THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF DIVISION I MEN’S COLLEGE BASKETBALL:

VIEWS FROM ACADEMIC ADVISORS FOR ATHLETICS

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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This study utilized the sociological imagination to examine the academic performance of Division I men’s basketball. Division I men’s basketball has consistently fallen behind all other collegiate sports in all academic measures. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the academic performance of Division I male basketball players from the people who work most closely with men’s basketball players’ academic performance, the academic advisors for athletics. Their insights were used to help understand why basketball teams compile the academic records that they do, what can be done to change that trend, and what kind of impact the new NBA age limit rule will have on the academic performance of college basketball players. Eight academic advisors for athletics were interviewed for this study. Each advisor worked with a men’s basketball team that had been in the Associated Press (AP) top 25 during the 2007-2008 season. The academic advisors shared information about their job, general athletics, the academic success of men’s basketball, the NBA age-limit rule, solutions to the academic issues with men’s basketball, and challenges/traps in the advising career. The advisors proposed many reasons for why men’s basketball has the lowest academic records of any collegiate sport. They also expressed their opinions about the NBA age-limit rule and how it has impacted Division I basketball. Many of the issues with the academic performance of men’s basketball stems from the culture of the sport. This culture that does not stress academics starts at the youth sports level, and it continues through college. Coaches have a great impact on the culture and the academic performance of their athletes. This culture makes the role of the academic advisor more difficult because it often forces them to work to keep players eligible instead of helping them to get their degree. The culture of men’s basketball has to change before any improvement
in the academic performance of men’s basketball will be seen. This change has to start at the top with the NBA and filter down to youth basketball.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The air smells of marinara sauce and garlic. The quiet murmur of people talking as they eat fills the air. Once again I am at Fazoli’s for a player appearance. These appearances are sporadic. During such appearances I sit for two hours with one or two members of the Fort Wayne Komets minor league hockey team as they sign autographs and talk to fans. During lulls we have a chance to talk.

Today, only one player is here for an appearance. Sitting across from me is Doug (a pseudonym). At 30 he is one of the oldest players on the team. His scars and missing teeth suggest that he has spent a long time playing hockey. As one of many players on the team from Quebec, he speaks with a French accent.

“So why are you here?” he asks.

“I am doing my internship. I have to do it before I can graduate.”

“What are you getting a degree in?”

“Sports Management.”

“What does that mean?”

“Really, that I can do almost any job related to sports. I could work for a team, a school, a company that sells sports equipment or memorabilia, or for a company that works with athletes.”

“That sounds like fun. I think I would have enjoyed that major. I wish I had gone to college.”

I wish I had gone to college.

That was not what I had expected to hear. Doug always talked about hockey. He was one of the most dedicated and intense players on the team. I had assumed that he loved hockey more than almost anything. He worked so hard at it, and he had been playing for most of his life. He
had played five years of junior hockey followed by eight seasons as a professional. Now he was
telling me that he wished he had gone to college. I was surprised to hear him say that.

“If I had gone to college, I could have retired and gotten a good job.”

In retrospect, I realized that I could almost always tell which players on the team had a
college degree and which players did not. It seemed liked most of the players who had a college
degree would talk about how they liked playing, but if they did not move into a higher league
soon that they would get a job outside of hockey. They seemed not to worry. They showed very
little stress when they mentioned the future. Their tone was always relaxed, and they often talked
about their plans for the future.

The players without degrees had different views of the future. They only saw hockey.
They would talk about how hockey was the only thing they knew how to do, and that was all
they could do. A few of the older players expressed a desire to have gone to college. They
wished they had another option for a job. Just like Doug, they wanted a college degree, but they
felt that it was too late for them. They would play hockey as long as they possibly could, and
then they would have to find some form of work. That thought bothered them. It seemed
apparent that they felt more pressure on them to succeed at their sport. Hockey was no longer a
game they played for fun. They played because they had to play.

My memories of this scenario made me contemplate, what is the value of a college
education?

Like the athletes that I talked to during my internship, many professional athletes do not
realize how valuable an education can be until it is too late. Technically they are young enough
to go back to college and get a degree. People of any age can go to college, but they do not
usually consider that an option. When the athletes without a degree mentioned college, they
never suggested going back. It did not seem like an option for them. Once they realized that they would like a college degree, they no longer believed that they could get one. Some of them barely got through high school. As the top hockey players at their Canadian schools, a couple of them got free passes without any effort. Hockey was everything, and now it had become the only thing. One of the players had been offered a college scholarship earlier in his career, but his high school grades were so low that he was not accepted. These things helped to make going to college not seem like a viable option for the athletes once they had become professionals.

I wondered further, how many professional athletes look back and wish that they had gotten a degree? Does it matter what sport they play?

After hearing what the hockey players said, I decided to get involved working with Student Athlete Support Services at Bowling Green State University as a study table monitor. Student Athlete Support Services exists to help athletes with everything in their lives that is not related to sports. This includes helping with academics and being there to listen to any personal problems an athlete has. Here was the opportunity to help athletes get a college degree. Every day I work there I am amazed at how little some athletes seem to care about getting their college degrees. Some of these athletes are required to attend study tables for anywhere between two and ten hours, but they refuse to study. They try to look at Youtube or Facebook which are banned websites in study tables. If they get caught once, they are told to get off the website. If they are caught again the same day, they are asked to leave study tables. Sometimes they just fall asleep, and I have to wake them. Other athletes just talk and distract other people in the room. Then I ask them to be quiet or I will have to kick them out. Finally, some athletes talk or text on their phones, other banned activities in study tables, which results in them getting kicked out of study tables. These athletes have a chance to do class work, and they choose not to do the work. I
wonder how many of them will have to cram later to get their work done. Many of these athletes have full ride scholarships for playing their sport. They have the chance to get a college degree without having to pay for it, and they do not seem to care.

While I have worked with athletes from many sports, the sport I care most about is college basketball. Most of what I watch is men’s basketball because for most of my life it was the only college basketball that I could see on television. I loved watching March Madness since I was young. Basketball was one of the two sports that I played since I was young, the other being softball. Basketball is a great game, and I have always looked up to the players that were successful at it.

While reading an article by Wolverton (2006b) for a graduate class, I was very shocked to discover that men’s basketball players were the least likely of all athletes to graduate. Their academic performance has been behind other sports for quite a while. Around the time that I learned this, the NBA came up with a new age-limit rule which states that “a player must be 19 years old and at least one year out of high school” (Katz, 2008, ¶3). I wondered if this new rule would have any effect on the academic performance of college basketball players. Would it motivate athletes who do not want a college degree to go to college for a year?

I realized from working in Student Athlete Services that academic advisors for athletes work very closely with these athletes, and they have the best insight into their academic performance. Therefore, I decided that I would like to talk to them about this phenomenon and try to get a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of men’s college basketball players. This study focuses on the academic performance of men’s basketball and the impact the NBA age-limit rule has on that performance. In this study, I
interviewed academic advisors to learn more about the academic performance of men’s college basketball players.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

In this thesis I examined the academic performance of men’s college basketball players. In order to understand the academic performance of contemporary men’s basketball, it was important to explore the literature. I began by examining the history of men’s basketball so as to establish the relationship between college athletics and academics. Next I explored the academic measures that are currently used to assess the academic performance of student athletes. I used these measures to analyze the academic standing of college basketball in comparison to the overall status of college sports. This thesis also addressed the external influences such as the National Basketball Association’s (NBA) age-limit rule that requires athletes to be 19 and one year removed from high school before they can enter the draft. Also, since I wanted to understand the people who serve as academic advisors, I considered the historical role of academic advisors for athletics. Finally, I have articulated the purpose and significance of this thesis.

Historical Relationship Between College Athletics and Academics

History of college athletics

Sport has been an integral part of colleges and universities in the United States since the mid 1800s (Rader, 2004). Bowen and Levin (2003) define intercollegiate athletics as “an activity in which representatives of one school compete against representatives of other schools—not just against themselves and not just against classmates” (p. 173). This makes intercollegiate athletics a unique aspect of universities since they are more external than any other collegiate activity (Bowen & Levin, 2003). They are more external because they are seen the most by people outside of that university, and they have more interaction with other universities. The first
intercollegiate sporting event was in 1852 when crews from Yale and Harvard raced at Lake Winnipesaukee in New Hampshire (Rader, 2004; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Athletics were unique not just because they were more external, but also because professors could use them to control students by affecting their ability to play (Rader, 2004). Collegiate athletics became popular with students and fans. That helped college sports to continue to exist and grow into what they are today.

When athletics were first introduced on college campuses, faculty members thought sports would be good for the students because it was a way for them to expend energy outside of the classroom (Rader, 2004). During this era, college students were primarily members of the upper class (Rader, 2004). Collegiate sports were mostly for males (Rader, 2004). There were many people who believed that sports, especially football, “nurtured personal character, manliness, and teamwork in their male children” (Rader, 2004, p. 85). Since one of the goals of a university is to create well rounded individuals, it could be argued that intercollegiate athletics fit into this part of a university’s mission (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Bowen and Levin (2003) propose that, to this day, intercollegiate athletics are rewarding for participants, they are a source of pleasure, and they also have health benefits. They propose that athletics “are also a way of introducing some balance into a student’s life” (p. 243). Some scholars further suggest that intercollegiate athletics build a sense of community on college campuses (Rader, 2004; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). A sense of community is beneficial for a college campus as it makes students, faculty, alumni, and other sport fans all feel like they belong to something bigger.

By the late 1800s it was realized by collegiate officials that intercollegiate athletics could also bring in revenue. This revenue now comes from ticket and merchandise sales and by bringing in more alumni and booster dollars (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Sports can also be a
source of revenue by bringing attention to the university, and as a result potential students are more likely to have them in mind when deciding on which university to attend (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). This is sometimes referred to as the “Flutie Effect,” whereby a university sees increased attention and applications if one of their revenue teams does well (Johnson, 2006). Today, sporting events such as March Madness in basketball and football bowl games bring in millions of dollars to the NCAA and universities (Johnson, 2008). Overall, the purpose behind intercollegiate athletics has gone from something that economically built up students only, to something that builds up the reputation and finances of the university as well as the students.

The governance of college sports has changed since athletic competitions were first introduced. In 1844, as sports in the college sphere were beginning, sport clubs were created and run by students (Rader, 2004). As athletic competition became more intense, and the number of spectators increased, these clubs started to find coaches to help them train (Rader, 2004). In 1869, the first intercollegiate football game occurred between Princeton and Rutgers (Rader, 2004). The sport of football would eventually be the major reason that control of intercollegiate sports was taken out of the student’s hands. Early games of football were very violent, so violent that President Theodore Roosevelt had the presidents and coaches from the most well known football programs, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, come to the White House in 1905 to discuss changing some rules to make the game safer (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Roosevelt threatened to end the playing of intercollegiate football if something was not done to curb the brutality (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). The changes that addressed brutality in football also led to changes in student control. Faculty members and coaches gradually took over the teams that were once run by the students.
Along with brutality, issues of academic integrity surfaced in the early 1900s (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). At this time “alumni/ae and other outside interests placed commercial pressure on student sports, and there were threats to academic integrity” (Shulman & Bowen, 2001, p. 8). For example, people realized that they could make money on college sports. As these issues surfaced, college sports governance moved to ventures run by the universities instead of by the students (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Taking control of intercollegiate athletics out of the hands of students was the first step in dramatically transforming the nature of intercollegiate sports.

As intercollegiate sports continued to grow, the governance of these sports became more complicated. Dr. James Duderstadt (2000) was the President of the University of Michigan from 1988-1996, and as such has interesting insights into the world of college sports (“James J. Duderstadt,” 2006). Athletic conferences were created by university presidents to help organize play (Duderstadt, 2000). These conferences were supposed to be run by the faculty from the member universities, but “from the earliest days of the conferences, the real power has resided with the coaches and the athletic directors” (Duderstadt, 2000, p. 115). Commissioners were chosen to run the conferences with little input from the member universities’ presidents.

Today athletic conferences look far different from those early conferences (that began just over a century ago). Isidore (2006) found that combined in Division I “all college sports teams generated $4.2 billion from its fans and various partners, such as broadcasters and sponsors” (¶2). This is a lot of money that college teams and conferences have to work with for their athletic departments. In 2002, the NCAA signed a $6-billion dollar TV contract with CBS for the men’s basketball tournament (McMillen, 2002). This money filters down through the athletic conferences. Athletic conferences have become legal corporations to deal with the many contracts with which they have to work, such as for broadcast rights, and that has required
college presidents to take a larger role in the conferences because they often compose the board of directors for the corporations (Duderstadt, 2000). Duderstadt (2000) tells that the current conference commissioners today look more like commissioners from professional teams because of all the money they work with and the people skills that they have to have. All of this has led the commissioners to work more closely with the college presidents (Duderstadt, 2000). This has given more control of the athletic conference to someone who works with academics.

Above the athletic conferences are larger bodies that govern them. The largest of these bodies is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Examples of other governing bodies are the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and the National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA). Universities are able to choose which of these governing bodies that they want to be a part of based on that university’s athletic and academic goals. The NCAA was created in 1906 to address the brutality of football (Duderstadt, 2000). However, it had very little power until scandals in basketball and football pushed several conference commissioners to use the NCAA as damage control in 1946 because the media and educators complained that athletes who were not truly amateurs were playing (Duderstadt, 2000). Duderstadt (2000) claims that “although the NCAA portrayed itself as the defender of the integrity of college sports, in reality this was primarily a public relations effort, aimed at deflecting criticism rather than exploring more fundamental reforms” (p. 118). The NCAA did not have as much power to defend the integrity of college sports because it was more for show, public relations, than actual action.

The NCAA had to continue to act as damage control as more scandals came to light. The biggest of these was a point shaving scandal in men’s basketball in 1951 (Cohen, 1985). Seven schools and 32 athletes were implicated in the fixing of 86 games (Cohen, 1985). The NCAA
had to work to save college basketball from the public reaction to this scandal (Cohen, 1985). What is currently the largest governing body in intercollegiate athletics gained power as a public relations effort. It was more for show than actual change. This is critical because it impacted the future of the NCAA, which has struggled to maintain control of collegiate sport. Rader (2004) reported that the NCAA had become a cartel as of the 1950s. It now has the dual jobs of maintaining the integrity of intercollegiate athletics and managing national championships in addition to the money that comes from them and their broadcast deals (Duderstadt, 2000). Since making money and maintaining integrity can often be in competition, this heightens the difficulty of governance for the NCAA. Duderstadt (2000) shared that “throughout most of its history, the NCAA has been strongly influenced by power coaches and athletic directors” (p. 121). These power coaches were the ones that came from large schools with successful athletic teams. This is similar to the athletic conferences that were often influenced by coaches and athletic directors.

In the 1980s, pressure was put on the NCAA to give more power to the college presidents (Duderstadt, 2000). This happened as a result of the scandals that happened in the 1980s. These scandals occurred as a result of what Rader (2009) referred to as the “triple crisis.” He explained that “one crisis revolved around the integrity of college athletic programs, another around the academic performance of athletes, and the third around the exploding costs of college sports” (p. 289). In 1986, presidents came together to form a commission to help reform the NCAA and also to start having a greater presence at NCAA conventions (Duderstadt, 2000). The greater visibility of presidents in the NCAA has helped to reform the NCAA (Duderstadt, 2000). In 1996, the NCAA was restructured to give clear control to the presidents instead of coaches and athletic directors (Duderstadt, 2000). Duderstadt (2000) says that this change has given intercollegiate athletics “the opportunity for reform if there is the will among university leaders”
This means that there can be change for the good in intercollegiate athletics if university presidents want it.

The NCAA is a large organization that includes almost 2000 different colleges and universities. The NCAA is divided into three divisions. This research focuses on Division I, but it is important to mention the differences and characteristics between the divisions. The largest difference between divisions is the number of sports that they have to sponsor and the number of scholarships available (“What’s the difference,” 2007). Division I schools must have at least seven men’s sports and seven women’s sports (“What’s the difference,” 2007). Division II and III schools must have at least five men’s and five women’s sports (“What’s the difference,” 2007). Division I schools are required to offer the most financial aid (though there is a maximum amount allowed), Division II schools offer less financial aid, and Division III schools are not allowed to offer any financial aid (“What’s the difference,” 2007). It is possible that with less money available, Division II and Division III institutions have fewer issues with the academic progress of student-athletes.

Each division also has different philosophies. It is interesting that the NCAA website (ncaa.org) has a philosophy statement for Division II and Division III but there is none available for Division I. It can be reiterated that Division I schools are required to have the most teams and provide the most scholarships, so it could be inferred that it has the greatest emphasis on athletics. Division II’s philosophy statement is

members of Division II believe that a well-conducted intercollegiate athletics program, based on sound educational principles and practices, is a proper part of the educational mission of a university or college and that the educational welfare of the participating student-athlete is of primary concern (“Division II,” n.d., ¶1).
This puts a focus on athletics as a helpful part of education. Division III institutions “place highest priority on the overall quality of the educational experience and on the successful completion of all students’ academic programs” (“Division III,” n.d., ¶1). This statement about student-athletes’ academic status shows that there is greater emphasis on completing a college degree.

