned recommendation and as designated by the minimum standard of the Northeastern University IRB, the researcher has included 6 participants. This number has been deemed appropriate by the researcher in order to avoid an overwhelming number of viewpoints.
that may have become exhausting and too challenging to find commonalities. All nominated participants were selected during the spring semester, once verification by the Office of the Register was confirmed. Three initial nominees did not participate in the study due to lack of response to the researcher’s initial email contact. Upon their lack or response, the researcher obtained names of three new nominees from the Director of Athletics.

The six participants who took part in this study shall be identified as Amber, Valarie, Claire, Tyler, Victor, and Pierce. They were all Division III student-athletes enrolled in the final semester of their senior year. Representative across various academic disciplines, all six reported engagements in sports since they were in grade school, beginning between the ages of 4 to 8. Two of the students were majoring in business disciplines; two were in the social sciences; and two were in STEM related fields, specifically engineering. One reported community college experience as a student-athlete, and the others indicated participation on the college level at the four-year school directly after the completion of their secondary education. They all ranged in age from 21-23, with five out of the six identifying as Caucasian (83%) and one African-American (17%). This sample was representative of the student body at the cooperating institution, and all participants were in good academic standing. In order to provide a rich description of the research participants, a brief portrait of each contributor is found below.

Amber

Amber was the first respondent to participate in the study based on her nomination by the Director of Athletics. The interview was conducted on the campus of the research site in a location deemed comfortable by Amber. Displaying a relaxed demeanor, Amber shared stories of her time growing up in the upstate region of her home state as well as her participation in
sports since she was eight years old. Presently twenty-two, she also expressed her efforts to take
her competitive spirit to a higher level while at community college:

“When I started playing sports …I got serious about it when I actually went to
community college.”

Currently completing her senior year as a soccer player and business administration
major, she expressed excitement about her academic concentration, indicating:

“I think that I chose the right major for me, in the sense that it's very broad and if I went
into certain careers, I have a lot of options.”

Valarie

Valarie was a 21-year old woman who grew up in the central region of her home state.
During her interview, she was very expressive about her appreciation for learning and people. In
regards to her sociology major she indicated:

“I like it. It’s interesting...you get to learn about different aspects of people, with services
in society.”

Playing sports since she was twelve years old, she was very comfortable sharing her
experience and involvement in athletics. Her interview was conducted on campus, and she was
very excited to share the progress of the athletic teams in which she participated. Her sense of
camaraderie was clearly evident, with Valarie expressing that she was not going to be attending
graduation to support her athletic comrades in playoff competition:
“I had decided to actually not attend graduation.....so I did not purchase a cap and gown, but I will be borrowing one so that I can take a picture...because I’m going to playoffs instead....so I’ll be in Pennsylvania during graduation.”

Claire

Claire was the consummate over achiever, double majoring in Psychology & Community & Behavioral Health, with a minor in Biology. A student-athlete since four years old, Claire was currently twenty-one and grew up in the northeast region of the United States. Raised in a strong close-knit family, Claire was very expressive about the support from her family of origin regarding her decision to begin her post undergraduate life more than 1,500 miles away:

“My entire family.....I told them last summer that post-graduation I wanted to move half way across the country....they were so supportive of it right away. They didn’t try to deter me at all.”

She also noted her valued relationships and support in the Athletics Department during her senior year. Claire noted:

“They’re always very supportive, which has been phenomenal because I was a wreck on my senior day, I was so upset and they (Athletic Department Personnel) were like, “hey you had a great career, you did great things here....”

Tyler

A twenty-two year old Business Administration major from downstate, Tyler was the first male to interview for this study, in a setting selected based on his comfort level and to ensure confidentiality. A men’s volleyball player, he began his involvement in athletics at age ten and continued through all four years of high school and during his undergraduate tenure.
Tyler was very candid in discussing both the benefits of being a student-athlete, as well as missed opportunities in his college experience due to athletic participation. Tyler mentioned:

“What traveling does for athletes is takes away opportunities you might have going on campus, but you can’t attend at that point.”

Victor

Twenty-three from the western part of his home state, Victor was a Mechanical Engineering Technology baseball player who has been involved in sports since the age of four years old. Articulate in his responses, Victor went on to explain the challenges of his senior year as a Division III student-athlete and the tremendous support he received from his coaching staff:

“Overall, it was rather challenging, making sure I had time for all my academics while still being able to make practices and games, but our coaching staff is very supportive if you need time away from practice or anything, their very supportive in making sure that you commit to your studies before the sport.”

Pierce

Captain of the Lacrosse team, Pierce was straightforward about his experience as a Division III student-athlete. A twenty-one year old Civil Engineering Technology major, Pierce has been involved in athletics since the third grade. In regards to holding a leadership position on his team, and now leaving the institution, Pierce went on to explain:

“I am a captain this year so I have a lot more responsibilities than just everyone else on the team. It’s definitely a little more difficult than being a regular player because I have to keep track of twenty-something guys also…and be kind of coach’s right hand man all the time, but I think it’s a pretty good job….I’m kind of sad, I mean, it’s my last time ever playing a sport....”
Summary of Participants

As representatives of Division III student-athletes at the selected research site, the six participants who volunteered for this study consist of three females and three males based on the nomination by the Director of Athletics. Ranging in age, gender, academic major, and sport, these individuals have been allocated the pseudonyms Amber, Valarie, Claire, Tyler, Victor, and Pierce to ensure confidentiality. It is also important to note that even though the participants in this study were all traditionally-aged college students, only one student was representative of the non-majority population. This factor is indicative of the PWI research site classification stated earlier in this document, with Appendix F displaying the research site student-athlete race/ethnicity classification. Based on criterion sampling, all of the volunteers met the minimal criteria for participation including: 1. currently enrolled in the final semester of his/her senior year in an undergraduate degree program; and 2. classified on the roster of the athletic department and the NCAA as a Division III student-athlete. In addition to meeting the designated criteria, it is important to note that participants were also selected as a matter of convenience. Convenience sampling is a qualitative technique involving the selection of the most accessible subjects (Marshall, 1996). Finally, the criterion information was verified by the athletic department and the office of the registrar at the research site. Table 2 below displays demographic information pertaining to the six participants.

Table 2: Participant Profile Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>ACADEMIC MAJOR</th>
<th>SPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valarie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Softball/Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Psychology/Community</td>
<td>Volleyball/Lacrosse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Upon completion of the coding process, the researcher separated the information collected based on emergent themes that were developed through the data analysis procedure. This process can also be referred to grouping information into meaning units, as recurrent themes emerged during the analysis process. During thematizing, the researcher is asked to “cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

By conducting a thorough and repeated review of the transcribed data, horizontilization, the researcher uncovered similar patterns of experiences expressed through words of the research participants. These statements are grouped into larger units of information, called “meaning units” (Moustakas, 1994). The information provided by the participants contributed to the emergent themes, and highlighted the shared experiences of each individual transitioning out of college as a Division III student-athlete. Overall, through the careful and recurrent review of the participants’ transcripts, the verification of data via a follow-up with the participant for accuracy, and the analysis of summarized data being grouped together, the emergence of four themes has been identified that were applicable to the research study: 1) Personal Challenge, 2) A Sense of Loss, 3) Adequate Professional Preparation, and 4) Relationship Engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering Technology</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Civil Engineering Technology</td>
<td>Lacrosse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 displays the distribution of responses applicable to the emergent themes pertaining to the research participants. This information indicates how the emergent themes were developed as applicable to the experience of multiple participants. As indicated by the consistent dissemination of the participant responses, the four emergent themes were a constant for all who took part in this research study. An edict of qualitative research is to collect data until saturation occurs. Saturation is defined as “data adequacy” and operationalized as collecting data until no new information is obtained. Overall, saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work (Morse, 1995), and has been reached in the data gathering for this study. To this end, the interviews transcripts were analyzed, from which a rich structural and textual understanding was formed. The findings were allowed to emerge, rather than being imposed by the investigator. The process of phenomenological research does not “break down” the experience that is being studied. Instead, it provides descriptions that are rich and full interpretations that exactly describe what it means to be a person in that particular world (van Manen, 1997).

Table 3: Dissemination of Participant Responses to Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>PERSONAL CHALLENGE (Situation/Transition)</th>
<th>A SENSE OF LOSS (Situation/Transition)</th>
<th>ADEQUATE PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION (Self/Self-Efficacy)</th>
<th>RELATIONSHIP ENGAGEMENT (Support/Resources &amp; Strategy/Action Plan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valarie</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Textural-Structural Descriptions

The final step for phenomenological data analysis consists of writing textual-structural descriptions. As indicated by Moustakas (1994), textural descriptions are used to write a description of “what” the participant experienced pertaining to the phenomenon. Structural descriptions highlight the context or setting that influenced “how” the participant experienced the phenomenon. Finally, a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions generates the “essence” of the experience. This passage is the essence of the experience and represents the cumulating aspect of a phenomenological study. It is typically a long paragraph that tells the reader “what” the participant experienced with the phenomenon and “how they experienced it” (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). Overall, the researcher is concerned with moving from final coded and clustered themes to establishing a narrative discussing the meanings inherent in the participant’s experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

As discussed, all recorded interviews of the Division III student-athletes were transcribed, repetitively reviewed, and categorized into descriptions of what was experienced and how it was experienced, revealing the true essence of the phenomenon. This final narrative is the integration of the essential textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole. Because the purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand and reveal lived experience and the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003), the trustworthiness of phenomenological research stems from the lived experience of the participants and the researcher’s goal was to explore and unearth this true experience. Overall, this is where the essence and lived experience of the participants are realized, without interpretation or influence by the researcher. The goal of qualitative phenomenological research is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the
individual describing a “lived experience” of a phenomenon. To this end, pure phenomenological research methodology is a qualitative analysis of narrative data and seeks essentially to describe rather than explain and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl, 1970).