*Questioning athletics and academics*

Beginning as early as the 1890s, educational leaders started to question the impact of college athletics on athletes’ academic lives (Ferris, Finster, & McDonald, 2004). Ferris et al. (2004) tell that people “decried the presence of ‘tramp’ athletes who were not ‘bona fide’ students” (p. 557). These were athletes that were paid to play for college teams when they were not really students, and sometimes they would play for more than one university at the same time (Rader, 2004). At this time there were not separate divisions with different philosophies. In the 1930s, Robert Hutchins saw that there were students who went to college only for sports, and said that “young people who are more interested in their bodies than in their minds should not go to college” (Hutchins, 1936, p. 23). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, scandals such as the point shaving scandal in men’s basketball once again made people question the purpose of athletics at a university (Cohen, 1985; Duderstadt, 2000; Rader, 2009).

Another scandal that made people question the role of athletics occurred at West Point. In 1950, the United States Military Academy at West Point admitted that all but two of the football players “had been dismissed for cheating on examinations” (Rader, 2009, p. 278). Sperber (2000) stated that in the 1970s and 1980s “the college sports obsession with victory often undermined the educational objectives of university administrators” (p. 23). There has been much debate over the different goals of academics and athletics, and how they create conflict.
(Miller & Kerr, 2002; Siegel, 1994). The academic performance of student-athletes continues to draw attention (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). These examples show that for over a hundred years the relationship between athletics and academics has been in question.

It is with good reason that the relationship between athletics and academics has been questioned. Since the beginning of intercollegiate sports, many athletes who were recruited were ill-prepared for the academic challenges of college (Ferris, et al. 2004; Smith, 1988; Watterson, 2000). Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1982) found in their study of over two thousand male and female athletes at Division I universities that athletes were consistently less prepared for college than the general student body. They also found that female athletes performed better than male athletes, though still behind the general female students. Along with this they found that students who received athletic scholarships “were the least prepared for the academic rigors of college and were the least successful in college” (p. 444). In general, it has been found in the past that student-athletes were less likely to earn a bachelor’s degree than non-athletes, and if they did get a degree it usually took longer than non-athletes (Adelman, 1990). Shulman and Bowen (2001) found that at Ivy League and liberal arts colleges, athletes were academically similar to the general student body in 1951, but a gap started to grow between these two groups, with athletes falling further and further behind. The male and female athletes that do succeed are often pushed into a small number of “safe” majors in the social science and business fields where the athletes are presumed to have an “easier” time (Bowen & Levin, 2003). This means that even if the athletes graduate, they do not always have a degree that they want or can use.

The conflict between college athletics and academics continues today. Perko (2004) found that in 2004, 48% of the Division I college football teams that participated in postseason bowl games “failed to graduate at least 50 percent of their players within six years of their initial
enrollment” (¶4). In 2008, 17 Division I football teams and 53 Division I basketball teams received sanctions from the NCAA for failing to meet the minimum Academic Progress Rate (APR), which is an NCAA standard for academic achievement that I will explain in more detail later (Megargee, 2008). These can be shocking numbers considering there are only 329 Division I colleges and Universities (“Dayton: UD athletics program,” 2008). These numbers not only apply to public universities but also private institutions. Bowen and Levin (2003) examined Ivy League universities, New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) colleges, University Athletic Association (UAA) universities, and coed liberal arts colleges, all of which are considered academically selective schools. They found that at many of these universities the athletes that graduate do so with a lower average class rank than the general student body. This means that student-athletes graduate with lower GPAs than the average student. The biggest difference between the average class ranks of the general student body and student-athletes was seen at the Ivy League universities (Bowen & Levin, 2003). All of these factors show that further investigation needs to be made into the relationship between athletics and academics in the college sphere. One of the places that most needs to be investigated further is men’s basketball.

_History of Men’s College Basketball_

The sport of basketball was invented in 1891 by James Naismith at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in Springfield Massachusetts (Isaacs, 1984; Washington & Ventresca, 2008). The first basketball game was played on December 21, 1891 (Isaacs, 1984). Naismith created basketball to give competitive men an indoor activity to play during winter when they could not play football or baseball (Isaacs, 1984). Basketball caught on quickly. By the mid 1890s, colleges such as the University of Chicago, Stanford, Yale, and Vanderbilt had basketball teams, but they were unorganized and played against non-collegiate teams (Isaacs,
The game that is often cited as the first intercollegiate basketball game was held on March 20, 1897 between Yale and Penn (Isaacs, 1984). Isaacs (1984) suggests that “intercollegiate conference play began to stabilize around 1905, and it is with that season that a history proper of college basketball may begin” (p. 31). Basketball is now played in “99 percent of all institutions of higher education” (Isaacs, 1984, p. 37). This means that college basketball is a widespread activity, and it has a large impact on intercollegiate sports.

Like other intercollegiate sports, college basketball started as a student activity. Basketball was created for physical education, and it “stemmed from the Muscular Christianity movement, which argued for the divine linkage between a robust body and a developed intellect” (Washington & Ventresca, 2008, p. 40). It was on college campuses that basketball started to be used for resources, visibility, and prestige (Rudolph, 1962). As early as the end of the 19th century intercollegiate sports, including basketball, were being used to bring in financial resources to a university through ticket sales, alumni donations, increased visibility, and increased status (Washington & Ventresca, 2008).

When college basketball first started, teams did not have coaches (Isaacs, 1984). The players ran their own teams. During the 1908-1909 basketball season, about half of the college teams had a coach, and often coaches were recent graduates (Isaacs, 1984). Isaacs (1984) tells that soon after 1909, coaches became very important, and big name coaches started to appear. The early coaches of the 1910s and 1920s included Walter E. Meanwell (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Henry Clifford “Doc” Carlson (University of Pittsburg) who created set offensive patterns. It also included George Keogan (University of Notre Dame), Cam Henderson (Davis and Elkins College), and John Lawther (Penn State University) who created defensive styles. These coaches paved the way for future coaches to become a more integral part
of college basketball. Basketball has now come under the complete control of coaches, and college players now have very little say if they want to continue playing at their university.

Since the 1920s, coaches have become well known, and now coaches are often more well-known than their teams. Coaches such as John Wooden (UCLA) and Coach Krzyzewski (Duke) immediately come to mind. Basketball coaches have become some of the most powerful men on a university’s campus. Some even have million dollar salaries (Fish, 2003; Masin, 2007; Whiteside, 2004). Fish (2003) found that in 2003 Iowa State’s basketball coach, Larry Eustachy, was the “highest-paid public employee in the state” (¶1). He also shared that “the best-compensated person on any Division I campus is all but guaranteed to be either the football coach or men’s basketball coach” (¶2). In 2007, the average coach’s salary for the NCAA tournament bound teams was $850,000 (Masin, 2007). Coaches also make more money through “TV and shoe/apparel deals” (Fish, 2003, ¶32). The NCAA has acknowledged that coaches salaries have begun to escalate out of control, and as a result they have suggested a salary cap (Wolverton & Lipka, 2007). These coaches are being paid quite a bit of money to win. They are given bonuses for wins (Masin, 2007). That affects how they coach and how they recruit (McMillen, 2002). McMillen (2002) shared that coaches are pressured to “recruit successfully so they can win” (¶7). Coaches have become very powerful and very rich, two factors that have a major affect on the student-athletes that play for them.

Early in basketball history, colleges had a hard time controlling basketball because there were no set rules and no set leagues (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). The NCAA had to compete with the YMCA and AAU for control of amateur basketball (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). College teams often played against teams from the YMCA, AAU, and even high schools (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). These competitions made it hard for colleges to gain revenue
from their basketball teams (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). In 1915, the NCAA, YMCA, and AAU met to develop a joint set of rules for basketball (Leifer, 1995). The NCAA and AAU continued to fight for the control of amateur basketball, and colleges could choose to which organization they wanted to belong (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). This choice would impact which organization would gain control over amateur basketball.

It was not until the 1920s and 1930s that the NCAA became the biggest amateur basketball power and college teams began to compete against similar-status institutions (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). The AAU had regulations that punished teams for playing non-AAU teams by banning them from AAU tournaments (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). Colleges liked that the NCAA had fewer regulations so college teams moved away from the AAU to the NCAA (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). The NCAA also had to take more control when the 1951 point shaving scandal occurred in men’s college basketball (Cohen, 1985). Now the NCAA is the dominant organization for amateur and college basketball (Washington & Ventresca, 2008). That means that all the rules about college basketball and the athletes that play college basketball primarily stem from the NCAA.

**Academic Measures**

There are many questions about the progress of college athletes in the classroom that have been posed by faculty and community members (Rader, 2009). These questions are important because they help answer whether athletics have a useful role in the college sphere. Are sports really helpful in the growth of well-rounded students as they were intended to be? Shulman and Bowen (2001) explain that there are people who love college sports, and other people believe they are irrelevant at a university. They question “the ‘fit’ between the educational missions of the institutions and the nature of the athletic programs” (p. 1). The
existence of these questions means that the academic achievements of college athletes are being judged by faculty and community members.

In order to judge the academic achievements of college athletes there needed to be some measures of academic success. Currently there are three major measures of academic achievement for college student-athletes: Federal Graduation Rates, Graduation Success Rates (GSR), and Academic Progress Rates (APR). These are the three measures that the NCAA reports (Lapchick, 2006). These three measures are the most commonly used, and so they are the ones that will be employed in this thesis.

The first academic measure to consider is the Federal Graduation Rate. In 1990, a law was passed that required the NCAA to report their athletes’ graduation rates (Ferris et al., 2004; Seigel, 1994). Graduation rates are the traditional way of measuring academic success (Lapchick, 2006). Bowen and Levin (2003) reported that “much of the national debate on the academic performance of athletes focuses on graduation rates” (p. 125). This rate reports the number of student-athletes that entered a university as freshmen with a college scholarship and graduated from the same university within six years (Wolverton, 2006a). It is important to understand what this measure is and the drawbacks of using it. Some people question the usefulness of this measure because it does not consider several factors. This measure does not count walk-on athletes, non-scholarship athletes, or athletes who transfer in or out of the university (Ferris, et al., 2004; Lapchick, 2006; Wolverton, 2006a). Also, this measure only looks at student-athletes who graduated within six years of when they began college (Lapchick, 2006).

The second measure, the Graduation Success Rates (GSR), addresses the shortcomings of the Federal Graduation Rates. This measure was created by the NCAA around 2006
(Wolverton, 2006c). This measure includes athletes who transfer to another school or transfer into the university that is being measured (Lapchick, 2006; Wolverton, 2006a). It also includes athletes who graduate more than six years after they began college (Lapchick, 2006). Wolverton (2006a) states that athletic officials see the GSR as “the most accurate measure of how many athletes are succeeding in the classroom” (¶5). The GSR is good because it does not punish schools for having athletes transfer.

The third measure, the Academic Progress Rate (APR), which is also called the Academic Performance Rate, counts athletes who remain eligible during a semester. The APR was created by the NCAA in the early 2000s (Dodd, n.d.). This measure is more real-time than the other measures as the APR considers current students rather than past classes (Dodd, n.d.). Wolverton (2005) explains that the APR is a measure that gives points based on success in the classroom and whether players “are making progress toward their degrees” (p. A36). Teams are given points for every player that begins and ends a semester academically eligible (Dodd, n.d.). A team’s score is figured by multiplying the number of players that were eligible at the beginning and end of a semester by 4, the players that were eligible for only the beginning of a semester by 2, adding them together and then dividing this number by the total number of points the team could have earned (Dodd, n.d.). Dodd (n.d) gave a good example of this calculation…

Division I basketball teams are allowed a maximum of 13 scholarships. If 11 players at State U. achieve a 4 for 4 and two achieve a 2 for 4 (0 for 2 second term, they were not eligible and were not retained), this team lost four points total based on the performance of these two student-athletes. The maximum number of points possible would be 52 (13 scholarships x 4 points). (11 players x 4 for 4 = 44) + (2 players x 2 for 4 = 4) = 48 points. 48/52 equals .923 x 1000 =923. (¶7).
If a team receives a score lower than 925, which equals 50% of the team remaining eligible, then that team can lose scholarships, can be banned from postseason play, or can be expelled from the NCAA (Dodd, n.d.). In 2008, “a total of 218 teams at 123 schools will be sanctioned for poor performance” (Megargee, 2008, ¶3). This is something that no college sports team wants to have happen. Teams want all the scholarships that they can have, and they definitely do not want to be banned from the postseason or be expelled from the NCAA.

Improving Numbers

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has gone to great lengths to improve the graduation rates of college athletes. Once again, there was the “triple crisis” in collegiate sports in the 1980s, and that included issues of academic integrity (Rader, 2009). In the early 1980s the NCAA implemented Proposition 42, which required minimum grade point averages (GPA) and minimum scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT) (Johnson & Ashe, 1998). There were different views on Proposition 42; John Thompson said it was racist, while Arthur Ashe said that the requirements were too low (Callahan, 1994). On January 10, 1990, Proposition 42 was rescinded (“Looking back,” 2006).

Siegel (1994) tells how in 1986 the NCAA implemented Proposition 48, which increased the admission criteria for a college athlete. As mentioned previously, the NCAA began to require public disclosure of athletes’ graduation rates in 1990 (Ferris et al., 2004, Siegel, 1994). The NCAA was restructured in 1996 (Duderstadt, 2000). This brought it more under the control of the college presidents, who cared more about a balance of academics and athletics than the people with interest only in athletics. The people with interest only in athletics included powerful coaches and athletic directors (Duderstadt, 2000). They cared more about having winning teams than having their athletes graduate. By giving more control to college presidents, the graduation
rates of student-athletes have increased (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Wolverton, 2006a, 2006b). Increasing graduation rates are a very good thing that should continue.

Some recent numbers show that the academic records of Division I student athletes have improved. Wolverton (2006a) found that, according to the 2006 NCAA graduation-rate report, two dozen sports showed improvement in the number of athletes who graduated in six years. The highest graduation rates were in men’s skiing with 89 percent of the athletes graduating, and women’s “fencing, field hockey, gymnastics, and skiing” graduating 94 percent of their athletes (Wolverton, 2006a, ¶19). This is the second consecutive year that “scholarship athletes graduated at historic levels” (Wolverton, 2006b, ¶12). To continue this trend, the president of the NCAA, Myles Brand, has set the goal of having 80 percent of college athletes graduate (Wolverton, 2006a). Through all of these efforts the graduation rates and APR have been on the rise (Wolverton, 2006a; 2006b). It will be good if this trend continues and college sports reach the NCAA’s goal of having 80 percent of college athletes graduate.

*Academic Standing of College Basketball*

As overall graduation rates have increased, one sport in Division I continues to fall behind, and that is men’s basketball. Currently, men’s basketball has the lowest graduation rate among 29 sports (Hytche, 1999; Lapchick, 2008; Wieberg, 2007; Wolverton, 2006b). Wieberg (2007) reports that nearly 44 percent of the basketball teams in Division I are below the APR score of 925, and their graduation rates are similarly poor. Bowen and Levin (2003) called the statistics on the graduation rates of Division I basketball players depressing because they were so bad. Siegel (1994) found that men’s basketball players graduated 19% fewer than all male athletes and non-athletes. Fifty-four percent of the basketball teams in the 2006 NCAA basketball tournament “did not graduate at least 50% of their basketball student-athletes based on
Federal Graduation Rates” (Lapchick, 2006, ¶4). In 2008, the numbers were a little better with only forty-six percent of Division I NCAA tournament teams not graduating at least 50% of their athletes (Lapchick, 2008). Bowen and Levin found that basketball players at academically selective schools that did graduate did so with an average 26th percentile rank in their class compared to the students at large who averaged in the 51st percentile. This means that, even when basketball players attend and graduate from an elite school, they do so with GPAs well below the general student body. These trends confirm that Division I men’s college basketball is behind other college sports in terms of the academic achievement of the players.

Along with sagging academic numbers, there have been academic scandals in men’s basketball. Minnesota was stripped of it’s 1997 Big Ten men’s championship because of academic fraud that year (“Plus: College basketball,” 2000). Minnesota was also put on probation for four years and lost five basketball scholarships when it was found that people involved with the athletic department were completing coursework for members of the basketball team (“Minnesota put on 4-year probation,” 2000). In 2003, it was found that St. Bonaventure had allowed a student-athlete to play basketball, even though he failed to meet the NCAA’s academic eligibility requirements for admittance (Biemiller & Suggs, 2003; “Foul shots,” 2003). The same year it was discovered that bogus grades were given to three basketball players at the University of Georgia (Biemiller & Suggs, 2003; “Foul shots,” 2003). At Fresno State and Rhode Island, people tied to the basketball program admitted to writing papers for the men’s basketball players (Biemiller & Suggs, 2003; “Foul shots,” 2003). California State University was put on probation by the NCAA because they were found to have given grades for classes basketball players never took, and grades were changed in some classes to keep the players
eligible (Suggs, 2004). This is just a sample of the academic scandals that have rocked collegiate men’s basketball in recent years.