Upon precise review and development of emergent themes as the data were analyzed, the experience transitioning out of college for Division III student-athletes at a mid-size, four-year institution within a state university system involved “Personal Challenge,” “A Sense of Loss,” “Adequate Professional Preparation,” and “Relationship Engagement.” Indicated under the designated emergent theme in order to most effectively present the data, textural-structural descriptions of the Division III student-athlete experiences are presented below via verbatim examples from the interview transcriptions.

In all, the aforementioned procedures allowed the researcher to minimize personal opinion or experience in order to best understand the experience of the Division III student-athlete participants in the study (Moustakas, 1994).

**Theme # 1: Personal Challenge**

When it comes to Division III student-athletes, their ability to manage their life as an undergraduate student becomes crucial to their academic success as well as the completion of their degree in what may be deemed an appropriate timeframe. The participants were all outspoken about addressing their participation as a student in his or her senior year, the ending of their intercollegiate athletic career, and ensuring that they met their undergraduate degree requirements.

In addition to academic responsibilities, the life of a student-athlete is bombarded with practice, cardio and conditioning, weight training, and athletic competition, voluntary as it may
be (Parham, 1993). Compounded with the standard academic rigors of the non-athletic student, the pressure of senior year becomes even more concerning as the exit plan for these athletes were moved to the forefront of their reality. When asked about their feelings regarding their transition out of college as a Division III student-athlete, participants consistently mentioned the “Personal Challenge” of balancing their senior year responsibilities. Participants recalled the following information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>“I found it to be difficult at times because some professors don’t understand the commitment that you have being a student-athlete.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>“So….in the beginning of the year it was relatively easy to just get through all of my classes and stuff. My schedule was easier….but as you get into season and you have practice and games, and overnights, and all that…it’s hard to…like…be at every class and not miss anything, and get all your work done…so it’s like a lot of time management. It’s been kind of difficult recently because I have a lot bigger workload like senior seminar and all those types of classes. But it’s getting through it… “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When you’re captain you get a little bit more responsibility than everybody else on the team... you try to oversee everybody and make sure they’re doing ok......so you’re technically worried about what everybody else before yourself: ...which is also difficult to do as an athlete because you want to do well yourself.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>“It was definitely harder as a senior than the previous three years, because there’s so much to plan out now that you’re leaving college. So instead of just thinking, ok I go to do classes next year, and get to play next year, it’s like alright now what?......So it was a lot more.....I want to play and I want to spend a lot of time committing to my sport, but at the same time I got to make sure I focus on my senior year to make sure I complete my requirements to graduate, and then move on. So I would definitely think it’s harder than the last three.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>“Honestly, I find it a bit challenging at times...whereas sometimes it might be difficult, other times its easy...the challenge comes with traveling and the commitment to practice each week......so then from there, there’s a need to get all your work done before you travel, or try to make time while you’re traveling to get done any assignments or prepare for test the following week...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>“Overall, it was rather challenging, making sure I had time for all my academics while still being able to make practices and games, but our coaching staff is very supportive if you need time away from practice or anything, they’re very supportive into making sure that you commit to your studies before the sport.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>“Well, being a civil engineering technology student, and being an athlete, I am a captain this year so I have a lot more responsibilities than just everyone else on the team....It’s definitely a little more difficult than being a regular player because...”</td>
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</table>
Theme # 2: A Sense of Loss

As indicated by Schlossberg (1981), change may elicit feelings of pleasure (marriage, obtaining a raise at work), while others are accompanied by feelings of pain (loss of a love one, losing a job). Additionally, some, but not all, transitions require a role change conceptualized as a “gain,” such as getting married, becoming a parent, or taking on new employment (p. 8). Other role changes are viewed as a “loss,” such as divorce, becoming widowed, or retirement (p. 8). Furthermore, changes have also been known to conjure up both positive and negative feelings. For example, a Division III student-athlete may be excited as he or she anticipates graduation, while also having feelings of anxiety or sadness when the change becomes a reality due to the end of their athletic career. In the end, all changes produce some degree of response.

The theme of “A Sense of Loss” stemmed from responses of all participant regarding their transition out of college and the end of their career as a Division III intercollegiate athlete. A sense of loss also pertained to missed opportunities in the college environment due to participation in athletics. Participants readily referred to their identity as an athlete as they prepared for the next phase of their life. Information noted included:

| Amber | “I’m sad because a lot of my friends that I made through college, I met through soccer...So I’ve made some lifelong friends that I know was because of that and I’m going to miss being on a team that was competitive and just the feeling that you get when you step out on the field, knowing that you have a purpose there....”

“Oh my gosh....I know that during pre-season I would be working really hard every day because I really wanted to be the best out there...since I’m a senior now, that the younger students would look up to that, and that would make them work harder....but as I’m ending my career as a college athlete, you know I go to games still all the time, and it’s sad because I miss that...like once it’s gone, you don’t get it back, I mean you could play in recreational leagues or pick up leagues, but it’s never quite the same.” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valarie</td>
<td>“It’s upsetting to me. I love athletics and I love playing softball, but I definitely want to take my knowledge and develop it into maybe something I can do in the future with coaching. It’s definitely different to know you’re not going to be competing, like ever again…it’s, it’s kind of… it is depressing a little bit, but you know. You look at it like I gave my all for this many years, and now I’m just ready to just relax a little bit…”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“You know my team, not that they need me, but like… I play a huge role in that team, and I know I do, and I would let them down if I didn’t show up….. Athletics have been fantastic in Division III and I wouldn’t change anything. I wouldn’t do it any other way if I could……”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>“I’m so sad, I’m so sad….. It’s a happy thing, because I got to compete for four years, but at the same time, I’m not going to be with my girls in preseason in August. It’s the strangest feeling in the world, and it’s like I don’t know what to do…..”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Yeah, so it’s like now that I’m done, now what? I get that a big part of my life was athletics growing up. When I was in high school I was in sports every single season, and now I came here, and I played two sports, one I never played in high school before. And I was like ok... it’s going to end, and that’s it...it’s like the strangest feeling in the world. I’m so sad……”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“It’s a nervous excitement at this point...being in college for four years, having that guidance as to what you’re going to do from year to year is great, but eventually it kind of becomes kind of repetitive in the fact that you wake up, you go to class, you go to work, you go home kind of thing... So I’m very excited to be done with school work, but at the same time....it’s the whole let go, it’s the whole unknown thing. Whereas, I know what my plans are...are they going to happen? Like, I don’t have that guidance anymore. So I’m definitely nervous, but I’m excited to see what I can do after college...”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“You’re done....emotionally it’s like every single game you play is your last game...and as you keep going, you come across your senior day and it’s like you never thought this time would come, or at least you didn’t think it would come this fast, and obviously it’s an emotional thing.....I was a wreck on my senior day, I was so upset.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>“We just finished our season this past weekend, and it’s just a little different because I’m used to having the buildup of next year I can perform, and make up for the prior year, but it’s over so....I think I’m appreciative of the experience, I think I’m going to be going on a new path, I think I’ll probably try to continue the sport in a recreational capacity after I graduate.”</td>
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</table>
“Um…I think I’m a bit nervous when it comes down to that, because I feel so comfortable in this environment….I see that there is a lot of positive faces and people I know, and it’s just a very comfortable environment.  And so from there I’m a little nervous about it because I adapted to this environment.”

“Negatively, I think there is a few opportunities that I might of missed out on because of traveling for volleyball.....so I think, where there’s the positive, there are the negatives, but I think overall it’s helped me more than it’s hurt me....what traveling does for athletes is takes away opportunities you might have going on campus, but you can’t attend at that point....”

Victor

“It’s sad to see organized sports kind of go away because it just been a part of my life for so long, but at the same time it’s still exciting because I know a whole new chapter of my life is about to begin.”

Pierce

“I’m kind of sad, I mean it’s my last time ever playing a sport....um I’m happy about starting the next part of my life, but now I know I’m not going to stop playing lacrosse....like I’ll still play in leagues and stuff like that, but it’s definitely a little upsetting knowing that I’m not going to play a college sport or for a team anymore.”