The NCAA has acknowledged that there is a problem with men’s basketball in regards to academic rates. In 2007, they decided to put together a group to review the academic performance of Division I men’s basketball and explore possible remedies (Wieberg, 2007). This group was made up of university presidents, coaches, athletic directors, faculty representatives, and conference commissioners (Wieberg, 2007). This group has been called the “Basketball Academic Enhancement Group” and they have been “charged with developing strategies to enhance academic performance and graduation rates in Division I men's basketball” (Carey, 2007, ¶1). The NCAA hopes that the Basketball Academic Enhancement Group will help them to understand the reasons behind the academic performance of men’s basketball and also to find solutions to the poor rates that are seen.

There has been much speculation among scholars as to why basketball has continued to lag behind other sports in all academic measures (Adler & Adler, 1985; Hytche, 1999; Wieberg, 2007; Wolverton, 2006a). Based on literature, I have found eight possible reasons that will be addressed in this thesis. The reasons are a compilation of the results of Adler and Adler (1985) coupled with suggestions given by other authors. These reasons include 1) the academic (lack of) preparedness of men’s basketball players (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Ferris et al., 2004; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Holsendolph, 2006; Siegel, 1994); 2) basketball players are not encouraged to do well academically (Adler & Adler, 1985; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Lucas & Lovaglia, 2002; Sperber 2000); 3) many student-athletes use college as a springboard for becoming professional basketball players (Brand, 2001; Gerdy, 2006; Holsendolph, 2006; Hytche, 1999; Sperber, 2000); 4) student-athletes are often treated like professionals (Adler & Adler, 1985; 1989; Gerdy,
a large time and energy commitment is required to play college basketball (Adler & Adler 1985; 1989; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gerdy, 2006; Holsendolph, 2006; Miller & Kerr, 2002); 6) basketball players often feel that they are treated differently by their professors (Adler & Adler, 1985; Bowen & Levin, 2003); 7) the issue may have a race component (Ferris et al., 2004; Lapchick, 2008; Siegel, 1994); 8) the youth culture of basketball (Cook, 2003; Donovan, 2000; Halley, n.d.b; Wieberg, n.d.; Wolverton & Lipka, 2007). I would now like to elaborate on each of these factors and how they contribute to men’s basketball lagging behind in academic measures.

Men’s basketball players are often less academically prepared when they enter college (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Holsendolph, 2006). Ferris et al. (2004) point out that colleges often recruit athletes who are not prepared for college and they draw students from “poor, and academically inferior schools” (pp. 557-8). Among all student-athletes, basketball players had the lowest SAT scores and high school GPAs coming into college (Siegel, 1994). Bowen and Levin (2003) report that, even at academically selective schools, there are serious policy and priority issues when it comes to the admissions of athletes. They found that at Ivy League universities, and New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) colleges’, men’s basketball players had average SAT scores over 100 points below the average scores of the general male students. Not being academically prepared for college can lead men’s basketball players to have difficulty succeeding in the classroom.

In many cases, basketball players do not have as much encouragement to succeed academically. Adler and Adler (1985) conducted a four year “participant-observation study of a major college basketball team” (p. 242). They wrote several articles based on their research from this time. In their 1985 article the Adler’s reported that Division I men’s basketball players cared
more about their sport than their academic success. Other researchers have found similar information. Lucas and Lovaglia (2002) found in their study of the “attitudes held by student-athletes and non-athlete students towards academic and athletic success” (¶1) that athletes do not expect as many benefits from academic success and their academic motivation is less than scholars (non-athletes). Bowen and Levin (2003) propose that “there is an athletic ‘culture’ that does not value academic achievement” (p. 163). The athletes are often bunched into a small number of majors, so they take classes together, practice together, play together, and often live together; thus, there is pressure to conform to the group (Adler & Adler, 1985; Bowen & Levin, 2003). Often the team does not see academic success as something they should aspire to obtain (Adler & Adler, 1985; Bowen & Levin, 2003). Sperber (2000) contends that college sports have an obsession with victory because it brings in more money, and this obsession often undermines the educational purpose of a university.

Another reason for the undervaluation of academics is that college men’s basketball players often go to college with the hope that it will help them to play basketball professionally. Sperber (2000) points out that this may be attributed to the fact that “many college athletes regard their university years primarily as a minor league training for the pros” (p. 30). Gerdy (2006) agrees that many athletes use college sports “as a springboard to the pros” (¶15). Many college basketball players give up their college eligibility with the hopes that they will be able to make it at the professional level (Holsendolph, 2006; Hytche, 1999). While still president at Indiana University, Myles Brand, the current President of the NCAA, stated that “some Division IA basketball players attend college primarily or exclusively to position themselves for a professional career…and have no plans to graduate” (Brand, 2001, p. 370). When these players
leave early to play professionally, it hurts the graduation rate of the university that they had attended.

Division I men’s college basketball players are often treated more like professionals than students. Sack and Thiel (1985) say that these athletes are “increasingly being asked to fill roles that are virtually indistinguishable from those of bona fide professionals” (p. 196). Gerdy (2006) agrees that all scholarship athletes are professionals. He argues that these athletes are getting paid to play and this forces them to focus on basketball first and foremost. Their payment comes in the form of their scholarships. Adler and Adler’s (1985; 1989) studies were some of the first to focus on the academic performance of men’s basketball, and their observations are still relevant today. They found that men’s basketball players often are in the media, and they have to deal with strangers knowing many things about them and wanting to be near them. Other researchers have found that men’s basketball receives a large amount of media attention. Klan, Vincent, and Mondello (2008) found 388 articles just on the NCAA men’s basketball tournament in 2006. This did not include any television coverage or articles that did not attribute to individual authors. That could include hundreds of other articles. This is just the coverage from the tournament. There would be more coverage for the rest of the season. This often leads basketball players to see themselves as more glorious than they really are (Adler & Adler, 1989). Basketball became more of an occupation than a recreational activity once athletes started college, and many of them were not prepared for this change (Adler & Adler, 1985). It can be very hard for these basketball players to learn to balance this “career” with their academic lives.

There is a time and energy commitment that is required to play college basketball. The student-athletes in Adler and Adler’s (1989) study felt that their first priority was to their basketball obligations. With all of the pressures of their sport from everyone who has an interest
“it became easier for athletes to turn away from academics and concentrate their efforts on sport” (Adler & Adler, 1985, p 245). The athletes may try to improve their grades, but their athletic commitments limit the time that they have to do that (Miller & Kerr, 2002). It is also a struggle for athletes to focus on academics when some of their major influences, their coaches, focus on athletic performance and not education (Gerdy, 2006). Bowen and Levin (2003) suggest that before they even start classes, athletes have to decide to commit to their coach and their teammates. It is one of their first priorities, and that remains with them throughout their college career. Bowen and Levin (2003) also found that athletes spend more time and energy on extracurricular activities than the average student. This is counting their sport as an extracurricular activity. Holsendolph (2006) points out that in comparison to other sports in basketball “the pressure to perform is the most extreme” (¶26), and that is because there is the possibility of becoming a professional basketball player. The pressure to be the best and the possibility of being a professional makes many basketball players push their academic responsibilities aside.

Basketball players are, or often feel that they are, treated differently from other students by their professors. In some instances, professors give the players more freedom and make classes easier for them, and this is not always a good thing because it makes the players feel that they deserve that treatment in every class (Adler & Adler, 1985). Adler and Adler (1985) found that in other instances athletes thought that some professors “stereotyped them as dumb jocks or cocky athletes” (p. 246). Bowen and Levin (2003) suggest that professors often discriminate against athletes. They do this by “giving them lower grades, or…hurt [their] academic motivation and interest” (p. 164). Bowen and Levin (2003) also suggest that professors
sometimes do not take athletes seriously. Adler and Adler (1985) contend that this differential
treatment reinforces to the basketball players that they are athletes first and students second.

Some scholars have suggested that there is also a racial component that helps to explain
the academic performance of college men’s basketball players. African American athletes often
graduate behind their white male counterparts (Siegel, 1994). As mentioned above, Proposition
42 was considered by many to be racist and was later overturned. Lapchick (2008) tells that there
is a 31 percent gap between men’s basketball NCAA tournament teams that graduated 70 percent
of their white athletes and teams that graduated 70 percent of their African-American athletes.
He found that 56 percent of NCAA men’s basketball tournament teams had “a 10 percent point
or higher gap between the graduation rates of white and African-American basketball student-
athletes” (¶8). A reason for this gap is that African-American athletes are sometimes pulled from
academically inferior, inner city schools (Ferris et al., 2004). This reason for the academic
performance of college men’s basketball points to a deeper issue within society. This issue is the
continuing racial inequality in education.

The dream of being an NBA star starts long before college for most men’s basketball
players. Spencer Haywood, who was the first basketball player to leave college early for the
NBA draft, said that “when I go to speak at junior high schools and elementary schools,
everyone is so focused on the dream, the basketball dream” (Moran, 1996, ¶2). The basketball
dream is that they will become NBA stars and leave the world of their youth. Donovan (2000)
talked to Nick Blatchford, the director of a program for young men that help to develop youth
academically, socially, and athletically. Blatchford shared that he had seen many kids
overemphasize basketball and not do well academically. This suggests that men’s basketball
players learn to focus on their sport instead of academics at an early age. Youth basketball
players are also receiving more and more attention from the public. Wolverton and Lipka (2007) point out that “a video of a 6-year-old boy playing basketball has attracted more than 100,000 page views on a popular Internet site” (¶1). A 6-year-old is getting attention for his basketball skills.

Youth basketball has been gaining more attention from the public. This has led high school basketball to become more like college. Cook (2003) shares that what is emerging is a win-at-all costs mentality that increasingly promotes commercialism over academics. It’s the same mentality that has parents suing coaches over playing time for their son or daughter, puts high school games on national television, and has kids as young as 12 or 13 looking for that one-in-a-billion shot—with blinders on. (p. 13).

Youth basketball now seems to have a more professional mentality. Winning has become more important than doing well in the classroom. Coaches have to get more insurance because they have to protect themselves from lawsuits over the playing time of their athletes (Cook, 2003).

High school basketball players can now be seen by everyone on ESPN (Cook, 2003). Cook (2003) quoted a school board chairman, Jimmy Conner, as saying “we were starting to treat high school athletes like prima donnas” (p. 14). The athletes were getting the chance to change schools to find the best fit, and they were high schoolers. Many youth basketball players join Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) teams. These teams travel and compete in tournaments so much that Halley (n.d.b) said one player’s schedule “is hectic even by the standards of heads of state” (¶2). These are the things that the players need to do in order to prepare for the NBA (Halley, n.d.b). There was once a time that there was a certain season for basketball; now youth players can be on some team year round. These kids are being watched by college coaches.
Eighth graders have been offered college scholarships to play basketball (Wieberg, n.d.). All these factors lead youth basketball players to see themselves as basketball stars heading for the NBA, even though only 0.03 percent of high school seniors in basketball will actually have the chance to play in the NBA (“Estimated probability,” 2007). All factors combined often lead to less of a focus on academics. This belief that they will become NBA stars so they do not have to focus as much on academics follows the players into college.

**NBA Age-Limit Rule**

The National Basketball Association (NBA) is the top basketball league in the world, and as such it has a large impact on every level of basketball. When the NBA began in 1949, it had “what was called the ‘four-year rule,’ in which a player could not be drafted until his class was graduating” (Moran, 1996, ¶12). This referred to the class graduating from college. Therefore, a player was not considered eligible for the NBA draft until he was four years removed from high school. In 1970, Spencer Haywood sued for the right to play in the NBA before he was four years removed from high school (Price, 2005; Moran, 1996). The case went to the Supreme Court and in March 1971 they ruled in Haywood’s favor (Price, 2005). A new age-rule was put into place where a player had to be eighteen, and their high school class had to have graduated, for them to be eligible for the NBA draft (Applegate, 2006). More and more players left college early, or skipped it altogether to join the NBA draft. After 1975, there was a lull of players being drafted out of high school. Kevin Garnett restarted the trend in 1995 when he was drafted directly out of high school (Applegate, 2006). The number of draftees out of high school increased. Some, such as Kobe Bryant and LeBron James, have done very well (Price, 2005). Other players have “failed miserably and disappeared from the league” (Applegate, 2006, p.
The failure of many players that were drafted out of high school led NBA officials to consider changing the age-limit (Applegate, 2006).

In 2006, the NBA passed a new rule requiring players to be at least one year removed from high school before they could enter the draft (“NBA age limit,” n.d.). This led people to question if the game of college basketball would be changed, and would cause teams to be younger (“Young teams,” 2006). This new rule has caused many aspiring professional basketball players to go to college for one year and then move on to the draft. This is why the rule is commonly referred to as the “one-and-out” rule. Katz (2008) tells that the NCAA had to go along with the NBA’s decision to create a one-year buffer between joining the NBA and high school. They had no power to oppose the decision.

Athletes want to make the millions offered by the NBA to its players, so they leave college before they get a degree (Hytche, 1999). Seven players picked in the first round of the 2007 draft left college after one year (Katz, 2007). Three of them were from Ohio State University, who lost another player after one year in 2008 (Katz, 2008). Katz (2007) says that if the NBA age-limit rule had not been enacted these players may not have gone to college at all. There had always been students who skipped college altogether to enter the pros, now they are forced to wait a year. Many of them are choosing to spend that one year in college, and then leave. Whitlock (2008) suggests that these athletes are only pretending to be students to bide their time before they can enter the NBA draft. Katz (2008) points out that O.J. Mayo, who played for the University of Southern California “probably never would have set foot on a campus if the rule hadn’t been in place” (¶3). He adds that a few basketball players spend their one year in college working hard and being involved, but many of them slack off and even stop going to class at all once they have declared for the draft. This means that they leave college
ineligible, which hurts their team’s APR. This phenomenon could possibly have a negative impact on the already poor academic numbers of men’s college basketball.

Other options have also opened up for athletes who do not want to go to college. In 2008, Brandon Jennings chose to play professional basketball in Europe instead of going to college (Glier, 2009; Thamel, 2008). Jennings had originally signed to play for Arizona, but he had some academic issues and he disagreed with the NBA’s age-limit rule (Halley, n.d.a). Some media and basketball experts consider that other NBA hopefuls will skip college to spend a year in Europe until they were eligible for the NBA draft (Thamel, 2008). If this does happen, it could limit the number of “one and done” athletes that enter college. However, after a few months in Europe, Jennings has warned future players about going to Europe because it is not as easy and glamorous as it may seem (Glier, 2009). Also, many of the 2009 high school graduates have shared that they will not be going to Europe (Glier, 2009). So, Europe may be an option, but many high school players are not choosing it for the year they have to wait to be eligible for the NBA draft. They are still choosing to spend that year in college.

The Role of Academic Advisors for Athletics

It is important for universities to keep athletes eligible, and as a result most universities’ athletic departments have a student athletes support services department (which may go by other names). Every Division I school is required by the NCAA to have tutoring services available to student-athletes (Robbins, 2008). In 2007, the NCAA distributed $19.8 million to member institutions for academic assistance (Robbins, 2008). This department exists to help student athletes balance their academic, athletic, and social lives (Brown, 2007; Holsendolph, 2006). These departments employ academic advisors for athletes. Academic advisors act as “liaisons between teachers and coaches” (Mader, 2003, p. 16). These advisors monitor athletes’ grades
and meet with any athletes that are struggling (Holsendolph, 2006). They also counsel athletes as to which major they should choose and help them to schedule classes in order to obtain their degree (Brown, 2007). Advisors need to be able to identify which student athletes are starting college less prepared and to work closely with them to help these athletes transition into college life (Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006). Robbins (2008) tells that athletes need to maintain higher grades than the general student body to stay eligible; therefore, academic advising is necessary for them. Overall, academic advisors for athletes are the link between student athletes and their academics. These are the people who know the most about what is going on with the academic lives of athletes.

Because of the stress, many athletic advisors feel burnout, which causes them to leave their job. Burnout can occur in any career. Since the early 1970s, research has been done about burnout (Freudenberger, 1974). According to Maslach and Jackson (1984), burnout has three areas: being emotionally exhausted, feeling like they are becoming less of a person, and a decrease in performance. Burnout can lead to health problems and employees missing work (Goodger, Gorely, Lavallee, & Harwood, 2007). Workers no longer enjoy what they are doing; in fact, they may come to hate it. This leads many people to find other careers.