Theme # 3: Adequate Professional Preparation

As Division III student-athletes across the country transition out of the higher education institution, the next phase of their life becomes important as they mature and deal with the struggle of losing their athletic identity. In addition to the benefits of college sport participation discussed earlier, many employers specifically target student athletes because of their valued characteristics in the workplace. According to Williams (2013), athletes have the drive to practice a task rigorously, relentlessly, and even in the midst of failure until they succeed. Other scholars have echoed the importance of the student-athlete’s resiliency through defeat, in addition to the student-athlete’s ability to embrace and offer constructive criticism (McCann 2012; Rosche, 2013; Soshnick, 2013). Furthermore, New York-based Drum Associates opened the first division of an executive search firm that caters exclusively to current and former college athletes in February of 2013 (Soshnick, 2013). To this end, the empirical evidence indicates that there appears to be a faction of corporate America that highly values athletic experience.
In this emergent theme, participants focused on how being a Division III student-athlete prepared them to handle their transition out of college. They consistently presented feelings of confidence developed through participation in Division III athletics regarding transferrable skills as they moved on to the world of work or continuing their education on the graduate level. This theme has been labeled “Adequate Professional Preparation.” Participants shared responses included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amber</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’ve learned how to manage my time really well. I know that the experience was well worth it, given that I had to balance doing my school work, and making it in time for practice, and being there early, making sure I had everything.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m a little nervous. Especially since, having your bachelor’s degree nowadays there’s a lot more competition, for jobs...so it’s not as valued. But that’s why I’ve thought about going for my MBA and I’ve also considered doing internship programs to help get some experience before I actually go out in what field I pursue...I think one of my strongest components that I have is that I’m disciplined. And a lot of that is through sports because I learned to manage my time through that...I also think that how I grew up will help me with the next phase of my life.</td>
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<td>“I’ve gotten performance awards, and I’ve gotten academic achievements... so I’ve been really successful in that sense... and I definitely think that will carry over into when I actually do get a job... I’ll be prompt when I show up on time....I’m a perfectionist, so I want to do things well even though it will take me longer....everything will be done organized.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think that it transitioned positively for me, especially because the fact that I’m always on some sort of schedule....whether I’m going to practice or games, I always have to make sure that I’m on time and that I have everything with me. And I feel like, once I do find my career, that is going to be really important because employers... its very crucial for them to have reliable people who show up to work on time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It helps me become very determined and very focused. It helped me build leadership skills as well. If we’re really working hard towards a certain game...if it determines whether or not we make it in the NEAC’s final four or not, we really become focused and because of that we drive ourselves more... we push ourselves more...so a lot of the times, when there were career fairs, no matter far away I was from graduation, I always made sure to attend those.....And by doing so, I got more of an idea of what I liked and what I didn’t like about certain companies...And if I would do well at other companies versus ones that I wasn’t really interested in.....”</td>
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</table>
“I also spoke with my advisor, and I took certain electives where I thought that I would be interested in possibly to choose a career path...I just think that the skills that I've learned through being a student-athlete has really helped me and I feel like those are going to continue throughout life, not just for a career, but for friendships, relationships.”

Valarie

“I feel confident. I know that I have certain skills that can get me to places where I need to be to get the job that I want. So I’m not really worried about it....I have taken a couple of civil service exams to try to see if I can get a fallback plan...you know what I mean....so that if I don’t find something I really really, really want to do.....maybe this is second best.”

“It definitely taught me a lot of useful skills like multi-tasking, time management, how to work well with others... leadership skills, I’ve been captain for two or three years so, it’s helped a lot actually....”

Claire

“I think I’ll be ok. I’m pretty confident in that aspect. I was very independent growing up and I’m very independent here. I’m very organized, so I think that I’ll definitely be able to handle everything, and it’s going to go well but, it’s just going to be interesting to say the least. Being on my own for the first time......”

“Being a student-athlete in college is an experience kind of like no other because you get to learn so much from that...its more than just playing your sport, because it helps you a lot with time management, it helps you a lot to learn to work as a team, and to become a leader. Um...so I think those skills are ones that I can take with me into the future, definitely.....”

“I was selected as a captain of the women’s volleyball team for the last two years....so I think my natural leadership skills kind of blossomed in these four years....my Community & Behavioral Health professor dubbed me as the ambitious one, given that fact that I want to do two majors and a minor....she’s very, very proud of the fact that I want to move and take time off before grad school because it’s not a typical thing to do. She’s been guiding me a lot with how you can take your degree and move it to the world, like before grad school, and this is what you can do in grad school, and help me figure kind of the big picture.”

“Career services has been amazing, helping me clean up my resume. I’m going to be going there soon to do my cover letter. Just to make sure I sound intelligent when I do it”.

“As a whole, I think Division III prepares you a lot more than the other divisions. In D3 you are a student-athlete.....they put a lot of stuff in the student aspect of it... you’re coming to this level to play because you love the sport you do....Whereas Division I and Division II, you are going to school on some sort of scholarship, and in that aspect your kind of more of an athlete-student, in the fact that it’s your sport first and you are an athlete and then we’ll throw in academic later on. So I think Division III really prepares you, because you’re not going to
try to be professional after this, you’re doing it because you love it....and that the coaches and the administration here really take into account your academics, and they want you to succeed...not only on the court, but also in the classroom.”

“My time here has been an extremely important thing to me because if you have to come late to practice or if you miss practice because you have to do work, that’s ok........So I think D3 in that aspect is so much better for you than the other ones because of the emphasis it places on your future coming in.....”

**Tyler**

“I think I’m pretty confident going into it....I’m a good people person and I think I work hard, and I have a good work ethic, so I think having a sense of positivity, being motivated, and I having a sense of humbleness will really help me out in the next phase.....”

“I think athletics helped me in a positive way...it taught me to work in a team capacity, that when you work with others it’s not solely you.... I mean there’s an importance for you to get your individual task done, but at the same point, to work in a team is something that you’re going to be exposed to in the work environment.....”

“Career Services helped me out a lot.... offered a lot of support and guidance, and it just gave the resources in helping further my professional self... overall just preparing myself and finding a job, utilizing the career fair, utilizing indeed.com. Especially over spring break where I utilized indeed.com and applied to a lot of places, got a lot of interviews, and from there things just kind of fell into place, so then I had a better understanding of what I wanted to look for in jobs, and then from there I had several opportunities offered to me.....so.....”

“I think being an athlete, athlete helps out students. It gives them something else to work with and if a student can stay organized, they can understand what it’s like to have more going on, but it also can push them better overall.....”

**Victor**

“I’m confident that I’ll be able to handle whatever is thrown in front of me...uh....whether it be choosing between potential job offers and actually committing myself and doing well at that job. I feel that it helped me a lot. Uh... because I took a role with our baseball team here, where I had to help the guys out a lot and a lot of responsibilities got put on to me, so I can be able to handle working with the baseball team and still handle my studies, so it kind of helped me broaden my skill set. Uh...The biggest one that I used was the college fair to help me get my foot in the door for finding...uh....potential careers....I actually have a couple of interviews lined up now because of the career fair.”

**Pierce**

“I feel I got confidence in myself to make the best decision for myself and put me in the best position to be successful. I mean I am nervous about leaving here and like having to start my own life and everything like that, but I do feel like I have the confidence and the ability to choose the best thing I can”.
“I think it had a very big impact and a positive impact, because being captain this year I have to show a lot of leadership, but I also have to be a friend to maybe some people that I don’t agree with….maybe coach or your slash boss….if I don’t agree with some of their decisions, but I have to agree to keep my mouth shut….kind of use the compromise… and do stuff like that....”

“First of all, the career fair was very helpful, there was a lot of companies there... I got to talk to and show my resume to and get my name out there, set up interviews. Also my coach, I have a new coach this year, so he’s helped me with who he knows. And then my previous coach the past three years, he also helped me a lot, because he knows a lot of people up here.”

“Well websites like LinkedIn, Indeed, mostly online stuff, and my home newspaper has a lot of job openings. So, I can see the home newspaper also……. I think any division you play, any sport you play, it’s very helpful to learn leadership, and very helpful with being a team player because you need that in the real world.”

**Theme # 4: Relationship Engagement**

As the participants for this study discussed strategies that were utilized to assist with their transition out of college as a Division III student-athlete, the value of their relationships with their family, friends, and institutional personnel became a common thread in the fabric of their shared experience. As these young men and women began to take steps in the next chapter of their adult life, their reliance on the valued opinion and guidance of others was imperative to their level of comfort and confidence as they move to post-collegiate life. The understanding of the worth of these relationships to Division III student-athletes became clear based on researcher observation in this study. As explained by Gardner (1999) in addressing the need to allow opportunities for seniors to reflect, the most basic need of seniors is for the opportunities for reflection on the meaning of the college experience, including integration, closure, and holistic support.
In the “Relationship Engagement” emergent theme, participants focused on internal (institutional) and external (non-institutional) relationships that were crucial to their transition out of college as a Division III student-athlete. Statements shared included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Amber</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Some professors would be willing to give me additional work for classes if I wasn’t able to attend… I have really supportive parents, and they’ve motivated me to do well in school… Definitely my parents, helping me with my financial aid, showing me my strengths and my weaknesses, and what I would be good at once I leave college. So they’ve also been helpful, making sure that I walk at graduation, and I participate in everything I can to help me further in life when I do apply for jobs…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“So I made sure that when I spoke with my advisor to make sure that I graduate on time….emailed back and forth with my advisor a lot, and I kept checking degree works every week…”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“So about half way through my senior year, I thought about applying for my MBA and I went back and forth for the longest time because I want sure whether or not it was worth it because I still don’t know exactly what it is that I wanted to do. Some companies require certain certificates or they’ll pay for you to get your degree and that was just something I wasn’t sure of. But I realized, after speaking with the Director of Graduate Admissions, she really help me understand the benefits of getting your masters now versus if were to go work for company and get your masters….. or if you were to wait another ten years….it really helped me decide that getting my masters now was the best resource for me.”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Valarie</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>“For the most part professors take it relatively well. They are supportive…. I’ve had a lot of people actually…my family definitely is a huge support system….my coach as well….she talked to me about like potential job opportunities that I could like look into….and also our strength and conditioning trainer, he’s great…he actually got me my jobs during while I was in school. He help me get a job and he said that he would be willing to be reference for me at any future jobs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I also been to career services to tweak my resume a little bit…I’ve been kind of talking to people…..see what they think would be a good fit for me….Maybe I don’t see it myself……”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I met with my advisor, plan out classes for fall semester, and for spring semester when I went to meet with my advisor, we made sure that I had all the credits that I needed all the classes I needed, nothing was like out of order, so everything went well for that…for the scheduling…and then I had decided to actually not attend graduation…..so I did not purchase a cap and gown, but I will be borrowing one”</td>
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so that I can take a picture... because I’m going to playoffs instead....so I’ll be in Pennsylvania during graduation.”