Summary

Intercollegiate sports have had a rich history on college campuses full of highs and lows. Men’s basketball has long been a part of that tradition. Many scandals within intercollegiate sports have led the public to question the value of sports on a college campus. Men’s basketball has been among the sports that have had to deal with many controversies. To look at the academic performance of sports, there are several academic measures that are publically reported. They are the Federal Graduation Rate, the Graduation Success Rate (GSR), and the
Academic Progress Rate (APR). Overall, athletics have seen an increase in the reported academic measures. However, recently men’s basketball has been consistently in last. Scholars have given several possible reasons for the low academic performance of men’s basketball. These are the academic (lack of) preparedness of men’s basketball players, basketball players are not encouraged to do well academically, many student-athletes use college as a springboard for becoming professional basketball players, student-athletes are often treated like professionals, a large time and energy commitment is required to play college basketball, basketball players often feel that they are treated differently by their professors, the issue may have a race component, and the youth culture of basketball. The NBA has an impact on college basketball, and recently they have implemented an age-limit rule of 19 and one year removed from high school. The NBA age-limit rule may impact the academic performance of men’s basketball. Academic advisors for athletics work closely with men’s basketball on their academics.

Conceptual Framework

This study looks at the academic performance of Division I collegiate basketball within the conceptual framework of the sociological imagination, which was introduced by C. Wright Mills. Mills (1959) believed that the sociological imagination should be used to look at issues that affect society, not just troubles that affect an individual. Mills (1959) defines troubles as things that “occur within the character of the individual and within the range of his immediate relations with others…a private matter” (p. 8). He goes on to define issues as “matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life…a public matter” (p. 8). In the context of this research, if one basketball player a year left their university without a degree, it would be considered a personal trouble. It would be something that is tied only to that person. When many basketball players are leaving school early, so that it creates a
scenario in which men’s basketball compiles the worst graduation rates of any sport, it becomes an issue. The root of this phenomenon is deeper than just an individual, and to solve this issue more has to be done than just address the circumstances of one individual. To find answers, we must look at how society is tied into what is happening. Therefore, using the sociological imagination is very appropriate for this research.

People who employ the sociological imagination examine the intersection between the personal and the public (Mills, 1959; Solis-Gadea, 2005; Tomlinson, 1984). Mills (1959) states “that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period” (p. 5). This means that to understand our lives we have to understand where we are in history. I employed the sociological imagination by looking at the history of college sports and basketball, which was discussed previously. This background helps to explain how Division I men’s basketball has come to be where it is academically. I also used the sociological imagination to look at the groups of people that are impacted by the academic performance of Division I men’s basketball. This includes the student-athletes and the academic advisors for athletics that work with men’s basketball. This is a job that I hope to someday have, so it will also have an impact on me.

This study helped me to understand my own life better. I hope to become an academic advisor and I want to comprehend how I can enter a system and deal with the issues that face collegiate athletics, particularly basketball, in regards to their academics. I want to understand what is happening so that I can help to make a difference. By using the sociological imagination, I can find where my own biography intersects with the social structure of men’s basketball and academic advising. Using the sociological imagination also helps me to understand why men’s basketball falls behind all other sports academically (Hytche, 1999; Lapchick, 2008;Wieberg,
2007; Wolverton, 2006b). It enables me to see where men’s basketball has been, how society currently impacts the situation, and how academic advisors fit into the whole picture.

I hope to attain a job in Student Athlete Services as an academic advisor in the future. I have experience with the field of academic advising for athletics. I completed a practicum experience with a university’s Student Athlete Services office where I often saw the interactions between student-athletes in various sports and their advisors in the office. Most of the interactions were very pleasant. The student-athletes were very open about their academic accomplishments and struggles. Sometimes the student-athletes had an attitude where they did not care. They avoided eye contact or complained about how the advisor was pushing them. I would like to have the chance to help student-athletes be the best they can be athletically and academically. Society has often told these student-athletes that they can only succeed athletically. They are pushed to focus on athletics so that they can become professional athletes, even if that is not realistic. I would like to help them to understand that they are more than just their sport. As their advisor, I would like to help them achieve balance between their athletic, academic, and social lives. This is a very difficult goal since there are many people in a student-athlete’s life who want athletics to come first. These are my experiences that I bring to this research. To best understand what all of this means, I also have to look at the status of men’s college basketball.

In every career, including academic advising for athletics, there are circumstances that can make the job more difficult. Mills (1959) brings up the idea of traps. He explains that “men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps” (p. 1). These are the things that threaten the goals and ambitions of a person making that person feel “trapped” where they are. In the case of academic advisors for athletics, there are many things that can make them feel trapped. Most of
them are the things that the advisors have no control over, and there is a long list of things that the advisors cannot control. These include how the student-athletes were raised, the attitudes of student-athletes, who gets to be a coach, the attitudes of the coaching staff, NCAA rules about academics/eligibility, and their own lack of influence in the athletic department. These factors contribute to the academic advisors feeling ensnared in their career.

There are many factors that complicate the role of an academic advisor for athletics. The first is the culture of men’s basketball. Academic issues with men’s basketball are pervasive, and it could be said they are a part of the sport’s culture. Adler and Adler (1985) found that the student-athletes often lived together and in their conversations “little reference was made to academic, cultural, or intellectual pursuits” (p. 246). Men’s basketball culture tends to focus on athletics to the exclusion of academics. The culture includes the socialization of men’s basketball players, or how they learned their role in their youth. Many youth players are rewarded for their athletic ability, and there is little emphasis put on academics (Cook, 2003). Another factor is the lure of the NBA. Joravsky (1995) followed two basketball players, William and Arthur, through their high school playing years in his book *Hoop Dreams*. He found that both of them focused on their sport with dreams of becoming NBA players, and they suffered academically for it. They both barely made it into college because of grades. The lure of money and fame can make it difficult for academic advisors for athletics to do their jobs. Student-athletes often focus on the money instead of academics (Hytche, 1999).

The NBA has unintentionally set another trap by creating the age-limit rule, and through it the “one-and-done” basketball players. Wolverton (2007) shared that some coaches worried that the age-limit rule would cause “elite players to spend just a year in college, blowing off their classes, and leading many less-talented athletes to have unrealistic expectations for their careers”
This is also a worry for academic advisors because it is their job to help these student-athletes succeed academically even though the athletes just want to get through a year. These factors can make it hard for academic advisors for athletics to do their jobs. Again, it is the academic advisor’s job to help student-athletes succeed academically. That is very difficult to do if the student-athletes have no desire to perform academically. The advisors can often find themselves fighting losing battles with men’s basketball players who only want to focus on their athletics. The advisors also face the snare of their own powerlessness. Coaches have influence with the athletic departments and with the student-athletes, but the advisors do not have that same influence. These factors have an impact on this research because it affects the people that are being interviewed. That means they color what the advisors share. It also affects me as the researcher because I know that someday I will face these traps. I need to understand them and relate to them.

People who use the sociological imagination look at relationships between the personal and the public to help increase understanding. Mills (1959) says that the intellectual journey is not complete until you have looked at that intersection. Solis-Gadea (2005) shared that the sociological imagination is still very viable today to understand and communicate about social issues. She says that the sociological imagination is “the search for pertinent relationships among facts, moral problems, structural conditions, historical concerns, personal worries and ethical values of contemporary societies” (p. 118). What she explained can be demonstrated using men’s basketball as an example. The facts include the numbers that are being published that show that men’s basketball falls behind every other sport in graduating their athletes (Hytche, 1999; Lapchick, 2006, 2008; Wieberg, 2007; Wolverton, 2006b). This creates a moral dilemma if we believe that the student-athletes should graduate from the university where they play basketball.
Many are receiving full ride scholarships to attend those universities, and someone else who might graduate is not getting those scholarships. One problem with the structural condition is the culture of Division I basketball. This includes the culture of men’s basketball starting at a young age and moving into college. It also looks at the NBA and how it exacerbates the issue. Historically, there has been concern about the role of student-athletes on campus as to whether they were really students (Ferris et al., 2004). Researchers have looked specifically at men’s basketball to determine some of the factors that contribute to their poor academic standing and they have found that it has been an issue for quite some time (Adler & Adler, 1985). When a men’s basketball player does not graduate, personal worries are affected. These include the personal worries of academic advisors who work with men’s basketball players that are not doing well academically. For society, this raises the ethical issue of whether this matters. Should society care if men’s basketball players do not graduate? Does society have an impact on what is happening in Division I men’s college basketball? Does society teach men’s basketball players to focus on their sport to the exclusion of academics through media attention, the NBA, and the overall treatment of men’s basketball players? These are all factors that, as a future academic advisor, I want to consider.

By using the sociological imagination, I recognize that I am integrally involved in the research. I impact the research that I conduct, and that means that my experiences help to shape my research. Mills (1959) states that, “you must learn to use your life experiences in your intellectual work” (p. 196). This means that my own experiences influence how I interpret the information that I acquire. I am finding how my own biography intersects with my research. My experiences include the research that I have done to learn more about the academic side of sports, especially men’s basketball. My experiences also include the time I have spent working in
the Student Athlete Services office at a university. In my time there, I have worked as a study
tables monitor where I watched student-athletes doing (or trying to avoid doing) schoolwork. I
have also observed academic advisors as they worked with the student-athletes. I worked with
the tutoring program that the Student Athlete Services offered, both in hiring and training tutors.
I also worked as a tutor myself by tutoring a men’s Division I basketball player. Also, each
interview that I conducted shaped how I thought about the academic side of men’s basketball.
All of these experiences shape how I see and interpret the information that I received during the
interviews that I conducted.

The notion of interpretive interactionism, which was introduced by Norman Denzin,
provides a way for me to utilize the sociological imagination. As Denzin (1989) explains,
interpretive interactionism observes the “interrelationship between private lives and public
responses to personal troubles” (p. 10). He suggests that this can be done through epiphanies.
The academic concerns of men’s college basketball are an issue in society, but they also affects
individuals’ lives. These include the private lives of the men’s basketball players. It also includes
the lives of the academic advisors for men’s basketball because the academic issues around
men’s basketball affect the job that they do and the student-athletes that they work with day-to-
day. The public has responded in different ways. The NCAA and the government have made
efforts to combat the academic concerns facing men’s basketball. The government tried to make
schools more accountable by making them report the graduation rates of their student-athletes
(Federal Graduation Rates) (Ferris et al., 2004; Seigel, 1994). The NCAA has also come up with
measures for the academic performance of student-athletes, the Graduation Success Rate and
Academic Progress Rate (Dodd, n.d.; Wolverton, 2006c). The NCAA has also created a men’s
basketball issues committee to try to combat the poor academic numbers that are being obtained
by men’s basketball (Weiberg, 2007). These efforts and how they affect individuals should be explored more closely. That can be done in this research using interpretive interactionism.

I included myself in this research. Mills (1959) says that a good researcher understands that, to use the sociological imagination, they must understand their role in the research. This is another way that interpretive interactionism can be used with the sociological imagination. I included some of my experiences in the form of an epiphany in the introduction of this thesis. Denzin (1989) explains that “everyday life revolves around persons interpreting and making judgments about their own and others’ behaviors and experiences” (p. 11). This interpretation is done by everyone. It is done by the academic advisors when they work with men’s basketball players. I will be doing it throughout my research. Everything in this research is based on the interpretations of everyone involved. These interpretations have come from what we have experienced and the behavior we see. We can only understand when we see how we ourselves are interpreting these happenings. What I have experienced and learned affects how I will interpret the information that I receive. It shapes how I use the sociological imagination. I am intricately tied to this research.

*Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the academic performance of Division I male basketball players from the people who most closely observe that performance, the academic advisors for athletics. Their insights were used to help understand why basketball teams compile the academic records that they do, what can be done to change that trend, and what kind of impact the new NBA age limit rule will have on the academic performance of college basketball players.
Significance

The academic issues of men’s college basketball programs are of great significance to American universities. Tens of thousands of dollars are given to Division I athletes for college in the form of athletic scholarships. Athletes in general also are given an average of $2,000 a year for expenses (Hytche, 1999). That money could be going to students who want to acquire a college degree. The graduation rates of basketball players also have a large impact on athletic departments as a whole. The NCAA has the power to take away scholarships from teams that do not show that their athletes are making progress toward attaining their degrees (Wolverton, 2006b). There were 53 basketball programs in Division I that were sanctioned in 2008 (Megargee, 2008). Each program lost one to three of their 13 possible scholarships or were given a public notice (Megargee, 2008). The scholarships that are cut could be the difference between someone going to college or not going. The new NBA age limit rule may have an impact on the academic achievements of college men’s basketball players. It is important to understand what these impacts may be. It is possible that aspiring basketball players will see the number of athletes who are leaving college early and believe that is the best path for themselves. If that trend continues, the graduation rates and APRs of college basketball could start to slide further and pull basketball even further behind other sports. It is important to ask if these athletes are cheating themselves when they do not succeed academically. They may come to regret not getting their college degree, as did some of the hockey players I knew. Looking at this issue is essential because it affects universities, athletic programs, and student athletes. The future of all is tied to the academic performances of student-athletes, especially in men’s basketball.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study utilized qualitative research strategies to examine issues underlying the academic standing of men’s college basketball. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Qualitative researchers could be called jacks-of-all trades, or quilt makers, because they piece together empirical data and interpretive practices to get an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Since every person constructs meanings and interprets events differently based on their experiences, reality is based on the individual; therefore, “the most logical way to access these realities is to talk to the people” (Amis, 2005, p. 105). Thus, it was important for me to talk to people to get a better idea of their reality. More specifically, I talked to academic advisors to discover meanings of their experiences about the academic aspects of men’s college basketball. I was especially interested in doing interviews with academic advisors for athletes in the hope that I could paint a better picture of the reality of men’s basketball players’ academics. Since “stories are a way of knowing” (Seidman, 2006, p. 7), the advisors’ stories helped to increase my knowledge base about college athletics and academics. All of these things suggest that, to understand a phenomenon, researchers must look at how individuals see and interpret that phenomenon.

One way of learning what people know, and the realities that they have, is to interview them. Interviewing includes the interactions between the participants and the researchers (Seidman, 2006). An interview is a conversation where the interviewer tries to explore the information that the participant has inside them (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). With this, it is
important for researchers to have good social skills so as to build trust with the participant (Amis, 2005). Interviewing helps researchers to understand behaviors because it gives the behaviors context (Seidman, 2006). This means that people have the chance to explain more about certain behaviors, such as what was happening at the time, or what they were thinking. Fontana and Frey (2000) say that “the focus of interviews is moving to encompass the *hows* of people’s lives (the constructive work involved in producing order to everyday life) as well as the traditional *whats* (the activities of everyday life)” (p. 646). Weiss (1994) suggests that qualitative interviews do not have uniform questions for each participant. Instead, questions flow from what the participant is saying. For this research, it was important to gain insight into the academic side of men’s college basketball. Interviews were the best way for me to gain this insight.

It was important to choose the appropriate people to interview in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the issues underlying the academic standing of men’s college basketball. Amis (2005) explains that “individuals should be chosen on the basis of particular insights that they can provide on the events being studied” (p. 118). With this in mind, I wanted to interview academic advisors for athletics because they work most closely with men’s basketball players on their academics. I believed that their collective insights could provide a better picture of the issues underlying the problems with men’s basketball, and what can be done to alleviate them. These advisors observe the academic lives of men’s basketball players, and “interviewing gives us access to the observations of others” (Weiss, 1994, p. 1). Interviewing these advisors helped to shed light on the issues that contribute to the academic performance of college men’s basketball players.
Participants

Eight academic advisors for athletics were interviewed for this study. These advisors worked directly with the men’s basketball teams at their respective universities. I contacted universities that have been ranked as one of the Associated Press (AP) top 25 Division I basketball teams during the 2007-08 season (not including pre-season rankings). These universities were chosen under the assumption that successful men’s basketball teams might be more likely to have to deal with players leaving college early. My selection of universities that were included in this study was constrained by my (in)ability to travel to universities outside of one day’s drive. Another constraint on this study stems from the limitation on the number of face-to-face interviews that I could conduct with each participant. Seidman (2006) suggests that it is ideal to do two or three interviews with each person; however, it was not possible for me to do more than one face-to-face interview. As a result, I sent a follow-up email, including a transcript of our interview, for clarifications that provided participants an opportunity to add anything they thought of since the interview. See Table 1 for pseudonyms of each academic advisor, in addition to demographic information about gender, race, the number of years each person worked as an academic advisor for athletics, and the number of years they have worked with men’s basketball (MBB). Table 2 includes information about the academic performance of men’s basketball at the participants’ universities.