**Claire**

“My entire family really has, like my mom, dad, bro.., I have two brothers....I told them last summer that post-graduation I wanted to move half way across the country to Austin, Texas.  Which is kind of not like a typical thing you do when you graduate...and they were so supportive of it right away.  They didn’t try to deter me at all.  So in that aspect they were very helpful, and helped me figure out all those logistics reasons, how I’m going to get my mindset straight, because obviously it’s a very nerve-wracking thing. So like the transition out of college, they were definitely able to help me figure out that aspect of my life. Help me feel confident in that aspect.”

“My best friend, was very pissed off when I told her I wanted to move far away, to say the least.  We’ve been roommates for the past three years, we lived in the same suite freshman year, and she is on the volleyball team with me so we’ve been with each other every single day for the past four years. Like we don’t get sick of each other kind of thing either...So she wasn’t too thrilled when I told her...but she also has been very helpful because ....she knows this is what I want to do.  And that she is going to help me get to that point.  Where like I start having doubts, she’s like, “no you can do it”. And that kind of gives me the boost that I need...”

“The whole athletics department as a unit too, especially the sport information director has been so great in the fact that they understand when you are a senior, like that is a very tough year as a student-athlete because you’re done, but they’ve also been very helpful in knowing that you want to move on and they want to know what you’re doing with your life, and they want to see you succeed, and all that kind of stuff.”

“It was a lot of meeting with different advisors, in order to make sure, like, I can do all this...um.....one of my advisors actually changed the time of a class to make sure I was able to take it, so they changed the schedule around a little bit.....um.....this year I definitely made sure I had all my credits in place...because that’s a major thing.... You don’t want to get to the end of your spring semester and its like, “wait you have three credits left”......that would be awful......”

**Tyler**

“My mom’s been a huge support system and guiding light when it came to transitioning out of college and finding a job. She has a couple of friends that work at colleges she’s able to help me understand what are good methods for actively pursuing a job.....she talked to a lot of people and she has a lot of knowledge of different opportunities...In addition to that, I think Career Services was a very good resource... the office helped me out throughout the years, in preparing myself through different workshops, and understanding of different tools that I could use in trying to find jobs.”

“My advisor for student government, was a good support system...I think what I really needed was just kind of support, so I think she offered...she was always positive in helping me understand my potential...”
“So there’s a certain part when every college student is concerned they’re not going to graduate, so I needed to reach out to the bursar/registrar, to find out that I was cleared to graduate...”

Victor

“My parents played a huge role in that...they’re very supportive...especially, now that I am looking for jobs, whenever I ask them for advice with my potential job offer, they’re always there to help me transition out of college.”

“My advisor helped me to make sure that I’ve taken all of the classes that I needed... and going with the registrar’s office to make sure, just to double check everything.”

“My parents being the biggest role, and then as of late with having to miss practice here and there for interviews or such for the career fair, my coach was very supportive in helping me through all that as well.”

“The first step was in the fall and I had to make my spring schedule, was to meet with my advisor and make sure that there wasn’t any classes that I wasn’t aware of that I needed...just to make sure that I would graduate, and then going through the registrar office just to make sure that nothing got overlooked...and then other than that I was just making sure I kept my studies up, kind of balancing everything that was on my plate, whether it be baseball or school work and that’s it.....”

Pierce

“First of all, my parents have been very big in transitioning out of college. They always send me jobs, job interviews, or job applications and stuff like that....and helping me with any questions I have.”

“My uncle has been very helpful too, he’s a successful businessman and he keeps helping me out with his friends and who he knows, so he helps me a lot...”

“First of all I made sure my credits were all in set with my advisor, I made sure that I was ready, able to graduate, had all my emphasis done, had all my required credits done, and made sure that I was on track to graduate in the four years...that was my first step...and my next step was just making sure that I passed all my tests, like we had to pass an AutoCAD test to make sure that we’re qualified to go into the work field, so I made sure I passed that, and now I’m just making sure that I pass everything, just completed my capstone project, making sure I’m getting everything paid for cap and gown.....”

Summary

As phenomenology is focused on understanding the voices of participants, the participants in this study were nominated because they “have lived the experiences being investigated, and were willing to share their thoughts about the experiences as well as articulate
their conscious experiences” (Donalek, 2004, p. 6). Using this approach assumes that all selected participants have a unique experience of the phenomenon (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010). To this end, participants in this study were all designated as a Division III student-athlete transitioning out of college, but were asked to share their conscious experiences within the frame of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. Having a well-defined theoretical framework provided an opportunity for greater broadcasting of information and a stronger lens in which to explore the phenomena overall.

In alignment with phenomenological analysis, the purpose of this research study was to better understand the lived experience of each of the participants and to uncover deeper meaning about his or her experience transitioning out of college as a Division III student-athlete. The study itself was built on the foundation of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory and the interview questions were based on this framework. All the interview questions were semi-structured, and responses of the research participants helped shape other questions to fully grasp the essence of the experience. Moustakas (1994, p.13) states that the “empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience.”

The interview transcripts were thoroughly reviewed and analyzed, from which a rich structural and contextual understanding was created. Furthermore, all data were secured and accessed only by the researcher. Marshall and Rossman (1998) defined data analysis as “the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p. 112). Categories and themes emerged through constant comparative data analysis. Based on the themes that emerged, the research participants were united in several areas as it pertained to their transition out of the higher education environment as a Division III student-athlete. Taking two
months in total, Table 4 provides a synopsis of the data collection and analysis practical procedures.

**Table 4: Synopsis of the Data Collection and Analysis Practical Procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1: Outreach</th>
<th>Reach out to campus partners regarding nominations (Athletic Department), verification of enrollment status (Office of the Registrar), and support (Health &amp; Wellness).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 2-3: Interview and Transcription</td>
<td>Facilitate outreach to nominees; conduct interviews with volunteer participants, making sure to review informed consent and confidentiality; transcribe data, documenting recorded information verbatim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 4-5: Review and Verification</td>
<td>Thoroughly review transcripts independently; review information with participants for final approval (member checking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 6: Horizontalization</td>
<td>Analyze transcripts treating each statement as significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7: Emergent Themes</td>
<td>Highlight significant statements, compare and contrast statements made by all participants to find similarities; begin the process of looking for emergent themes that appear in the data base on the information provided by the research participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8: Textual-Structural Descriptions</td>
<td>Document the emergent themes discovered and support them with verbatim examples from the research participants.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Overall, according to Plano-Clark and Creswell (2010), there are four key characteristics of phenomenological research: (a) when the researcher’s purpose is to determine the essence of a single phenomenon; (b) when the researcher sets aside individual experiences (epoche) regarding the phenomenon and collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon; (c) when the researchers analyzes the data for significant statements and meaning regarding the phenomenon; and (d) when the researcher reports themes, descriptions, and the essence of the phenomenon (p. 239). All four of these key characteristics were applicable to this research endeavor. In this chapter, information has been presented regarding the experiences shared by
Division III student-athletes transitioning out of college at a northeastern university within a state system. It showcased the data collection and analysis process, followed by the presentation of four emergent themes, and textual-structural descriptions.

As mentioned, Moustakas (1994), essence is the integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a final statement regarding the experience of the phenomenon. Ultimately, the goal of a phenomenology is for the reader to walk away with the feeling that he or she has a better understanding of what it is like to experience the phenomenon.

In conclusion, the process of learning about the shared experience of the participants for this study allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding about the experience of the Division III student-athlete transition out of college. Phenomenology was the appropriate selected qualitative method for this research because of the ability to interview participants, searching for specific and in-depth information, which allowed the researcher to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of those who were closest to the phenomenon. The data presented was candid, as were the emotions and experiences shared by the research participants who volunteered for the study. Although each participant is a unique individual with his or her own story to tell, themes emerged expressing a shared experience. The combination of textural and structural descriptions was conducted in order to discover the essence of the participant’s experience. As previously mentioned, this primarily focuses on the common experiences of the participants and informs the readers of “what” the participant experienced with the phenomenon and “how” they experienced it (Creswell, 2013). In all, the process of comprehending the experience of each participant as well as the overall essence of the experience provided an opportunity for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the world of the Division III student-athletes’ transition out of the higher education environment.
Chapter 5: Research Findings and Discussion

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate the lived experiences of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of college. The goal of this research was to understand the experience of Division III student-athletes attending a mid-size, four-year public institution within a state university system in the northeastern region of the United States through the lens of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. This chapter presents a brief review of the theoretical framework, synopsis of the findings, connections to existing literature, future policy and practice implications, and future research recommendations.

Brief Review of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory

In order to gain a better understanding of Division III student-athletes’ transition out of the higher education environment, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (1981) was selected as the theoretical base to guide this research study. Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) stated the transition model allows practitioners to understand a student’s needs through a structured approach to predicting, measuring, and modifying reactions to change. As a pioneer in the transition theory field, Schlossberg’s theory introduced the idea of situation, self, support, and strategy. She also introduced the moving in, moving through, and moving out model of the higher education student experience (Schlossberg, 1989). As this study focused on the experience of Division III student-athletes as they transition out of the college environment, the most useful components of the theory for this study included the 4S system as well as the “moving out” stage of the transition process.
Presentation of Findings

As emergent themes arise as a result of observation of reported information, findings manifest from the collective experience of participants in a phenomenological study (Perry, 2017). Upon review of the shared experience reported by individuals in this study, the following findings have been determined about the phenomenon of Division III student-athletes’ transition out of college:

Finding # 1: Significance of Balance

As faculty members tend to be the gatekeeper to student-athlete academic success, findings of this study indicate that as Division III student-athletes put in effort to balance their senior year transition out of college, understanding of their level of commitment by faculty is crucial to their success. Those who participate in sports spend a great deal of time focusing on and developing physical skills (Parham, 1993). Furthermore, for those without a sense of belonging, the college experience often becomes similar to a stop over, like “[stopping at the mall] to get what they need on their way to somewhere else” (Garland, 2006, p. 6).