Instruments

Before each interview session, I asked each participant to fill out a brief demographic survey that I designed for this study. Interviewees filled out the survey prior to their interview so that information could be used during the interview. The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of
| Pseudonym | Gender | Race   | Yrs. with MBB | Title of Position | Yrs. in Current Position | Other University Advised Teams | Other Academic Advised | Athletic Academic Advisor | Academic Services Title | Academic Services Title | Academic Services Title | Academic Services Title | Academic Services Title | Academic Services Title |
|-----------|--------|--------|---------------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Michael   | Male   | Black  | 7             | Director for      | (name withheld)       | (name withheld)           | (name withheld)             | (name withheld)          | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         |
| Nicole    | Female | White  | 24            | Coordinator for   | (name withheld)       | (name withheld)           | (name withheld)            | (name withheld)          | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         |
| Sheryl    | Female | White  | 9             | Coordinator for   | (name withheld)       | (name withheld)           | (name withheld)            | (name withheld)          | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         |
| Cynthia   | Female | Black  | 3             | Coordinator of    | (name withheld)       | (name withheld)           | (name withheld)            | (name withheld)          | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         |
| Lisa      | Female | White  | 24            | Director for      | (name withheld)       | (name withheld)           | (name withheld)            | (name withheld)          | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         |
| Kiki      | Male   | Black  | 7             | Director for      | (name withheld)       | (name withheld)           | (name withheld)            | (name withheld)          | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         |
| Lauren    | Female | Latino | 1             | Coordinator       | (name withheld)       | (name withheld)           | (name withheld)            | (name withheld)          | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         |
| Brandi    | Female | White  | 8             | Advisor          | (name withheld)       | (name withheld)           | (name withheld)            | (name withheld)          | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         | (name withheld)         |

Table I: Demographic Background of Academic Advisors.
Table 2. Men’s Basketball Success Rates of Academic Advisor Institutions.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>60</td>
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Source: web:www.ncaa.org

questions about the participant’s age, gender, race, and other general demographics. In addition, participants were asked to include information about the number of years they had served as an academic advisor, the number of years they had worked directly with men’s basketball players, and about their experiences working with other teams. Table 1 includes a brief overview of information taken from this survey. To protect the confidentiality of participants, they were informed that the survey would only be seen by the researcher and her advisor, and that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identities.

The interviews were semi-structured. This is a method between structured, where every interview is the same and has the same questions, and unstructured, where there are no set questions (Fontana & Frey, 2005). This means that a semi-structured interview has similar questions, which may differ between interviews. A general interview guide was used to assist with conducting the interviews. I used the interview guide to lead the interview and, in each interview, questions may have been added or left out of the guide. Using a guide is “probably the most popular method of interviewing within those qualitative studies that have appeared in the sports studies literature” (Amis, 2005, p. 108). It was helpful because it ensured that all topics were covered while still giving flexibility to the interview by allowing questions to be added or
subtracted from the interview (Amis, 2005). Fontana and Frey (2000) say that this type of interviewing “can provide a greater breadth of data than the other types” (p. 652). This is because the interviewer is free to change and/or add questions.

The interview guide (see Appendix B) was generated and used previously by me for a class project. Before the guide was used in an interview, it was reviewed by two professors, who approved of the guide, and it was used for two separate class projects. The guide was found to be useful in exploring the insights of the academic advisors that were interviewed for the two classes. The interview questions covered topics about how to measure the academic performance of athletes, the academic advisor’s views on the student-athletes in general, questions specific to the academics of men’s college basketball, the NBA age limit rule, and general questions.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face with individual academic advisors. Fontana and Frey (2000) state that “the most common form of interviewing involves individual, face-to-face verbal interchange” (p. 645). There are several benefits to this type of interview. One benefit is that it makes it easier to build rapport between the researcher and the participant (Amis, 2005). A second benefit is that it gives the researcher a chance to observe non-verbal cues from the participant (Amis, 2005). A third benefit is that face-to-face interviews allow for a more flexible interaction (Amis, 2005). I tape-recorded the interviews, which enabled me to take notes about the non-verbal cues that were given. Each participant was asked to give written consent to be recorded and each participant was informed that the recordings would be destroyed when the study had been completed. Overall, face-to-face interviews proved to be the most appropriate means for attaining information for this study.
Procedure

This study was submitted for approval to the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at Bowling Green State University (See Appendix C). Once the study was approved, prospective participants were contacted via email (see Appendix D for a copy of the email that was sent to prospective participants). The email explained the reason for the study and asked if the participant was willing to participate in the study. If there was no reply to the first email, a second email was sent one week later, which indicated that I would call the participant a week after the email was sent if there was no reply. If there was no reply to that email, I called the participant. Once participants agreed to participate in the study, the interview time and place were arranged at the convenience of the participant.

Interviews were conducted at the participant’s university at a location of their choosing. Amis (2005) says that it is a good idea to let the participant choose the location of the interview so that they feel comfortable. The participants were first asked to read and sign the informed consent form (see Appendix E). Amis (2005) points out that an informed consent form “confirms that the individual understands exactly what they are being asked to do, and provides authorization for information to be collected in a manner that is neither coercive nor deceitful, thus protecting her/his autonomy” (p. 114). It was important that the participant understood what was going to happen and felt comfortable with that. Each participant was reminded that anything they wrote or said would remain confidential. It was important to assure each participant that their confidentiality would be protected (Amis, 2005). Participants were also reminded that they were free to withdraw from this study at any time.

After the participants were informed about their confidentiality, they were asked to complete the demographic survey. Once that was completed, the participants were asked if they
would agree to allow me to audio tape the session. Taping the interview allowed me to have the exact words of the participant and enabled me to not miss or forget anything that was said. I used the interview script and the demographic survey as guides, though questions were omitted or added. It is recommended that two hours be set aside to conduct an interview that is in-depth (Amis, 2005; Henderson, 1991). Since only one interview was conducted with each person, I sent a follow-up email, which included the transcript from the interview, and asked if the participant would like to add or clarify anything else they thought of since the interview.

**Analysis**

After completing all of the interviews, I compiled the surveys to obtain information about the participants’ gender, race, years in their current position, the title of their position, the number of years they had worked with men’s basketball (MBB), the number of other teams they advised, if they had worked at another university, and if they had been a student-athlete in college (Table 1). The audio tapes from the interviews were transcribed word for word. Transcribing the tapes myself enabled me to become more familiar with what was said (Seidman, 1998). Then the transcripts were reduced, which was done by pulling out what was of interest and seemed important (Seidman, 1998). In this study, I examined common themes that were brought up in the interviews. I read through each of the transcripts and marked any passages that were of interest. These included things that were mentioned by more than one interviewee, as well as noteworthy things that were only said by one person. I also included things that an interviewee continually repeated. The passages that I marked as important and of interest were placed into categories, and then I studied the categories to find thematic connections (Seidman, 1998). From this, I found themes and they were used as the basis of the results section. I remembered that the interviewer is “part of the interactions they seek to study
and influence those interactions” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 663). This means that I acknowledged my part in the research.

Goodness

In conducting qualitative research, it is important to evaluate the goodness of a study. That can be a challenge with a qualitative study. Howe and Eisenhardt (1990) argue that the only way to determine if a study is good is if it adds to our understanding. It is important to set some standard of validity and reliability. In qualitative research, validity and reliability are different from quantitative research (Creswell, 1998). Reliability is replaced by seeking “dependability that the results will be subject to change and instability” (Creswell, 1998, p. 198). Validity comes from the confirmability or credibility of a study instead of objectivity (Creswell, 1998). In this study, dependability and credibility were achieved through triangulation. Using multiple sources is a method of triangulation (Huberman & Miles, 1998). With this in mind, I sought to interview multiple people who served as academic advisors for men’s basketball. Also, member checks were used, meaning that interviewees were asked to check the transcription from their interview to confirm what they said and to allow them to clarify anything that was unclear (Creswell, 1998). I also employed peer review, which is an external check of the research process (Creswell, 1998). This was done by my advisor and members of the thesis committee. All these methods helped to make this research dependable and credible, thus fulfilling the criteria of goodness by qualitative research standards.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

There were eight academic advisors for athletics who were interviewed for this study. Each of them worked with their institution’s men’s basketball team. They were asked to share about their jobs and the student-athletes with whom they worked, especially men’s basketball players. From the information they shared, six major categories arose: 1) academic advisors for athletics; 2) general student-athlete information; 3) men’s basketball; 4) NBA age-limit rule; 5) what can be done. Themes emerged from these categories.

Academic Advisors for Athletics

Academic advisors for athletics focus on the academic roles of student-athletes at their universities. In order to obtain a better sense of the role of academic advisors for athletics, I asked them to provide an overview of what a day in their lives might be like. Many of the advisors expressed that every day is different. Lauren shared that “you never know what you are going to experience.” The average advisor will have a 40-50 hour work week during the school year. Brandi, who has been an academic advisor for the past eight years, gave a good overview of the purpose of academic advisors. She said that “it’s our job…to help them [student-athletes] understand the importance of getting a degree, and the importance of going to class, and the importance of why they are here.” Michael explained many of the tasks that academic advisors perform when he said that he does “everything…from grade tracking to monitoring to liaison with staff and faculty, reporting to coaches, working with the students one on one, eligibility tracking, APR tracking, and then of course academic advising.” This means that advisors often have to check to see what grades the student-athletes are obtaining to see if they are on track to be eligible and to graduate. Advisors also monitor what the student-athletes are doing while they are in the Student-Athlete Services office. Advisors often spend time communicating with
faculty members and coaches about the academic performance of the men’s basketball players. Finally, advisors meet with student-athletes to discuss their academics and how life is going. What follows is a possible day in the life of an academic advisor from a composite of what the advisors shared.

Academic advisors for athletics often get to work in the morning around 8am and start organizing their day, to find out what their student-athletes should be doing that day. They also begin communicating what should be done. Michael shared, “I go through emails first.” Sheryl stated that “a lot of my time is actually spent emailing, calling, text messaging.” She does this to change schedules and make sure everyone knows where they are supposed to be and when. Brandi added that “what I am doing with the athletes is sometimes tracking them down…So a lot of what I am doing is now tracking them down, finding out where they are, texting them, calling them, and then communicating all that with their coaches.” The advisors continue to organize and communicate whenever they have time during the day.

The rest of the morning, to early afternoon, is typically spent meeting with students. Meeting with students is what takes up most of the advisor’s time. The number of students an advisor works with depends on the university. Student Athlete Services at different universities have different budgets and numbers of staff members, which means that sometimes advisors will have to work with one team, sometimes with four. Brandi explained that, “my mornings are quite hectic just because that is when I have the students.” Cynthia shared that “the majority of my day is spent meeting with not just at-risk students, but a lot of the freshman athletes to make sure they get started on the right foot.” At-risk students are those that are either identified as academically underprepared when they come into the university or those that have difficulty in their classes once they are in the university. The advisors meet with the students “to provide
support for the student-athletes,” according to Brandi. Kirk added that they also meet to “mentor these young student-athletes.” Another reason they meet with the student athlete is “to make sure that our student-athletes are transitioning well from high school to college” (Sheryl). In these meetings the advisors talk with the student-athletes “about what’s going on in their classes, upcoming classes, organization and time management” (Brandi). Nicole sees students “just on a one to one basis…trying to determine from our conversation how things are going.” The academic advisors also meet with athletes to advise them about classes and eligibility. Nicole spends time with them “making sure that their courses are scheduled at reasonable times in the morning and certainly before practice.” Lisa shared that

what we do is cross college advising…academic advising here is a blend of what
the university requires, university rules, college rules, and then specific major
requirements, as well as the student-athletes then have the [conference] and the
NCAA progress rules to deal with, and the rules of eligibility.

Kirk pointed out that “when you deal with basketball, honestly, it is eligibility, eligibility, eligibility.” This could lead to the lower academic rates seen with men’s basketball. The focus is not on graduating, it is just passing enough credits to keep playing.

Much of the rest of an advisor’s day is spent in more meetings. These could still be with student-athletes or they could be with coaches, faculty, or other advisors. Michael shared that sometimes I’m in a meeting with an advisor about a student, or a situation comes up, or it might be “let’s talk about study tables or a program or planning the schedule”…it may be a meeting with a faculty member just trying to determine ways to help our athletes be successful.
Many of these meetings arise because the advisors are, as Michael shared, “the liaison to all the faculty on-campus people.” Kirk explained that his job is “being a liaison to people on campus, in terms of professors.” He later added that it is “being a liaison for the coaching staff also. The coaches aren’t allowed to talk to professors or anyone on campus, so you are that liaison.” These meetings are also a chance for the advisors to keep the coaches updated about “NCAA eligibility, and the standings of each member of the team.” It is important for the advisors to meet with the coaches so that everyone can be on the same page in regards to the academic performance of the student-athletes.

Some advisors stay at work into the evening or return to work to help oversee night study tables. They most often do this when the teams they work with have a required night study hall. The required study halls normally take about two hours. Lauren shared that

we have a night time study hall for men’s basketball student-athletes…I anticipate myself being there for at least a portion of that study hall to check in and make sure the guys are doing what they need to do for that night to prepare for the next day.

Michael added that most nights he has a team in study hall so he is “usually here pretty much every night for study tables.” An advisor will often have to check in on study tables to make sure the student-athletes are working on class work.

There are other things that advisors may do throughout their day. One thing that they work with is recruiting. Kirk shared that “recruiting is big” in his job. Recruiting is very important for a sports team because they want to get the best players possible into their university. Lisa also shared that she is involved in the recruiting process. The advisors rarely have a say in who is recruited. They often meet with prospective student-athletes to share what
the Student Athlete Services Office does. This could include giving tours and explaining more about the support services that are offered to student-athletes. In some cases they may carry some weight in who is given admittance to their institution, but their influence is usually limited.

Advisors may also spend time doing administrative work. This was especially true for Nicole and Michael who were in charge of their respective Student Athlete Services offices. Nicole explained that in her day “there’s a lot of administration.” Michael agreed that he does “some administration as well.” Advisors can also spend their time like Cynthia. She said that “I also oversee our Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, and I coordinate with the NCAA with our CHAMPS Life Skills program here.” CHAMPS Life Skills programs exist to help teach student-athletes how to be rounded people. There are often events and/or speakers that will teach the student-athletes more about things like time management, money management, alcohol and drug use, and the like. Academic advisors for athletics often find that their job is “very busy” (Sheryl). Michael shared that “it’s an intense job, fast paced.” However, the advisors that were interviewed for this research said that they enjoyed their work.

General Athletics

One of the areas that was covered in our interviews was the academic side of athletics as a whole. I explained to the advisors that this referred to all student-athletes not just men’s basketball players. The advisors had quite a bit to share about the student-athlete population. The information they shared fell into several themes. These themes included defining student-athlete, student-athletes’ focus, measurement of success, why student-athletes do not graduate, role of the coach in academics, what coaches expect, what professors expect, and whether too much is asked of student-athletes.
Defining student-athlete

An important thing to understand when looking at the academic side of athletics is how academic advisors define and view student-athletes. The advisors shared what they thought of when they heard the term student-athlete. Six of the advisors could relate to the term because they were once student-athletes. They played sports such as volleyball, football, baseball, and soccer. This had an impact on what came to their minds. They shared many things that they thought about the general student-athlete.

The first thing that several of the advisors said was that student-athletes are students first and athletes second. Brandi stated that “I hear student first and athlete second.” Lisa mirrored that statement almost exactly when she said, “they are a student first and an athlete second.” Sheryl agreed that “I think student first.” This shows that they think the student-athletes that they work with should put more emphasis on their academics.

Another thing that six of the eight advisors thought about student-athletes was that they have many commitments to handle. Lauren said that she thought of a student-athlete as “someone who has a lot on their plate, someone who has a lot to juggle, and a lot of responsibility.” Sheryl added that a student-athlete is “someone who has basically like two full time jobs.” Cynthia explained that,

you are automatically setting yourself to spend how many hours outside of your classroom and outside of the time that you have to set aside to study for those classes in order to become good at what you also want to be good at, and that’s your sport.

Michael explained that a student-athlete is “someone who is really committed to putting in a lot of time and effort, not only in their sport, but also academically.” Lisa agreed that student-
athletes need to “do what it takes to be a student, but also balance an athletic talent.” A few advisors added that the commitments are mental and physical. Kirk stated that “a student-athlete, number one, has to be a capable individual—capable of managing and juggling so many different things that come at them. A person who is mentally and physically capable.” Cynthia added that “they sacrifice physically…studying takes it out of you just as much as a practice does.”

Many of the advisors believed that being a student-athlete often meant that the person is a good student. Kirk said that “you have to be talented to be a student-athlete, and not talented in just your sport, but talented enough to mentally manage everything that you’re asked to do.” Lauren stated that being a student-athlete means “being held to a higher standard on any institution’s campus.” Sheryl added that a student-athlete “typically is probably one of the best students that comes through an institution because basically student-athletes are very organized, very diligent.” Cynthia said that “when I hear student-athlete I see an individual that has made a choice, number one, to be extraordinary…it takes a mentality that the average person can’t comprehend.” Student-athletes have to be able to balance quite a few demands academically, athletically, and socially. To be able to do that well, they have to be talented. The advisors believed that student-athletes were students first, they had quite a few demands on their time, and they were often good students.

*The measurement of academic success*

The advisors shared what they thought about student-athletes, and they also shared what they viewed as measures of academic success for student-athletes. There are many ways to measure the academic success of a student-athlete. One way to measure success is defined by governing bodies such as the United States government, the NCAA, and their institution. These
measures include those that are publically reported, such as the Academic Progress Rate (APR), the Federal Graduation Rate (FGR), and the Graduation Success Rate (GSR). Many of the advisors did not like to use these rates because they did not believe the rates accurately portrayed the academic performance of the student-athletes. Kirk shared that he is “not a big fan of them.” Beth added that “they each have certain flaws within the way they are calculated.” They had their own personal definitions of academic success for the student-athletes with whom they worked. Many of the advisors did agree that the measure of academic success for student-athletes is different for each student-athlete. Sheryl stated that “I can’t have the same measure of success for everyone on the team.” Lisa shared that “how we view success or how a student views success varies from person to person.” Michael further added that “every student needs to be looked at individually, case by case.” The personal definitions the advisors have of academic success can conflict with the reported measures because the reported measures do not take individual achievements into account.

One way that the advisors used to measure the success of their student-athletes was by looking at their academics. This includes looking at the grade point average (GPA) of the student-athletes. Brandi shared that “one thing to measure how they’re [student-athletes are] doing is looking at GPA, but you could have a student that is never going to be that successful in terms of getting a 3.5.” Nicole added that “the grades that we get back from faculty provide us with a measure.” Another area of academic measure is whether the student-athletes graduate. Lisa explained that “success…is measured for us by our graduation rate.” Brandi agreed by saying “obviously if they are graduating that means that they have been somewhat successful academically.” Nicole further added “the attainment of the degree by attaining 120 credit hours.
is a measure which the university uses.” Both GPA and graduation can be used as measures of the academic success of student-athletes.

Another measure that can be used to determine the academic success of student-athletes is whether they are doing what they are supposed to do academically. This is another individual measure. Brandi put it this way: “For many of our students, going to meetings, going to class everyday, participating, those types of things will show academic success for that student.” Kirk added that “it’s about doing everything that’s been asked of you…going to class, being on time, not leaving class early, taking notes…it’s just trying to make them accountable.” Sheryl agreed and said, “I just want to make sure that the guys on the team are working to their potential.” Nicole stated that “the student’s ability to share with me what he or she has learned in the class is kind of my measure of it.” Thus, academic success can be attained when student-athletes generally do what is expected of them academically.

Student-athletes’ focus

Each of the advisors was asked if they believed the general student-athletes in their program focused more on athletics or academics. I clarified that the advisors should not just refer to basketball at this point. Two said that their student-athletes focused on athletics first. Kirk stated that the focus was on “sports, no question about it…Definitely sports, school, and then I would say community service, on a whole.” Nicole shared that “the ones I see…put the focus on their athletics to begin with…Students will come and their biggest interest is to achieve through their particular sport.” Two advisors stated that the majority of their student-athletes focused on academics, but they both clarified that that is not always true. Lauren said
I mean there’s times when athletics is kind of becomes number one for a second, but I think it is our job as advisors to educate coaches and staff and make it about academics. So for me, what I see, it is about academics for us, definitely.

Michael explained that the difference sometimes depends on the sport. He said that “here it is definitely more on the academics. I definitely think that there are a few sports that definitely emphasize more the athletic part.” The other four advisors said that it depends on the student and the sport where the student-athlete’s focus lies. Brandi put it this way:

I definitely have some student-athletes that think of themselves as an athlete first and that athletics is more important than going to classes and they don’t always see the correlation between the two. But, I also think that I have plenty of athletes who also realize the importance of getting their degree, and will do what they need to do in order to get that degree.

Cynthia added that “there are some that are very thankful for the opportunity to continue to play their sport, but I also know for a fact that there are those who have given that commitment to focus on their studies.” The advisors did not agree on whether their student-athletes focused on academics or athletics more. However, they could agree that there was no one answer for all student-athletes at all times. It would depend on the student-athlete and the day to determine whether they focused on academics or athletics.

When student-athletes do not graduate

No matter what the focus of the student-athlete, there are still some that do not graduate. None of the universities that were included in the interviews graduated 100% of their student-athletes. It is almost impossible to find a Division I university that graduates all of their student-athletes. That is especially true for schools with high profile basketball and/or football teams.
The advisors that were interviewed shared that there were many different reasons that student-athletes do not graduate.

Three of the advisors explained that student-athletes do not graduate because of the chance to become professional athletes. This occurs mostly with the revenue sports of football, men’s and women’s basketball, baseball, and hockey. Michael shared that this also happened with some of his soccer players. He had several soccer players leave college to play professionally in the United States and abroad. Cynthia said that “college is one of the vehicles that is used to get to the professional level…they believe that they can compete and play at the professional level.” Brandi agreed and stated that “going pro, I think that is a reason why they are not going to graduate.” Lauren explained that this phenomenon is limited to a few sports. She said that “in football, and really basketball, they just walk away; they want to go pro, they don’t care about their degree.”

Another reason the advisors gave is that many student-athletes never intended to graduate. As Cynthia indicated, “quite honestly, one of the reasons is that they never intended to.” Sheryl stated that student-athletes do not graduate because “they don’t have a desire to. They don’t see the result of what it gets you, and they’ve may not seen it in their lives (sic) as to why I should have a college education and what it means.” She later added that going to college “is not something they would have typically chosen to do if they had not been playing sports, and they had chosen to go out on their own.” Lauren stated that athletes do not graduate because “they don’t care about their degree.” These student-athletes did not have the goal of graduating from college, and they never do.

One advisor stated that often athletes do not graduate because they are underprepared when they come into college. Brandi said that some student-athletes are “not cut out to be
students…Sometimes athletics can do a disadvantage to students by bringing them in, and people that are not qualified, not necessarily qualified, but students that aren’t ready to do college work.” Sometimes student-athletes are not prepared for the academic rigors of college. Maybe they came from a high school that was not strong academically, or they may have been allowed into college, even though they had poor academic numbers in high school.

Several of the advisors shared that personal reasons can often explain why student-athletes do not graduate. Lauren said that it can be “just personal issues, needing to go home.” Lisa stated that some student-athletes tell her that “I miss home…I’ve got my boyfriend, girlfriend, parent, siblings.” Cynthia added that

Sometimes it’s an emergency situation. They’re forced to come home and help bring in income into the family’s home because parents have fallen upon hard times, or there is a death in the family and they have to go back and help take care of siblings…family comes first.

Sometimes the personal reason was they could no longer afford to attend the university when their scholarship dollars were done. Cynthia said that “they fulfill their eligibility and therefore, once they’re done the scholarship dollars end, and they could very well come from a background that just isn’t capable of sustaining them in college, at least at that point.” Sheryl agreed by saying “here at [name of university] it is financial reasons…I think sometimes when people don’t graduate it’s because they couldn’t afford to finish up their degree here.”

Another reason the advisors gave for student-athletes not graduating was that coaches do not always stress academics. Sheryl explained that “sometimes athletes don’t graduate because coaches did not hold that as something important for them.” Michael shared that “it’s a lack of emphasis from the coach on the importance of graduating in some aspects.” Many of the advisors
shared that whatever the coach emphasizes, the student-athletes will emphasize. When a coach
does not make academics a priority, academic advisors struggle to convince the student-athletes
that they should focus on academics.

A final reason the advisors gave was that the student-athletes may transfer to another
university. They may still graduate, but the university they left loses points in the reported
Federal Graduation Rate and the APR. That means that transfers make the graduation rates go
down. Sheryl says that their graduation rates go down because of, “a few transfers that have left
here, and those can count sometimes against your score.” Some athletes want to go where they
can play. “It’s clearly I’m not playing, and I want to play, and there are other places that I can
play…it’s usually I want to play, and I’m sitting on the bench. I’m tired of sitting on the bench,”
as Lisa said. Nicole added that “if they’re not in their sport, they’re just out…they need to go
elsewhere to find somewhere where they can play.” Sometimes athletes transfer because the
coach they had come to play for left. Michael shared that one of the reasons for athletes not
graduating from his institution was “definitely transferring due to coaching changes.” Student-
athletes that transfer away from a university hurts that team’s academic rates.

*Importance of the coach in academics*

Each of the interviewees in this study underscored the importance of coaches on the
academic performance of student-athletes. Sheryl stated that

when you see the coach that places a high regard on, and a high emphasis on,
academic success, that’s when you see the results in graduation rates and GPA,
team GPA is higher,…when the coach isn’t invested in it I believe that is when
you see the lowest.
Michael shared that “when it starts at the top and your coach doesn’t care and you come in here underprepared, and a lot of these students come in underprepared, why are you going to care?” He later added that the “coach becomes everything in the world to these guys in some ways, good or bad.” Brandi added that “I don’t think the student-athletes of basketball, but really any sport, are going to be successful as they can if the coach does not help support that academic success.” Student-athletes will often focus on whatever their coach does. Therefore, if the coach makes a point to focus on academics, so will the student-athletes. If the coach does not stress academics, neither will their players.

The coach also has a big impact on the effectiveness of the academic advisors. Michael put it the most succinctly when he said, “academic advisors are only as good as a coach.” The coach has control over a team, and the academic advisors get most of their power from the coach. If a coach focuses on academics, the academic advisors have an easier time helping the student-athletes succeed academically. Nicole shared that “a coach can be the most important person I’ve ever used to motivate an athlete.” Sheryl added that

having a relationship with the coaching staff is the key to that success…and they have to back you up. If they don’t back you up, and they’re not making sure guys are going to class, and if there isn’t a repercussion for not going to class, or being late, or not seeing your tutor, or not being prepared, then as an academic advisor, your hands are tied.

Kirk, who had experienced an unsupportive coach at his previous university, said that sometimes there is “no support from the coaching staff and then the only thing that you can rely on is your relationship with the players.” This requires an academic advisor to build a strong relationship
with the student-athletes, and that can be a challenge because many are so influenced by their coaches.

*What do coaches expect?*

Given the important role of coaches, the advisors shared what they thought their coaches expected from the athletes in terms of their academics. Sheryl and Michael both stated that it would be different based on the coach. Kirk shared that “number one, it depends on the sport.” All the advisors agreed that the coaches do not want to have to worry about their athletes’ academics. Nicole put it best when she said, “they don’t want to baby-sit, hand hold them, find their books for them…they don’t want to do that.” The two major things that the advisors said the coaches expected was that the student-athletes needed to do what they should academically and that they should focus first on their sport and winning.

Seven of the advisors said that they thought coaches would expect the athletes to do whatever they should do academically. Kirk said that coaches would say, “if they’re eligible at the end of the day we’re happy.” Lauren explained that coaches expect the student-athletes to participate, to do what you’re supposed to do, to show up to class, be on time, treat everything academically as you would athletically. You’re not going to be late to practice, you’re not going to be late to class, you are not going to be late to tutoring.

Lisa stated that she believed the coaches’ opinion is to “manage it, balance the two worlds.” Michael added that coaches “expect their students to go to class. They expect them to graduate. They expect them to have decent GPA’s, and they do expect much more than just being eligible.” Both Lisa and Michael shared that they had always worked with coaches that supported academics. These coaches had made their jobs easier.
A few advisors shared that they believed the coaches that they worked with expected their student athletes to focus on their sports first. Kirk said that “the expectations number one is definitely sports first…Every coach will say, they’ll give you the speech that it’s academics, but it is win first.” Coaches may say what they think is expected about academics, but it is their actions that show if they really support academics. Kirk later added that coaches will say, “if they graduate that’s great, we want them to graduate, but we focus on winning first, for the most part.” Lisa added that a coach’s “job is to put the best team out there and win games…it’s a business, we gotta win, and if it’s not working we’ll make changes.” Coaches are paid to win, and they will do what they have to do to win. That may mean focusing on athletics to the exclusion of academics.

*What do professors expect?*

Coaches represent the athletic expectations of student-athletes while professors represent the academic side. With that in mind, I asked the advisors what they believed professors expected when they had a student-athlete in their class. Just like with the coaches, the advisors pointed out that it depends on the professor. Lisa said that

it’s all over the map…The faculty are by and large quite supportive. We know the ones that are not, and then we have that agree to disagree kind of discussion.

Don’t tell them you’re a student-athlete, just go ahead and try your hardest.

She meant that when she knows a faculty member will not agree to support athletics, it is sometimes better for the faculty member to not know that they have a student-athlete in their class. Sheryl said that she believes “that range is really huge.” She was referring to the range of how professors react to having a student-athlete in their class.
On one hand, the advisors believed that professors expect student-athletes to act as students. This means that they expect them to be like all the other students who are students first. Cynthia said that professors “expect them to perform as students, period.” Michael added that professors “expect a lot of students to be just like any other student.” Many of the advisors also indicated that the student-athletes should be good students. Professors “expect academic integrity…you’re here to do your own work,” according to Brandi. Michael said that “our faculty have actually really gotten used to our students doing what they’re supposed to do.”

On the other hand, professors sometimes stereotype the student-athletes based upon what they have experienced, and what they have heard. Kirk shared that “professors expect what they’ve experienced…not to say they stereotype them, but they’ll judge, they will be prejudging of you just because of their previous experience…sometimes our student-athletes live up to that stereotype.” Sheryl added that “one bad apple can ruin the whole bunch. Like if you’ve had a couple of really uncharacteristic student-athletes come through your program and really ruin their image. I think that sometimes can run rampant through a university.” Michael stated that “it is unfortunate that in any school you have a few student-athletes who live out that stereotype of a dumb jock or not going to class and may become the poster child for 650 kids.” There are many expectations put on student-athletes both athletically and academically, and they are asked by almost everyone to just find a way to handle it all. Coaches ask them to focus on winning games, and do what they have to do in the classroom. Professors expect the student-athletes to be like other students, and not focus as much on athletics. These expectations can be quite a bit for a student-athlete to handle.
Is too much asked of student-athletes?

As mentioned previously, advisors generally believe student-athletes have many commitments that can keep them busy. So, I asked if too much is asked of student-athletes. The advisors were polarized on this topic. Three advisors felt that too much was asked of the athletes. Sheryl said that

the demands on their time are just crazy…All these people want their time. The community wants their time. I want their time. I need to have them with tutors who need their time…they have strength and conditioning coaches who want their time. They have athletic trainers who want their time. It’s crazy. I think a lot is asked of student-athletes that’s not asked of normal students.

There are many people in a student-athlete’s life who expect to get a piece of their time. Many of these people think that they should have priority over the student-athlete’s time. Brandi said that student-athletes also have to “add in all the voluntary things that they have, so watching video, weightlifting, team obligations that they might have outside of practice. So I think it’s a lot.” Michael agreed that there is sometimes too much asked of student-athletes, but he added that it occurs with “most of the revenue sports.”

Three of the advisors said that there is not too much asked of student-athletes. Lauren was very succinct in saying “absolutely not, nope, I do not.” Nicole added that “I don’t think we ever ask too much academically…Sometimes I think we don’t demand enough…Is it too much to expect that we go to the final four? Probably not.” Kirk went further to say, “you are definitely capable of going to school, doing well, coming to practice, doing well, competing in the games, doing the best that you can, and then also, again being a good citizen.” These advisors believed
that the student-athletes came into college knowing that they would have to be students and athletes, so they should expect to be both.

The final two advisors were on the fence about whether too much was asked of student-athletes. Cynthia shared that “I don’t know that I would say that there’s too much asked. I do think that sometimes there are ways that you could get them what they need to get without such long time commitments.” Lisa added that “I would have to say yes and no. The mother in me sometimes thinks they get awfully tired, but then another part of me says, but you know what, they kinda signed up for this…They knew what to expect.” The advisors were not able to agree on whether too much was asked of student-athletes. Some of the advisors thought yes, some no, and others were undecided. This may have to do with the teams with which they work, the coaches with whom they deal, and/or the universities at which they work.

The Academic Success of Men’s Basketball

The focus of this research was on the academic success of men’s collegiate basketball. Basketball falls behind every other sport in academic numbers. Wolverton (2006b) shared that the FGR showed that “just 43 percent of men’s basketball players finished their degrees within six years” (¶5). This is compared to all Division I athletes that graduated at 62 percent (Wolverton, 2006b). The academic advisors for athletics that were interviewed shared a variety of explanations for why they believed this was true. Their responses illustrated several themes that encompassed 1) the appeal of professional athletics; 2) the type of athlete who is recruited; 3) the schedule; 4) the basketball culture; 5) the pressure to win; 6) coaching changes; 7) that people are intimidated by men’s basketball; and 8) the culture of youth basketball. To follow, I elaborate on these themes.
The appeal of professional athletics

The most repeated answer that advisors gave for why men’s basketball players have poor academic numbers was the appeal of professional basketball. Cynthia shared that “the easiest target area is the fact that you have so many athletes that are looking towards playing at the professional level…they don’t have the interest in…seriously pursuing that degree that other people, or other athletes in other sports have.” Lauren added that men’s basketball players do not graduate because of the “idea that you’re always gonna go pro…it’s the professional men’s basketball idea that I think screws a lot of people up.” When discussing his experience at another university, Michael shared that “they had more issues with just professional stuff. I mean they literally had so many kids go professional and didn’t graduate.” Brandi agreed that “opportunities to play professionally…is another reason why maybe these players are not graduating as much.”