Consistently reported through the shared voices of the participants in this study, it needs to be understood that intercollegiate athletics is not on the periphery of the institution, but contributes to overall institutional spirit. In addition to their role as a Division III athlete, these young men and women must be conceptualized as students first. Tinto (1975) explains that “the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion” (p. 96).

Faculty/student interaction is vital to student success (Tinto, 2005).

For student-athletes that do approach faculty members, it is the perception about the character and worth of the interaction that dictates whether or not they will try again (Tinto,
Without robust faculty participation, there exists a lack of commitment to the students, and they fail to get the full institutional experience or the most out of their education. “Students are more likely to succeed in settings that are committed to their success, provide support and feedback, and actively involve them, with other students and faculty in learning” (Tinto, 2005, p. 5). To this end, in addition to the balance of being a Division III student-athlete itself, a clear understanding of this balance by faculty is important and would be most appreciated by Division III student-athletes. This finding ties back to the emergent theme “Personal Challenge.”

**Finding # 2: Grief Surrounding Institutional Exiting/Athletic Identity**

Shulman and Bowen found evidence to suggest that an “athletic” culture does in fact exist (2001). As they have found differences in athletes and others students entering college, this speaks to the overall experience of the Division III student-athlete. Over their duration at the institution, the participant’s commonality with being a student-athlete, engaging in the world of sports tradition, and experiencing both the glee of success and the pain of failure during athletic competition, contributed to their sense of identification. All the participants noted how much they will miss the collective environment from participation in athletics, as well as the sadness surrounding the completion of their undergraduate experience.

Reinforcing the voices of the Division III student-athlete participants, in role exiting, it is important to look at what is left over from the previous role of athlete. Research literature has revealed that athletes found difficulty transitioning away from being a competitive college athlete, beginning with athletic identity as one of the main reasons athletes struggle to transition out of sport (Darhota & Eitzen, 1998). The reason retirement for athletes has been studied in this fashion is because researchers have likened the experience of the ending of their career as a type
of death (Blinde & Greendorf, 1985; Drahota & Eitzen, 1998). Overall, being a Division III student-athlete involves a communal experience in addition to a solo experience. Sadness surrounding the loss of the team experience ringed true for the research participants, and as a significant factor that has played a role in their transition out of college. This finding ties back to the theme “A Sense of Loss.”

**Finding # 3: Successful Employment Groundwork**

Given the competitive spirit that comes with being a Division III student-athlete, their sport of choice is constantly reinforcing the need for adequate preparation. To this end, as competence refers to how people feel about themselves with respect to certain domains of their life (Weiss & Bressan, 1985), the results of this study indicate that participants share a common sense of confidence surrounding professional preparation as they consider their experience as a student-athlete and their transition out of college. As found, Chickering and Reisser (2003) state that students must “develop confidence, manage emotion, move through autonomy towards interdependence, develop mature interpersonal relationships, establish identity, develop purpose, and develop integrity” (pp. 45-50). Based on the analysis of the research data, being a Division III student-athlete has positively contributed to professional preparation for a smoother transition to the world of work. This finding has mainly been reported by participants as the ability to work in teams, practicing discipline, bringing a level of excellence to one’s performance, punctuality, and respect for differences of opinion. As Brooks-Terry (1988) states that students have “a commitment to graduation, a clear vision for a future career, and high self-efficacy for reaching goals,” the finding of this study indicate that student-athletes are aligned with such behaviors. This finding ties back to the theme “Adequate Professional Preparation.”
**Finding # 4: Communal Support**

As senior year can be a time of mixed feelings, Division III student-athletes can be dealing with a range of emotions from happy to sad, excited to anxious, and thrilled to fear. In order to assist with these feelings as they transition out of college, having strong support mechanisms included in their exit strategy has been a mainstay for the participants of this study. Their communal support came from both family as well as institutional stakeholders, who were cheerleaders and guidance counselors as these young men and women entered the next phase of their lives. As found, “Strong social networks such as family or friends who are familiar with higher education can provide assistance in identifying potential support within a college” (Burns, 2010, p. 37). Furthermore, “the more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely they are to persist and graduate” (Tinto, 2005, p. 3). As the Division III student-athlete participants built their support systems, this contributed to an increase in their confidence, provided a sense of wellbeing, and expanded their learning and growth. Overall, students need high levels of social capital to understand that faculty and staff can serve as advisors and how to approach them for help” (Burns, 2010, p. 37). This finding ties back to the theme “Relationship Engagement.”

**Essence: Synopsis of Findings**

As the “essence” of the experience representing the cumulating aspects of a phenomenological study is typically signified by a long paragraph that tells the reader “what” and “how” the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 194), the following information is a summary of the results for this study. As it pertains to the transitioning out of college for Division III student-athletes, four themes emerged from the data relevant to a shared experience of how each individual conceptualized the situation, assessed himself/herself, utilized
supports, and incorporated strategies to handle the transition. These themes include “Personal Challenge,” “A Sense of Loss,” “Adequate Professional Preparation,” and “Relationship Engagement.”

First, all of the Division III student-athlete participants expressed a “Significance of Balance” regarding their participation in intercollegiate athletics and their senior year responsibilities. Second, it was consistently presented that “Grief Surrounding Institutional Exiting and a strong Athletic Identity” was experienced by all participants surrounding their exit from Division III athletics and the institution overall. Third, all participants reported that participation in athletics built their sense of confidence and teamwork, as they transitioned to their next phase of life, whether it be employment or graduate school endeavors. This finding has been labeled “Successful Employment Groundwork.” Finally, the participants expressed strong appreciation for their support system as they transitioned out of the institution. Under the finding “Communal Support,” this included institutional resources such as athletic directors, coaches, professors, advisors, the Director of Graduate Admissions, the Director of Career Services, and personnel form the Office of the Registrar. Sources of support also included non-institutional resources, such as family and friends.

**Connection to the Existing Literature**

Scholars often inquired about the extent to which intercollegiate athletics align with the mission of higher education (Enlinson, 2013; McCormick & McCormick, 2006; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Sperber, 1990, 2000; Zimbalist, 1999). Overall the findings for this study support the current literature pertaining to student-athletes and their experience in the higher education setting. First, though most of the literature on intercollegiate athletics pertains to Division I commercialized revenue generating sports programs (Robst & Keil, 2000), this study
indicates that Division III student-athletes have similar concerns such as the “Personal Challenge” of balancing their time in the higher education environment (Parham, 1993), regardless of participation at a lower level of athletic competition.

Additionally, athletic identity and “A Sense of Loss” for Division III student-athletes is a significant factor pertaining to their transition out of college. As found in the research, upon the completion of participation in college sports, the majority of intercollegiate athletes will transition to life outside of sports (Brown, 2003). As athletic retirement approaches, some athletes are overcome with a sense of “uncertainty about a future without sports” (Wilson, 2007, p. 163). Dealing with retirement from sports, some athletes might experience emotional and psychological difficulty (Bailie, 1993; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994) while others may experience a sense of relief and freedom (Coakley, 1983). According to Coakley (2009), a main challenge facing athletes transitioning out of intercollegiate athletics is the task of reconstructing their identities in terms of something other than sports.

Third, to reinforce “Adequate Professional Preparation,” the literature reports the value of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of employers who target athletes. Many companies specifically target former student-athletes when hiring employees. Employers’ perceived value of athletic participation was significantly impacted by the athletic success and leadership experience of the student-athlete (Chalfin, Weight, Osborne, & Johnson, 2015). Furthermore, James Duderstadt, former University of Michigan president, states that “college sports provided an opportunity for teaching people about character, motivation, endurance, loyalty, and the attainment of one’s personal best – all great qualities of great value in citizens” (Duderstadt, 2000, p. 70). Such characteristics may also increase student-athlete marketability to potential employers.
Finally, in support of “Relationship Engagement,” the literature finds that approaching graduation may cause unease or stress for seniors. As previously mentioned, college seniors may legally be considered adults, but in regard to behavior and psychological development, they are not (Yazedjian, Kielaszek, & Toews, 2010). Furthermore, Kreig (2012) indicates that undergraduate seniors have additional layers of concerns and perceptions. In particular, seniors’ stress levels are uniquely different from first-year students given transition demands of graduation and employment. Given the aforementioned, adequate support for senior student-athletes becomes even more imperative given their transition out the college environment coupled with the completion of their athletic career.

In addition to the emergent themes, the findings of this study are also supported by the current transition research literature. As indicated by Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) research on the college student population, “moving out” in the transition process would apply to situations such as phasing out, exiting, role termination, disengagement, leaving a relationship, or ending a routine. As this research investigated Division III student-athletes’ transition out of the institution, the “moving out” stage of the transition process was deemed most appropriate. Furthermore, as reported earlier, the 4S’s for coping include situation, self, support and strategy. The situation triggers the transition, self is one’s perception of his or her ability to handle the transition, support are individuals who can assist with dealing with the transition, and strategy is action taken by an individual in response to the transition (Schlossberg, 1981).

First, when it comes to the situation explored in this study, Division III student-athletes experience exiting the institution, the findings indicated that the “Significance of Balance” regarding responsibility as a student-athlete in the senior year become more crucial. Additionally, “Grief Surrounding InstitutionalExiting/Athletic Identity” also play a significant
role in the Division III student-athlete experience as they transition out of the institution. Overall, both findings apply to the Division III student-athlete experience surrounding the situation. To this end, given the complex nature of their experience, in order to best understand and support the needs of student-athletes, comprehensive student development (Storch & Ohlson, 2009) and a culturally responsive approach (Person, Benson-Quaziena, & Rogers, 2001) is highly recommended. Given the challenges faced by this population in their senior year, having a catered response will improve institutional services as well as meet the needs of this cohort.

Next, “Successful Employment Groundwork” has been found as a positive shared experience of intercollegiate athletic participation. This pertains to the confident student-athlete perception of his or her ability to handle the transition out of college, which applies to the “self” category of the 4S’s for coping. As Robst & Keil (2000) indicate that support and advocacy for lower divisions is imperative, proper assistance for Division III student-athletes is pivotal to their success. The finding of this study indicate that the residual effect of athletic participation includes adequate preparation for the world of work. In addition to the shared experience of the participants in this study, this is also reinforced in literature regarding employers who specifically target student-athletes for recruitment purposes (Chalfin, Weight, Osborne, & Johnson, 2015).

Finally, the “Communal Support” finding is most applicable to support mechanisms and strategies utilized by student-athletes. As Division III student-athletes transition out of college, they turn to internal and external stakeholders to assist with this transition. These resources have a significant influence as these athletes begin to take action to exit the institution and explore the next phase of their life. As found, postsecondary institutions must be aware of and understand
the coping strategies used and the obstacles faced by particular student groups (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998), therefore it is imperative to look into transition strategies beyond higher education competitive sports, as most individuals will not become professional athletes at the Division III level.

Overall, the findings of this study are intended to have important implications for higher education personnel who serve Division III student-athletes and who are concerned with creating an environment that encourages positive student growth and development. As this study aimed to gain better awareness and understanding of the Division III student-athlete experience, this will contribute to efforts for improving service to this population. The NCAA has attempted to require member institutions to more intentionally prepare student-athletes for life after sport via life skills programs (Navarro, 2014). As this study sheds light on the phenomenon of Division III student-athletes transition out of the college environment, it is important that policymakers and practitioners promote specific practices to serve those who participate in sports at this level. Overall, this study calls for colleges and universities to be sincerely responsive to the needs of Division III student-athletes, as opposed to adopting a universal standard of service based on convenience and ease of practice.

**Implications for Future Policy and Practice**

For many students, the college experience provides a venue for both personal and professional identity formation to occur (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002). Students are often exposed to new experiences and cultures that challenge them to grow as individuals. Student-Affairs offices incorporate the services available to college students that are not covered by the academic component of the college/university environment.
To this end, the caliber of services provided to Division III student-athletes by higher-education professionals can contribute to a positive collegiate experience that prepare them for future pursuits. In contrast, negative experiences can impact the students’ overall well-being by way of overt negative interactions or neglect of their academic achievement for athletic superiority (Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984; Coakley, 1998; Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003; Gallagher, 2005; Hinkle, 1994; Murray, 1997; Parham, 1993; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981). Given all the challenges that are special to this target population, higher education institutions’ efforts to address these issues should be of utmost importance, as a positive experience can contribute to a well-balanced student as well as excellent alumni and community relations via the creation of successful graduates.

As a strong athletic identity can make exiting from the student-athlete experience life altering (Lee & Gramotnev, 2007; Weiss, Freund, & Wiesse, 2012), proper support is pivotal. Given the needs of Division III student-athletes, it is crucial for campus level athletics administrators to create programs that are uniquely tailored to this population. When designing programs for student-athletes, attention should be allocated to the nuances of the overall college experience, especially the effort for these individuals to balance scholastic training with athletic involvement (Parham, 1993). Athletics practitioners should seek to participate in intentional professional development activities along with campus-wide student affairs professionals and support staff to best serve student-athletes as they transition from the college environment.

**Cultural Competency**

To be engrossed in intercollegiate athletics is to be a part of a culture of teamwork, competitiveness, and achievement. This holds true for Division I, Division II, and Division III. Regardless of race, age, ethnicity, orientation, political affiliation, or socioeconomic status, all
student-athletes have a shared goal of high performance and winning at sports. Understanding
this shared goal as well as individual differences, makes serving the student-athlete population
unique for student affairs practitioners. Given the aforementioned, Person, Benson-Quaziena,
and Rogers (2001) recommend a culturally responsive approach for working with student-
athletes. A culturally responsive approach advocates a holistic perspective in serving students.
Five elements of cultural competence are particularly useful in addressing the special needs of
student-athletes and can also serve as a framework for effective delivery of student services in
general.

The five elements of cultural competence include the following: 1) acknowledging
cultural differences and becoming aware of how these differences affect helping; 2) fully
appreciating cultural differences; 3) understanding the dynamics of differences; 4) understanding
the meaning of behavior in a cultural context; and 5) knowing where or how to obtain specific
cultural information. As student affairs practitioners, it is recommended that one become
culturally responsive and move toward the development of a genuinely sensitive approach to
working with student-athletes. The five elements outlined serve as a foundation for learning and
using specific models to assist in holistically serving students (Person, Benson-Quaziena, &
Rogers, 2001). This concept is further illustrated in the Wheel of Cultural Competency, Figure
1, found below.
Person, Benson-Quazierna and Rogers recommend a **Culturally Responsive Approach** to working with student athletes. A culturally responsive approach advocates a holistic perspective in serving students. It includes knowledge of cultural dynamics and knowledge of how ethnicity, race and power influence human functioning.

The Wheel of Cultural Competence displays the five elements of cultural competence that are particularly useful in addressing the special needs of student athletes of color and can also serve as a framework for effective delivery of student services in general.

**The five elements of cultural competence include:**

1. Acknowledging cultural differences and becoming aware of how these differences affect helping;
2. Fully appreciating cultural differences;
3. Understanding the dynamics of differences;
4. Understanding the meaning of behavior in a cultural context;
5. Knowing where or how to obtain specific cultural information.

Faculty and student affairs practitioners should become culturally responsive and move toward the development of a culturally responsive approach to better serve student athletes. The five elements outlined serve as a foundation for learning and using specific models to assist in holistically serving students (Person, Benson-Quazierna, & Rogers, 2001).

According to Lerra (2014), transformation should primarily focus on developing people through empowering them and giving them responsibilities. When emotions are acknowledged and treated with respect, people became more engaged with the change (Smollan & Sayers, 2009). By addressing cultural competency, this impacts the institution as a whole as learning can take place between faculty and staff with students. Starting with senior leadership, cultural competency needs to be embraced institutionally, not just departmentally. In regards to institution-wide practices surrounding cultural competency, this opens the door to awareness about the Division III student-athlete experience as well as provides an opportunity for stakeholders to become educate about other student groups. Through engagement in open and healthy dialog, individuals can learn and contribute to an atmosphere of collegiality and goodwill.

As organizational culture is understood as a stable system of beliefs and assumptions that exist and persist overtime within an agency (Leland, n. d.), support of cultural competency can happen through concrete steps higher education institutions can incorporate to better serve the student body within academic affairs as well as student affairs. For example, academic affairs and student affairs can collaborate to offer academic advising, an early warning grading system, and tutoring services during non-traditional office hours. Residential life can offer community building workshops to encourage the inter-mingling of student-athletes with non-athletes or other diverse groups. Career Services can offer evening programs to discuss transferrable skills from athletics to the future employment. Furthermore, there can also be support through the registrar’s office, financial aid, the library, and dining services, offering extended hours as student-athletes and other groups have schedules outside of normal business operations. As found, in the context of change, commitment goes beyond just positive attitudes toward the
change to include the intention to support it as well as a willingness to work on behalf of its successful implementation (Herord, Fedor, Caldwell, and Liu, 2008).

Finally, through collaboration with other student groups and outreach to student government, this provides a wonderful opportunity to positively impact campus change. Such practice teaches empathy/how to be other-oriented, soft skills through effective communication, perspective of various student identities, and preparation for global citizenship through working with diverse groups. As found, McIntosh related the idea of the global citizen to “habits of mind, heart, body, and soul that have to do with working for and preserving a network of relationships and connections across lines of difference and distinctness, while keeping and deepening a sense of one’s own identity and integrity” (2005, p. 23). In a world that is increasingly team-based and no single person can hold all the relevant knowledge to make the right decisions, there is a growing belief that the competitive advantage will increasingly depend on the ability to integrate the widely dispersed knowledge and skills of all (van Ameijde, Nelson, Billsberry, & van Meurs 2009). As Schlossberg’s Transition Theory speaks to the student-athlete population as this cohort will be leaving in pursuit of future endeavors, culturally competent institutional practices support both immediate and long-term development.

**Non-Athletic Exposure**

Another way to address serving the Division III student-athlete population is to promote engagement through non-athletic exposure in other areas of the collegiate experience. For example, Valentine and Taub (1999) suggested practical interventions, such as encouraging students to develop friendships or study partnerships with classmates, choosing a roommate who is not a university student-athlete, or participating in Greek life. Given the significant saturation of time engaged in athletics, spending time in activities and around others not affiliated with
sports will contribute to a well-rounded college experience. As the mission of Division III athletes focuses on full student development (NCAA, 2017), such exposure supports the NCAA’s stance for individuals participating in sports at this level.

**Faculty Relations**

Regarding interactions with faculty specifically, there needs to be institution-wide policies that are relevant to student athletic participation. During the height of the athletic season, student-athletes must regularly be absent from courses to adhere to their travel schedule for away games (Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003). Due to such an absence, the athlete is required to make up missed assignments and tests. Regardless of this fact, some institutions fail to have policies to protect these students from being penalized by professors even though their participation as a student-athlete dictates the absence.