The advisors shared some views about professional basketball’s impact on their university. All of the advisors that were interviewed were from Division I universities that had been nationally ranked in the past year. This implies that they have elite basketball players that may have the chance to play professional basketball. Each advisor said that most of their men’s basketball student-athletes came into college with the dream of playing in the NBA. Three of the advisors said that all of their student-athletes wanted to do that. They also shared that the odds that the student-athletes would go to the NBA were low. According to the NCAA, “approximately three in 10,000, or approximately 0.03 percent of high school senior boys playing interscholastic basketball will eventually be drafted by an NBA team” (“Estimated probability,” 2007, ¶1). However, the advisors said that many of their players would be more likely to play professional basketball in Europe. Three advisors said that most of their team could
probably play in Europe. This may not be the NBA dream that many of the players had, but they still get the chance to play professional basketball.

_Type of athlete who is recruited_

The type of student who is recruited to play college basketball also factors into the lower academic numbers that are seen with men’s basketball. Lisa stated that “it’s who they recruit and who they’re allowed to bring to campus, I think is going to make a very big difference in who they graduate.” She added that there are maybe more at-risk basketball players out there that are impact players, and so the chance of getting those into a college situation at least here is probably a little bit higher than it would be for another team like soccer, or golf, or tennis, those considered non-income sports.

Michael shared that “a lot of these students come in underprepared.” Sheryl agreed that men’s basketball players “may not be prepared to be at that institution, academically speaking.” Lauren continued in that vein by saying that “people coming into college not being academically prepared…just not being able to make the cut in the classroom.” Nicole explained that “we can make them better readers; we can make them better mathematicians, but if they can’t do reading, if they can’t do math, we can’t do anything.” Many of these athletes would not have been accepted into the university if not for basketball.

_Schedule_

Several advisors believed that the schedule of collegiate men’s basketball was not conducive to the student-athletes doing as well academically. The basketball season spans two semesters unlike most other college sports. Also, basketball has many more games than football, which leads to the student-athletes in basketball missing more classes than a football player
would. Brandi shared that she believed a reason for the academic numbers of men’s basketball was “the length of the playing season. When you have a sport like football it is only in one semester versus basketball that spans both semesters. So there’s not as much down time for the athlete.” Basketball is also a very physically demanding sport that can make the student-athletes very tired. Kirk shared that “you always see in-season GPA’s will be a lot lower than what they are out of season, just because they are gone so much.” Michael asked, “how are you supposed to get into a good rhythm academically when you are always traveling?” He added that “now you have preseason tournaments…they’re missing class before the season even starts.” With the length of a Division I basketball season and the number of games, it is difficult for players to focus on their academics.

The culture of basketball

Some of the advisors pointed to the culture of men’s basketball as a reason that the student-athletes have lower academic numbers than in other sports. Cynthia said, “it’s in the basketball culture.” Kirk was a former football player and he saw the basketball culture as very different from football. He shared that some of the academic problems with basketball stem from “the culture. It’s the nature. Men’s basketball is different…it’s a prima donna sport, with prima donna attitudes.” He believed that basketball players expected to have special treatment, just like the prima donna in the theater. He added that “it’s a mentality, I think, of everybody involved, from the coaching staff to…the players.” Coaches help to create the culture of a men’s basketball team. Michael shared that “number one, I think academic expectations from coaches is low.” Some of the culture can be tied to the media hype that surrounds college basketball. Michael said that “almost every one of our games is on TV…plays into the hype these kids are getting about themselves, about how much people are talking about ‘em.” This adds to the prima donna
attitude that men’s basketball players sometimes exhibit. They know people are talking about them and they expect special treatment because of it.

*Pressure to win*

The pressure to win that is often put on coaches may indirectly hurt the academic performance of men’s basketball players, according to many advisors. Sheryl said that “the money that’s involved in men’s basketball plays a part in everything. Coaches’ jobs are on the line all the time so rather than focusing on academics, they have to focus on winning.” Lisa stated that “the pressure to win is huge, so the pressure to take a little bit higher risk a little more often…the fact that it is an income sport would probably lead to, I would say, them taking more risks.” She explained that the risks she referred to were recruiting student-athletes that would not be as likely to graduate. Michael spoke in the same vein. He talked about how coaches will recruit students that will likely not graduate. “What if you take a penalty hit, maybe you lose a scholarship, which isn’t a big deal if you win a national championship? It’s all about wins and losses. They get paid too much money to lose.”

*Coaching changes*

Two advisors explained that basketball players will often transfer if a coaching change occurs. If that happens, the abandoned university loses points in the Federal Graduation Rate and APR. Michael referred to the experiences he had with this phenomenon, when he shared that “numbers started declining because you had that coaching change.” Sheryl said that “kids come to play for a coach. They don’t come to play for a school usually…So, if our coach happened to leave, how many kids would want to leave to follow him?” Many student-athletes choose where to play based on the coach. If that coach leaves, those players may not want to play at that university any more. Therefore, they leave and go to the university that their coach went to next.
People intimidated by basketball

Men’s college basketball has become a big business, and with that some of the advisors shared that some people are too intimidated to work to increase the academic performance of men’s basketball. From personal observations, I can say that both people inside and out of the athletic department can feel intimidated. No one wants to feel that they are the reason that the star player is ineligible to play, especially if that leads to the team losing. That could include faculty members, academic advisors, and administrators. Nicole stated that “a lot of people are intimidated by them.” Kirk said, “the problem is that a lot of athletic departments are afraid.” The athletic departments are sometimes afraid to admit that they have star basketball players that are not or cannot do well in the classroom. A scandal with their men’s basketball team would be widely publicized. Athletic departments could be afraid of scandals or just of having their stars ineligible so they do not have a winning team.

Youth basketball

Some of the academic issues that arise in college basketball may stem from the way the players have been treated since they were young. According to Michael, “there is a culture in men’s basketball that starts in middle school, believe it or not, and goes through high school where these students are not expected to do well academically.” Sheryl said that “our education system, not at the collegiate level, but at the high school and early education system, is really failing students as well cause they’re getting pushed through.” Cynthia added that “some kids are told from when they’re little peons that you can play professional basketball, and that’s what they focus their attention on.” Lauren shared that “some of people, all they’ve ever known is basketball, people have always done things for them their entire life.” Michael felt that it was not
only the education system, but also the AAU that was partially responsible for the poor academic performance of men’s basketball. In referring to the AAU he said,

these students going through this time, traveling, doing all the stuff, not caring about academics, thinking they’re God’s gift to everybody, and then they get to college where now, okay, we have academic advisors that expect you to do work, you have faculty that expect you to go to class, and for the past four to seven years you haven’t been expected to do a whole lot of anything.

The advisors explained that the basketball players never learned to be students when they were young, and it is difficult for them to become students when they get to college.

**NBA Age-Limit Rule**

The NBA has a great impact on college basketball. One way they have impacted college basketball is by implementing the age-limit rule that has come to be known as the “one-and-done” rule. The advisors that were interviewed had strong feelings about this rule. Some of the advisors did not know the exact wording of the age-limit rule, but they could all see that it had an impact on college basketball. Some liked the idea of the rule, and some hated it completely. Their responses showed that the age-limit rule is something to consider when examining the academic performance of men’s college basketball. What they shared fell into several themes. These were 1) opinions about the rule; 2) length of the rule; 3) influence on Division I basketball; 4) influence on their university; 5) whether it was better to require one year of college or allow them to go professional. I will elaborate on each of these themes.

**Opinions about rule**

The advisors agreed that the NBA’s age-limit rule had an impact on college basketball. Five of the advisors shared that they believed this rule would encourage basketball players to go
to college because they had to go, not because they wanted to go. They continued to share their opinions about the age-limit rule and the athletes that would come to college because of it. Their opinions varied widely. Some advisors thought that the rule had some positive features, while others thought that it was a terrible idea.

A few of the advisors expressed that the rule had some good features. Michael shared that “it was a step in the right direction.” He thought that some time in college would help the athlete to mature. Brandi added that “the age limit is good…giving student-athletes time to mature, and to develop their game further before they go pro.” The advisors explained that this rule would help basketball players get a taste of college, and that might encourage them to stay. Brandi shared that “some of those students may get a taste for college and realize, hey, I might as well stay for a bit longer, help make this team more successful.” Michael said that “you may have a student who comes here and loves the college experience.” He shared that there was a men’s basketball player that was the player of the year for two years, and he could have gone pro, but he did not because he liked college. This sort of thing can happen, though it does not seem to be as likely.

On the other side of the coin, many of the advisors expressed that they did not like the NBA age-limit rule, or they did not see it as beneficial. Lauren, who had worked with a one-and-done player, was very strong in her opinion of the rule, saying “I just loathe the one-and-done.” She did not like that the rule caused players to come into college when they had no intention of staying for more than one year. Cynthia shared that she thought it was just a band-aid. It made the NBA look more like it cared about their athletes without really helping them. Michael added that “more negative can come out of that than experience.” Kirk stated that “it hurts you in every
area unless you play for the National Championship.” Sheryl explained that “I don’t know that I really like the rule.” These advisors did not see any benefit to the NBA’s age-limit rule.

One result of the NBA age-limit rule that the advisors saw was more student-athletes leaving college. Brandi stated that “it does lead to more students leaving.”

Kirk shared that

this is what happens, you are gonna have guys who could be first round draft picks in the NBA out of high school. They’re going to go to some school. They’re going to be eligible for one semester. Second semester they are not going to do anything in school, and then they are going to go to the NBA draft.

Many of the advisors gave examples of basketball players that had left college after one year. Michael had experienced a player leaving after one year at his own university, and he shared that “it was just a formality for him to come here for a year.” In referring to a player that left a different university early, Cynthia said that “what you are doing to that university is not a good thing…he counts against their APR.” Kirk added that the “university just lost two points, and could potentially lose scholarships because that player is not eligible, and he is not coming back.” A one-and-done athlete hurts the team they left if they leave ineligible. Also, after one year they have not acquired many credits, so it is hard for them to imagine coming back to school.

Many of the advisors shared that this rule pushes basketball players who do not care about academics to go to college. Michael explained that “those students are coming in with the mindset that they’re going pro anyway, they’re not going to care.” Lisa shared that “they’re waving millions of dollars, do you think they’re going to go to college and do study tables and homework and read books?” Some of the advisors explained that when student-athletes do not
care about academics, they have to work to keep them eligible instead of helping them to graduate. It becomes the advisor’s job to help the basketball player be able to continue playing basketball based on eligibility. Lauren explained that “it becomes an eligibility game, and that is when we go down the wrong road because it shouldn’t be about that.” Brandi shared that “there is a difference between making sure someone is eligible and graduating someone.” When athletes do not care about their academics it means the academic advisors are asked to help the athletes do the minimum amount academically instead of doing the best they can academically.

When basketball players come in and they do not plan on graduating, the advisors shared that it puts more pressure on them. Michael shared that “it puts more onus and pressure on academic advisors and the resource staff to really advise for eligibility.” He later added that “it can create a lot of academic situations.” He was referring to academic honesty issues. The advisors are pressured to keep the players eligible at all costs, and that can tempt them to help the players cheat by doing their work for them. Lauren explained what she had experienced with a one-and-done athlete:

> It hurts people like me because you have student-athletes that come in knowing that they’re gonna go pro after one year, and their goal is just to get through one year here, and then they know they’re going to go pro. So, I’m running around like a chicken with my head cut off trying to help the student, and then they’re just going to leave anyway. So it creates a lot of stress for people in my position because they’re not there to go to school.

Kirk said that having athletes that will only be there for a year “makes it tough on the academic support services, even the coaching staff, and the university because you’ve got guys here who don’t want to be here.” He later shared that “it puts a lot of stress on everybody.” Academic
advisors may not enjoy helping an athlete academically when that athlete does not care to help themselves academically. Also, if an athlete does not want to be in college, then they are likely to let everyone around them know they are unhappy. That can bring down everyone.

The advisors may not see many positive results from the NBA age-limit rule, but they did not believe coaches would stop recruiting one-and-dones. “If I’m a coach, of course I’m gonna recruit that kid…Isn’t it about wins and losses anyway when you’re making two/three million dollars a year” (Michael). Cynthia said, “it’s all about the money.” It does not really build a program because the athlete turnover is very high, but it can lead to a great year. Michael added that “these coaches are still going to recruit these kids that will be one-and-done because I want a National Championship, get to a final four. It helps the coach earn their money, get bonuses.” Many coaches only see the benefits of recruiting one-and-done athletes because they believe they can help them win games.

Length of rule

The advisors could all agree on one thing. That is that the NBA age-limit rule should require athletes to be older before they can enter the NBA draft. Kirk felt that “if you are going to have it, have it at least three years.” Michael said “it’d probably make more sense if it was another year.” Sheryl added that it “should be they can’t go after one year.” Lisa gave one reason that the rule should be longer. She shared that

when you only have that year, it’s almost like you haven’t been able to hook them yet…if we have them for those two years, two to three years, they’re going to amass enough credits with a chance that when they come back they’ll be able to get their degree in a reasonable amount of time.
Brandi gives more reasons for a longer rule, “staying a bit longer would give them a little more maturity before they go to the NBA as well as help them get a little farther along with their academics.” Lauren was more split on her thoughts about the length of the NBA age-limit rule. She said “that’s really young to go to the NBA, but at the same time some of these kids probably academically cannot make it for four years either…maybe going two years because they’re actually held accountable for their academics.” Often one-and-done athletes will not go to class second semester because they do not need to in order to play basketball. If they were required to stay in college for more than one year, then they would have to focus more on their academics to stay eligible.

Influence on DI basketball

All but one of the advisors believed that the NBA’s age-limit rule does have various influences on Division I basketball. The one who did not believe it would have an affect said it was because the playing floor would still be even across the Division. The other advisors had different reasons for their answer. Lisa said that “even if it impacts one life, to me that’s an impact.” She believed that if the NBA age-limit rule influenced one student-athlete, then it had an influence on all of Division I basketball. Brandi shared that “it has had an impact in terms of the play of college basketball.” Cynthia said, “you’re going to see one kid, Derrick Rose, play one year and that’s it.” Lauren stated that “there is a lot of newspaper coverage. I think it’s not shedding a positive light.” The newspaper coverage she referred to was on how one-and-done athletes were making a joke of being a student. Kirk explained what the affects could be. He shared that “from a PR standpoint, from the educators’ side, I don’t see how it’s a good thing, but from TV revenue and that sort of thing, and the excitement of college basketball it’s a good thing.” It can be very hard to weigh these two opposing sides.
Influence on their university

While most of the advisors believed the NBA age-limit rule would affect Division I basketball, most of them believed that it would not affect the university at which they worked. Two of the advisors shared that it did affect their university because they had experienced one-and-done players. Michael said the rule affected them because “we had one last year…if we had a rule that was two or three years we would have him this year. If they didn’t have that rule, he would have never come here.” Lauren shared that “we had a couple of people who’ve come to school for one year and then go pro.” Most advisors who said it did not affect their university said that it was because they had not had anyone leave after one year, and they did not expect to have any in the future. Kirk shared, “it hasn’t [had an impact], I don’t think, because we haven’t had anybody who was one-and-done.” Lisa added, “is it going to impact us very much at this institution? I would probably say no.” The advisors did not believe that there was an impact on their university if no one left after one year to go to the NBA.

Better one year of college or going professional

The advisors were split on whether basketball athletes should spend one year in college or go directly to the NBA. Two shared that they thought that one year in college was better than none. Lisa stated that “philosophically, I think it is better to have a year of college…A year of credits is better than none.” Nicole agreed that “a year in college is better than no college, and if they choose to leave for whatever reason, just say good luck.” They believed that any college experience would help the student-athletes to be better people. Also, maybe spending a year in college will encourage them to return to college at a later time.

Two advisors would rather have the athletes go directly to the NBA. They did not see one year of college as a benefit to anyone. Cynthia said
it is best for them to go. Those individuals are taking away an opportunity for someone else...I want them to pursue a degree, but quite honestly if that is not their intention, then let their coaches give that scholarship to someone who wants one.

One-and-done basketball players are taking the chance to learn and get a degree away from someone else who can play basketball, maybe not as well, but would want a college degree. Kirk added that

the year in college is not even a year in college...First off, they’re not going to graduate...again it’s not going to benefit them...forcing them to go to school, especially guys you know that are only going to be here one year, doesn’t benefit anybody.

These advisors believed that the one year that a men’s basketball player is in college before they enter the NBA draft is not really a college experience. They do the minimal amount of academic work, and so they do not learn much.