Given the amount of stress placed on student-athletes, having student affairs professionals develop a better comprehension of issues specified to this population can lead to them more successfully assisting these individuals given the numerous challenges that may interfere with their collegiate experience. As noted by Fletcher, Benshoff, and Richburg (2003), athletes must function within a multilevel system that includes NCAA rules and regulations, university policies, athletic department standards, and team dynamics.

In all, given the vast amount of pressing issues that may engulf many Division III student-athletes, college and university student affairs offices need to establish an environment of support, collaboration, and guidance. This ideal relationship should include an open-door policy that embraces student development and nurturance. With the pressure to perform in sports and academics, it is important to reiterate that most student-athletes will have a career in a field other than athletics. As the research shows, student-athletes have to make sure that they
balance their dual roles (Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003). To this end, making sure that student-athletes are well rounded is an essential task for student-affairs offices today.

**Comprehensive Student Development**

Given the over identification with his or her athletic role, exiting the college environment can open the door to several issues for Division III student-athletes, including anxiety, feelings of loss, and depression (Danish & Hale, 1981; Ferrante, Etzel & Lantz, 1996). Many student-athletes come to perceive their entire self-worth as related to their athletic ability. To this end, it is crucial for student affairs practitioners to meet with student-athletes and introduce them to others activities and areas of expertise outside of the athletic arena. When it comes to incorporating new educational policies and practices, full student development is crucial as it relates to Division III student-athletes.

Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) compared student athletes with non-athletes in terms of their engagement in effective educational practices. It was found that student athletes do not differ greatly from their peers in terms of participation in effective educational practices. Contrary to the public persona of student athletes depicted in the national media, in cases where differences do exist, they favor student-athletes. Results of the study show that student athletes are at least as engaged overall and in some cases more engaged compared with their non-athlete peers. Such information combats the negative societal biases about student-athletes, and institutions need to establish better student-athlete relations for improved student success.

With the mixture of adjustment, developmental, and mental-health challenges athletic participation poses and the heightened need for counseling or other specialized support services student-athletes appear to experience, many professionals insist on the implementation of counseling approaches focusing on the development of the student-athletes as a total person
The adoption of a wellness model approach may prove to be an effective perspective to take when working with student-athletes (Watson & Kissinger, 2007).

Wellness models closely resemble the college student development models most often used on higher-education campuses today. Whereas previous wellness models focused primarily on physical health, today’s counseling-based wellness model aims to develop the whole person and enhance the overall college student experience. In such programs, wellness is defined as “a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which the body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully” (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000, p. 252). To this end, the incorporation of a wellness model allows higher-education professionals to address the significant adjustment issues, developmental concerns, and psychosocial stress that are unique to student-athletes in their entirety. Furthermore, a holistic approach may include how to best provide counseling services for identity issues, career services for employment or graduate school opportunities, as well as a senior seminar course that focuses on successful strategies for leaving the higher education environment (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000).

Given the additional demands placed on student-athletes, it is reasonable to assume that their personal development will be different from that of their non-athlete peers. As mentioned earlier, a student-athlete’s own perceptions can play a role in his or her success/failure in the college environment. Given their perception, this can affect student satisfaction and academic performance. To this end, it is recommended that student-athlete support services include a number of components such as the following: 1) academic advisement; 2) academic mentoring; 3) tutorial services; 4) personal counseling and development; 5) study skills; 6) career exploration and development; and 7) life management skills. This highlights the perfect
incorporation of a wellness model. With the creation of new policies and practices, this shows how colleges and universities can set up proper support services to address student-athletes’ educational experience, retention, graduation rates, and transferability (Killeya-Jones, 2005; Storch & Ohlson, 2009). Figure 2 below incorporates this into the “Building Blocks of Student-Athlete Success.”
This figure incorporates building blocks that contribute to a well-rounded student athlete. Such a model can be utilized in colleges and universities to address the diverse needs of the student-athlete population in their entirety. Diagram is based on the wellness model research of Storch and Ohlson (2009).

**Intentional Collaboration**

Intentional partnership should be established between NCAA student-athlete welfare representatives and campus-based athletics student support personnel to develop clear program learning objectives and assessment measures. It is imperative that policymakers at both the national and campus levels consider the student-athlete voice as they craft programmatic initiatives and benchmarks (Navarro, 2014). Practitioners and policymakers need to evaluate program quality to ensure that Division III student-athletes are fully engaged in academic experiences, as well as contribute to their understanding of how to successfully move beyond the college athlete arena. Knowledge of NCAA policies can help student-affairs practitioners understand the pressures and restrictions placed on student-athletes, which may influence their ability to function and cope as students overall.

When designing programs for student-athletes, special attention should be given to the nuances of the overall college experience, especially the effort for these individuals to balance scholastic training with athletic involvement (Parham, 1993). Athletics practitioners should seek to participate in intentional professional development activities along with campus-wide student affairs professionals and support staff, to best serve student-athletes as they transition from the college environment. This may include how to best provide counseling services for identity issues, career services for employment or graduate school opportunities, as well as a senior seminar course that focuses on successful strategies for leaving the higher education environment.

**Future Research**

Though the present study seeks to provide useful information for institutional practices pertaining to Division III student-athletes, it is not without limitations as highlighted earlier.
Regardless of such limitations, this investigative research continues to provide imperative information for higher education professionals to positively contribute to Division III student-athlete success. As the sample size is small, the findings of this research endeavor may not be representative of the experience of all Division III student-athletes attending postsecondary institutions. To this end, the following recommendations are suggested for future research.

In future studies, it may be useful to explore gender differences pertaining to the experiences for male versus female Division III student-athletes. Second, differences pertaining to race and ethnicity may provide valuable insight, as most Division III student-athletic programs are housed at small liberal arts colleges, which are typically Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Bass, Pfleegor, Katz, & Schaeperkoetter, 2014). Third, expansion of the sample size and a comparison of public versus private institutions may also provide valuable information. Conducting such studies may be very useful to those leaders who serve this population in the higher education environment.

From pressure to perform in the sports arena and the classroom, it is important to restate that most student-athletes will have a career in a field other than athletics (Brown, 2003; Fuller, 2014). Student-athletes have to make sure that they balance their dual roles, therefore efforts to ensure that these individuals are well rounded is an essential task for higher-education professionals. The NCAA should be encouraged to lead the promotion of mandated programming for Division III student-athletes. Therefore, further research is important in order to support empirical evidence based practices. As a start in the right direction, this study attempts to provide guidance for future researchers and practitioners by considering the Division III student-athletes’ life experience and voice. Furthermore, this research provided valuable
information for how colleges and universities can set up proper support services to address the Division III student-athletes’ needs more effectively.

**Summary**

The focus of this research explored experiences specifically related to the Division III student-athlete population as they transition out of college and strategic steps that can be taken by both the faculty and administrative divisions of the college/university in order to address this unique cohort. With the desire to investigate current practices, and introduction of new programs, institutions of higher education need to understand the importance of assessment and evaluation of services to these young men and women. According to Storch and Ohlson (2009), student services programs should be evaluated annually. Effective evaluation strategies may include analyses of data pertaining to student retention, graduation, and professional and academic progress after leaving the institution. This process may be overseen by a board of trustees, directors, or even external evaluators to ensure that the best interests of the student and the institution are being taken into account. Such practice will also be favorable for outside accreditation agencies. Chart 1 and Chart 2 below depict how better trained student affairs practitioners can positively contribute to student-athlete success and the importance of a multi-component and culturally competent approach.
Based on this phenomenological research study, the following diagram indicates that an increase in a Student Affairs Practitioner’s development may positively contribute to the Division III student-athlete experience.

Factors that can contribute to Faculty and Student Affairs Practitioner’s development include a broader conceptualization of the student-athlete outside of sports competition, an adoption of a multi-component approach (Storch & Ohlson, 2009), and building his/her cultural competency (Person, Benson-Quaziena, & Rogers, 2001).
Chart 2: Faculty and Student Affairs Practitioner Development II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi-Component Approach</th>
<th>Cultural Competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Academic advisement</td>
<td>1. Acknowledging cultural differences and becoming aware of how these differences affect helping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic mentoring</td>
<td>2. Fully appreciating cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Tutorial services</td>
<td>3. Understanding the dynamics of differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personal counseling and development</td>
<td>4. Understanding the meaning of behavior in a cultural context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Study skills</td>
<td>5. Knowing where or how to obtain specific cultural information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Career exploration and development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Life management skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the gain and benefits to the college or university, especially with the success of Division III sports, utilization of their talent should at least ensure proper academic training and professional development for future career pursuits. Being a student-athlete should not imply exposure to inadequate service by higher-education professionals. Regardless of the choice to participate in intercollegiate athletics, higher-education professionals should still strive for excellent service. Though student-athletes’ choices are self-determined, quality service continues to be under the higher-education professional’s locus of control.

When it comes to Division III student-athletes, college and university student affairs offices need to establish an environment of support, collaboration, and guidance. The ideal relationship includes an open-door policy that embraces student development and nurturance. As the transition from a secondary education setting to a higher-education environment can bring both anxiety and excitement for thousands of students across America each year, dealing with the adjustment of being surrounded by new people of diverse backgrounds, getting in the groove of a rigorous academic schedule, and moving away from home may bring its own set of challenges. Couple this change with participating in Division III athletics, and entering in the university environment becomes an entirely new world that demands discipline, dedication, identity management, commitment, and perseverance. The research and recommendations of this study are to assist institutional policymakers and student affairs practitioners in addressing such challenges accordingly.

The findings for this study provide valuable information to address the void in the current literature pertaining to Division III student-athletes, as well as an extensive resource for the intended audience such as higher education faculty, student affairs professionals, intercollegiate sport practitioners (head coaches, assistant coaches, athletic trainers, sport psychologists), and
scholars who investigate the experiences of students’ transitions out of intercollegiate athletics. External stakeholders will also benefit from this research, as these young men and women will also be contributing to society at large upon graduation (Brown, 2003; Fuller, 2014). Overall, it is imperative to be sensitive to the experience of all students, including student-athletes.
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Appendices
Appendix A: IRB Approved Consent Form

Northeastern University
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies
Graduate School of Education
Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration Program

Name of Investigators: Natalie J. Perry, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Sim J. Covington, Jr., Student Researcher

Title of Project: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DIVISION III STUDENT-ATHLETES’ TRANSITION OUT OF COLLEGE

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

We are inviting you to participate in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will also explain it to you verbally. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher whether or not you want to participate. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

SELECTION CRITERIA

You have been selected to participate in this study because you meet the criteria of being: 1. currently enrolled in the senior year of an undergraduate degree program, and 2. classified on the roster of the athletic department and the NCAA as a Division III student-athlete.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study is to understand the experience of transition to post-collegiate life for students in a Division III athletic program at a northeastern regional institution within a state university system.

INOVLVEMENT

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one hour interview, followed by a review of the transcript of information collected for verification purposes. Your confidential interview will take place at a location you choose at a time that is convenient for you. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can
refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student.

RISK

There is no foreseeable risk to you as a research participant. In the very unlikely event that harm occurs, the researcher has contacted the Health & Wellness department to inform them of the study in the case of any risks, harms, discomforts or inconvenience that the participant may experience.

BENEFIT

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, this study is being conducted for educational purposes, and data may be utilized by higher education personnel to determine how to better address the needs of Division III student-athletes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project. The researcher shall maintain the integrity of all data records by utilization of designated pseudonyms, applying indexes, dating all documents and audiotapes/audiofiles accordingly, and storing information in the researcher’s private office in a locked file cabinet. Such practice is to ensure participants’ anonymity and confidentiality, as well as protection of information from damage, loss, or theft. Finally all data and corresponding materials related to this study will be locked and stored for a period of seven years. Once the seven-year period has elapsed, the data and corresponding materials will be permanently destroyed. In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to do so.

CONTACTS

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Sim J. Covington, Jr., the person mainly responsible for the research, at covington.s@husky.neu.edu. You can also contact Natalie J. Perry, Ph.D., the Principal Investigator at n.perry@northeastern.edu.

PARTICIPANTS’ RIGHTS

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

COST/PAYMENT

There are no costs to the participant affiliated with this study. All participants will be entered into a raffle for a $100 Best Buy gift card.
REQUIRED SIGNATURES

I agree to participate in this research study:

______________________________________________________ __________________________
Signature of Participant      Date

________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

________________________________________________________
Signature of Person Who Explained the Study to the Participant Above and Obtained Consent  Date

________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Above
Subject: Division III Student-Athlete Research Study

Greetings Director of Athletics,

As a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, I am conducting a study on the student-athlete population and would greatly appreciate the participation of the varsity athletes registered in your department. Specifically, the purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study is to understand the experience of transitioning to post-collegiate life for students in a Division III athletic program at a northeastern regional institution within a state university system.

To this end, the purpose of this message is to politely request your assistance in providing the names and email address of registered student-athletes currently completing their senior year here at the institution. In an attempt to study an equitable group of participants, I am seeking the names of three males and three females to participate. These individuals must be recognized by your department, and the NCAA, as Division III student-athletes on the roster of a varsity sports team.

Overall, student-athletes will add tremendous value to this study by sharing their experience. It is also important to note that each participant will remain completely confidential, and entered into a raffle for a $100 Best Buy gift card. Please be advised that this study has been deferred by the Institutional Review Board internally with final approval set by Northeastern University. You can find my approval letter for this campus attached.

Please email me at covington.s@husky.neu.edu with the names of people you think may be interested. Emails set to any other email address must be deleted without response per Northeastern University IRB. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at that email address only. Please do not call my office number.

Thank you very much for your assistance pertaining to this important research endeavor.

Respectfully,

Sim J. Covington, Jr.
Appendix C:

EMAIL TO REGISTRAR DEPARMENT VERIFYING STUDENT-ATHLETE SENIOR YEAR CLASSIFICATION

Subject: Division III Student-Athlete Research Study

Greetings Office of the Registrar,

The purpose of this message is to politely request that you verify that the students included in the attached document are classified as seniors with your office. As a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, I am conducting a study on the student-athlete population, and being a designated senior registered in your department is a required criteria.

Specifically, the purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study is to understand the experience of transitioning to post-collegiate life for students in a Division III athletic program at a northeastern regional institution within a state university system.

Overall, student-athletes will add tremendous value to this study by sharing their experience. Please be advised that this study has been deferred by the Institutional Review Board internally with final approval set by Northeastern University. You can find my approval letter for this campus attached. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me only at covington.s@husky.neu.edu. Emails sent to any other email address must be deleted without response per Northeastern University IRB. Please do not telephone me.

Thank you very much for your assistance pertaining to this important research endeavor.

Respectfully,

Sim J. Covington, Jr.
Appendix D:

EMAIL TO HEALTH & WELLNESS DEPARTMENT
INFORMING PERSONNEL OF STUDY

Subject: Division III Student-Athlete Research Study

Greetings Health & Wellness Department,

As a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, I am conducting a study on the student-athlete population at your institution. Specifically, the purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study is to understand the experience of transitioning to post-collegiate life for students in a Division III athletic program at a northeastern regional institution within a state university system.

In an effort to be proactive, I want to inform you that the research will consist of a one hour interview, followed by a review of the transcribed data. Though the study is classified as having a low-risk of harm, I will be referring all volunteering participants to your department who show or express any concern of physical or psychological harm.

Overall, student-athletes will add tremendous value to this study by sharing their experience. Please be advised that this study has been deferred by the Institutional Review Board internally with final approval set by Northeastern University. You can find my approval letter for this campus attached. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at covington.s@husky.neu.edu. Emails sent to any other email address must be deleted with no response per Northeastern University IRB.

Thank you very much for your assistance pertaining to this important research endeavor.

Respectfully,

Sim J. Covington, Jr.
Appendix E:

EMAIL TO STUDENT-ATHLETES NOMINATED FOR STUDY

Subject: Division III Student-Athlete Research Study (NOMINEE)

Greetings Student-Athlete,

I am currently doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts pursuing my Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration. To this end, I am conducting a study on the student-athlete population and would greatly appreciate your participation as a varsity athlete completing your senior year. Specifically, the purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study is to understand the experience of transitioning to post-collegiate life for students in a Division III athletic program at a northeastern regional institution within a state university system.

Your name has been provided to me by the Director of Athletics as someone who would qualify for this research.

This study is being conducted for educational purposes, and data may be utilized by higher education personnel to determine how to better address the needs of Division III student-athletes. It is important to note that your participation will remain completely confidential, and you will be entered into a raffle for a $100 Best Buy gift card.

Overall, as a student-athlete, if you volunteer to participate, you will add tremendous value to this study by sharing your experience. Please be advised that this study has been deferred by the Institutional Review Board internally with final approval set by Northeastern University. Your participation is entirely voluntary. This emails is the only time I will contact you regarding this research.

If you have any questions or would like to volunteer for this study, please feel free to email me at covington.s@husky.neu.edu only. Emails to any other address must be deleted without response per Northeastern University IRB. If you do volunteer, I will contact you from the same email address to set up an interview time.

Thank you very much for your consideration in this important research endeavor.

Respectfully,

Sim J. Covington, Jr.
Appendix F:
RESEARCH SITE STUDENT-ATHLETE RACE/ETHNICITY CLASSIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Classification</th>
<th># Represented</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Race</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>166</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH POTENTIAL PROMPTS

Ice Breaker Questions (to build a rapport and sense of comfort)

May I ask you permission to record this interview?

Where is your hometown?

How old are you?

What is your major?

Wow, how do you like your major?

Cool, are you happy you chose to attend here?

What sport did you play here?

What position?

How long have you been an athlete?

Are you ready to get started with the research questions?

Situation (goal is to understand the student’s perception of their transition out of college)

- Tell me about your experience being a Division III student-athlete and balancing your senior year commitment/responsibilities?
  - Prompts: Difficult, Easy, Challenging
- Now that you are completing your senior year, how do you feel about ending your career as a college athlete?
  - Prompts: Excited, Scared, Uneasy
- Please explain how you feel about transitioning out of college?
  - Prompts: Nervous, Happy

Self (goal is to understand how the student feels about their ability to handle the transition)

- How do you feel about your individual ability to handle this next phase of your life?
  - Prompts: Confident, Anxious
- How do you feel being a student-athlete impacted your ability to transition to life after college?
  - Prompts: Positively, Negatively, No Impact
Support (goal is to understand the supports the student-athlete’s utilized)

- Who in your personal life has been of assistance regarding your transition out of college? Were they helpful? If so how?
  - Prompts: Parents/Guardian, Mentor, Religious Leader
- What campus resources did you utilize to help with your transition out of college? Were they helpful? If so how?
  - Prompts: Professor, Advisor, Coach, Mentor
- What other sources of support did you use to assist with your transition out of college, if any?

Strategies (goal is to understand the student-athlete’s plan of action)

- Can you tell me about the process you went through as you prepared for completing your undergraduate experience? What specific steps will you take?
  - Prompts: Offices used, Preparation for Graduation, Method to Prepare for Post-College Life