Three other advisors were undecided about what they thought would be better. Michael said, “sometimes I’m like let ‘em go, but other times I’m like they need a college education or they need to at least get a couple of years under their belt.” The advisors believed that what could make the difference is the type of student the athlete would be. Lauren stated

if I knew that that student was the type of person that was just going to come and be a pain in my ass just because he just wants to get through a year, I would rather them go straight to the NBA...but someone needs to develop their education, in some way, shape, or form to prepare themselves, so, I mean, if I can make a difference I want to.
Sheryl added, “I’m kinda on the fence on that one.” These three advisors felt that one year in college could benefit the student-athlete if the student-athlete would let it. If the basketball player tries academically while they are in college, then it was good for them. If they do not work academically, then it will not benefit them.

Solutions

The advisors agreed that men’s basketball has academic issues. The next step was deciding what can be done, given the current circumstances, to increase the academic performance of Division I men’s basketball. This starts with working with individual men’s basketball players to encourage them to perform academically. It continues with what the academic advisors would like to see in the athletic department and what their own office should do to help the basketball players succeed academically. The advisors shared what they would say to an athlete who came into their office to say they did not care about getting a college degree, they just wanted to play basketball. They also shared what they would do in a perfect world to increase the academic performance. Finally, they explained what could realistically be done to help men’s basketball players succeed in the classroom.

What do you say to an athlete?

The academic advisors shared what they would say to a men’s basketball player that came into their office and shared that they did not care about academics, they just wanted to play their sport. Some advisors were very honest in explaining how they would react to a student-athlete that said that. Lauren stated, “well, first, I roll my eyes.” Lisa said that she would check with the coach to see if the student-athlete could realistically make it in the NBA. Once the advisors decided that they would have to talk to the athlete, there were three areas that they said they would cover.
The first area that the advisors would cover with the basketball student would be to say that they appreciate that the student is being honest, and they understand why they would say that. Nicole explained that she would say, “I understand, because a lot of people feel that way.” She shared that many student-athletes would like to focus on their athletics. Kirk said, “well shoot, we get that everyday.” He would let the student-athlete know that they are not alone in what they are feeling. Michael shared that he would say, “I appreciate your honesty.” The advisors would tell the student-athletes that they appreciate what they are saying, and they understand that many student-athletes feel that way.

The second area was encouraging the athletes to be students and do their best at athletics and academics. Michael shared that he would say

I think when you signed your letter of intent to be on a scholarship and play here, you have actually given yourself to the university and you have a sort of a dual role here now to be an athlete, but you need to be a student, and that goes hand in hand.

Lisa would say, “to survive here, you’re going to have to be a student, so let’s figure out how you can best do that.” Cynthia would tell the student-athlete, “this is what a degree can do for you…quote some statistics, and continue to tell them, but it’s your choice.” Lauren would explain to the athlete that “you cannot have one without the other. You can’t do awful in the classroom and expect to play. It just doesn’t happen, not in college.” Academic advisors try to emphasize that the student-athletes need to understand that they have to be both students and athletes while they are at that university.

The final area the academic advisors would cover with student-athletes is that they need to continue to progress toward a degree as long as the student-athlete is at their institution. Lisa
would say, “what classes can we get you through that are going to give you those skills that you are going to very much need?...Let’s make a plan.” Brandi referred to a player who had left early when she said, “we still took all the required courses, and we still gave him academic support, we gave him tutors.” Kirk explained that he would tell the student, “I’m gonna make sure that you’re on track in your studies and you always gonna be in the position to…progress toward your degree.” Nicole shared that “what we’re also trying to do is teach them also to make sure that they’re making progress toward a degree.” The advisors believed that when student-athletes continue to progress they may be more likely to return to college and finish their degree.

In a perfect world

Academic advisors for athletics do not have control of the athletic department. In reality, they have very little say about what happens in their institution’s athletic department. However, there are things that the advisors would like to see happen if they could. They shared what they would do if they had control of the athletic department and if it was a perfect world.

One thing that advisors would like to have in a perfect world is coaches who support what the advisors are trying to do. As mentioned previously, coaches have a great impact on the academic performance of their athletes and the academic advisors’ jobs. Michael stated that “number one, I’d hire a coach that demonstrates, or has demonstrated a commitment to academics…obviously someone who is going to win, too.” Brandi shared that “coaches buying in and support is definitely very important in you making the student-athlete successful.” Cynthia said they would have to “look at what our goals are and make sure that our coaches are in alignment with those goals.” Nicole shared that she would like a coach that would “have them sit until they perform [in the classroom].” The advisors would like to make sure the players are
really students first. If the coach is pushing academics, then the athletes will realize that being a student is important.

Another thing that the advisors would like is the ability to recruit athletes that would do well academically. Cynthia stated that “number one, you have to recruit the right kind of person.” Sheryl said that “I would like to have some say in who maybe has the ability to even come to the institution and be successful.” The student-athletes are not going to do well academically if they do not have the ability to perform at the college level. Lisa said that she would “tell the coaches slightly different people to recruit.” Kirk said he would “bring in more academic students.” Nicole added that “they should never bring in anyone into the college that cannot get through the academic program.” It is unfair to recruit an athlete that is underprepared academically and then ask them to perform at the same academic level as their peers.

The next thing that the advisors would like to do is change the culture of men’s basketball and the attitudes of the student-athletes that play basketball. Cynthia shared that “there has to be a want factor in them.” Kirk said that if “you make the student responsible for their own work, and I guarantee it would change.” He later added he would “change the culture of athletics and the mind state of the sports that you think have difficulty.” Changing the culture could be hard, as Lauren shared: “that’s a team lifestyle. It is what the team knows, it is what they expect; being able to change, that is going to be very difficult for a lot of schools.” It may be hard to change the culture and attitude of men’s basketball, but that is something that the advisors would like to see happen.

A final item that the advisors would want in a perfect world is more academic services. Michael said he would want to “create an environment where academics is number one…getting support staff around.” Sheryl shared that “it’s all about the resources…if you can hook kids up
with learning specialists, and you have unlimited funds for tutoring and things of that nature, you could really help kids be successful.” Lauren said, “I wish I could have someone at every single class for every single guy making sure that they’re there on time, they’re awake, and that they’re doing what they’re supposed to be doing in class.” Many academic services offices work on limited budgets so they cannot offer all the services that they would like to offer. In a perfect world they would be able to have those services.

Realistic options

Academic advisors for athletics do not have control of the athletic department. However, they do have control of the Student Athlete Services Offices, or at least a say in what happens there. It is the one area of the athletic department where the advisors have control. The advisors shared what they could realistically do to increase the academic performance of men’s basketball players. They also shared the advice that they would give other advisors that worked with men’s basketball teams.

The first area that the advisors suggested they could work on is academic services. Lisa suggested that advisors should “think of services that maybe would help them [the basketball players] a little bit more. Like having a writing center, math center, having their academic services closer to where their basketball team practices and has their training room.” Michael proposed that “maybe you can hire better tutors and mentors. Maybe you can create a quiet environment.” Sometimes study tables can get loud. If the staff was better trained to handle times when athletes got out of control, study tables may be quieter. Another possibility would be to have a room where no one is allowed to talk. That may be what some student-athletes need to study. Brandi said what they did was
have tutors that our students meet with. We have learning specialists that our students meet with. They have me. I travel with the team. So on weekday games, I’m with the team on the road and we’re doing study hall on the road.

Sheryl suggested that advisors should make “sure you have a good learning specialist who is willing to sit down with the guys and help them with reading comprehension and note taking, with basics.” Student-Athlete Services Offices may have limited budgets, but they can still work to focus their resources where they will be of the most assistance to the student-athletes.

The next area that advisors said they could work on is communication. It is important for the advisors to get the coaches on their side. Sheryl said that advisors need to “create a culture on the team where academics are supported by the coaching staff, so academics are viewed as important to the team…creating that kind of relationship with your coaching staff is critical.” Nicole shared that advisors need “the coaches to buy into the concept that if there’s no satisfactory progress toward the degree then there’s nobody that’s gonna be on this bench to play.” Lauren added that

a lot of it is going to start with coaches, educating coaches, making sure they understand the type of player that they’re recruiting, what APR is, what it means, being able to retain those people, being able to keep, it’s more than keeping them eligible.

It is also important for the advisors to communicate with the student-athletes. Michael stated that it is important to “build trust and a relationship with that student so they understand you care for their best interest outside of basketball because everyone else in their life is telling them basketball, basketball, basketball.” Brandi said that part of being an advisor is “helping them [student-athletes] understand the importance of going to class and getting their degree is
important.” Kirk said that it is important to pick one of the team leaders to help the team focus on academics, “‘cause if you can get one of your leaders on your side, and say okay man I need your help to influence these young guys, then you know, they’ll help you.” One key player can help to influence the attitude of the entire team. Communication is key.

The advisors also said that to be effective they had to focus what they could do personally. Michael said that advisors should spend time “figuring out what areas you can control and you can fix. Some of it you can’t fix.” There are areas outside of an athletic advisors control such as the attitudes of the coaches and/or student-athletes. Sheryl said that it was important to “make sure that the professors know that you are ethical, and that you’re not asking for favors.” Advisors can show that they are ethical by not asking faculty members to change grades or give student-athletes extensions or extra credit that is not given to the average student in the class. It was also important to interact with and get to know the faculty. Lisa said that “some of it is your personality and your willingness to be flexible and work hard…be creative in ways that you can connect with them.” Kirk explained that it is important to “stay positive, and you stay, what I like to say, on your ground.” He means that the academic advisors need to do what they believe is morally and ethically correct and not let themselves be influenced by anyone else.

Challenges/traps

Advisors try hard to impact the lives of the student-athletes with whom they work. Their job is to help the student-athletes to be well-rounded people, and to help them succeed at whatever university they enter. This is not always an easy job. There are many challenges that the advisors face when trying to do their job. These are the things that Mills (1959) called traps.
Traps are areas that make the role of an academic advisor more difficult. These challenges face all academic advisors for athletics to various extents.

One of the greatest obstacles advisors face is burnout. When asked for some challenges in the field, Sheryl was very direct in saying “burnout…you’re seeing a lot of burnout.” Burnout happens when someone is physically and emotionally weary of doing their job. This happens most often in stressful jobs, which academic advising for athletics can be. Some of the advisors also gave advice for burnout. Nicole said, “some people get tired of it. So try to keep an interest in every year, in new students getting them through unique challenges. I think that’s important.” Michael shared that “I think you find that with a lot of basketball, sometimes football advisors, just trying to keep some kinda balance in your life because it can become all consuming, especially men’s basketball.” The job of being an academic advisor can be very stressful, and it is important for an advisor to find balance in their life so they can avoid burnout.

Another challenge that the advisors face is working with coaches. Michael shared that “it’s hard sometimes dealing with the coaches that don’t care about academics.” Lisa said that a challenge is “coaches that don’t buy in, that don’t feel that you’re needed, don’t include you in anything, don’t make you part of their team.” Brandi added that “coaches are always something that can be a barrier towards academic success.” Lauren shared the same opinion. She said “dealing with certain coaches is a challenge.” Coaches have a large impact on the academic performance of men’s basketball. That can help the academic advisors if the coach supports them, or it can be a great hindrance if the coach puts little emphasis on academics.

Advisors also find the pressure that is put on them from all sides, academic and athletic, to be a challenge. Sheryl said that “you are asked to do so much, and you are only allowed to do so much for students that is within the rules.” The advisors are expected to help all student-
athletes succeed academically, but there are many rules about what the advisors are allowed to do to help the student-athletes. Those rules can make it hard to help the student-athletes. Brandi shared that a challenge is “just that pressure that you have.” Kirk said that every change in the field will “put a lot more pressure on us.” Some of the stress in an advisor’s job that leads to burnout comes from this pressure. He later stated that “they’ve changed the rules but the recruiting and the mind state hasn’t changed.” Sheryl agreed that

   they’ve decreased what students need to be eligible on the front end, and they’ve increased what students need to stay eligible on the back end. So once kids get here, they have to do more to stay eligible…and sometimes I think that’s unfair.

The NCAA has lowered eligibility standards for being accepted into an athletic program, and they have also increased the academic requirements to stay eligible once they are at a university. This means that academic advisors often have to work with student-athletes who are less prepared than ever to do better academically than they are accustomed to doing. These changes can put more pressure on academic advisors.

   Another challenge that the advisors faced was the student-athletes with whom they worked. Michael shared that he has faced some challenges with “some students that had some character flaws.” His university had recently dealt with some athletes that had some academic honesty issues that stemmed from a coach that did not put emphasis on academics. Brandi said that “the attitude of the student-athletes could sometimes be a barrier towards success.” Lauren explained that she found it challenging when she worked with “students that are capable, but choose not to do the work.” If they are choosing to not do the work, there is little that an academic advisor can do. Michael shared that a challenge is “taking an underprepared student who probably shouldn’t be in college and helping them be successful.” Lauren agreed that
students that are “academically underprepared, that’s the greatest challenges I think for a lot of basketball coordinators.” When athletes are underprepared it takes more effort on the advisor’s part to help them succeed academically, and to encourage them to keep trying in the classroom. Kirk proposed that a challenge is “getting the young guys to think outside of the box. Think about life more than just your sport and what you’re doing, what your daily schedule is.” Many basketball players want to focus only on basketball. It is a challenge for academic advisors to help them see beyond their sport.

Summary

The academic advisors had quite a bit to share about the academic side of college athletics. They showed how busy their day can be with all they are expected to do. They are expected to meet with student-athletes, be liaisons, be administrators, check grades and eligibility, and provide support for student-athletes. The advisors described the general characteristics of the student-athletes with whom they work. They explained that student-athletes are students first, have many demands on their time, and they have to be talented to balance their academic and athletic responsibilities. The advisors also shared that that there are several reasons for why student-athletes do not graduate, and the coach has a big impact on the academic success of their athletes. There are many reasons that the advisors proposed that men’s basketball struggles academically. These reasons include the appeal of professional sports, the type of athlete that is recruited, and the culture of youth and collegiate basketball. The advisors also discussed the NBA’s age-limit rule and how it would impact collegiate basketball. They were divided on whether the rule was good, but they did agree that the rule should be longer, and that it does influence Division I basketball as a whole. They suggested ways to increase the academic performance of men’s basketball. The advisors shared that they would explain to their student-
athletes that they had to be students if they wanted to play their sport. The advisors also expressed what they would like to see in a perfect world, and what could be realistically done to increase the academic performance of men’s basketball. Everything that they discussed provided insight into the situation that is happening with men’s basketball and their academic performance.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The academic advisors provided many insights into the academic side of athletics, especially men’s basketball. I will be discussing what the advisors shared in relation to the literature that I found. Using the sociological imagination, I wanted to see the intersection of personal biographies with the public behavior and the history of men’s basketball that helped to shape the academic performance of men’s basketball. I used the insights of the academic advisors to learn more about my personal biography. I would like to be an academic advisor, so what they shared will likely be what I soon experience. I was interested in learning more about the public, which is society, and how that influences men’s basketball. The history is the background of men’s basketball and where it has been historically in relationship to men’s basketball.

There were many topics that the advisors shared that are important to discuss. The literature and the advisors both agreed and disagreed on reasons for the poor academic performance of men’s basketball. I will also compare what the advisors shared about why the general student-athlete does not succeed academically as opposed to why men’s basketball players do not succeed academically. The literature and the advisors agreed that the culture of men’s basketball is unique and it impacts their academic success. Researchers and the advisors also agreed that coaches play a huge role in the creation of the college basketball culture. I found in the literature that men’s basketball brings in millions of dollars and media attention, and the advisors shared that that can lead to more at-risk basketball players getting into a university than athletes in other sports. Another area of consensus between the literature and the advisors was the lure of professional sports. The literature explained that academic advisors act as liaisons, and the advisors shared that can lead to more pressure being put on them. The advisors
mentioned that with men’s basketball they often have to play the eligibility game, which was something that I did not find in the literature. The advisors and scholars both shared how much is done for basketball players. The literature and the advisors both shared that men’s basketball players, who have no intention of graduating, are taking scholarships from student-athletes who do want a degree.

**Understanding the Poor Academic Performance of Men’s Basketball**

The literature has shown that the academic performance of men’s basketball has historically lagged behind other sports. In fact, it falls behind every other sport in all reported academic measures (Hytche, 1999; Lapchick, 2006, 2008; Wieberg, 2007; Wolverton, 2006b). The academic advisors agreed that this has been an issue nationally, though many of them did not see it happen at their own university. Many of the academic advisors that I interviewed elaborated on reasons that men’s basketball players do not succeed academically. The reasons that they shared sometimes agreed with the literature and sometimes diverged from what the literature said. Among the reasons were the chance to play professionally, recruitment of athletes who are underprepared, athletes that transfer (which hurts academic numbers), and the coaching staff. The coaching staff has a large impact on the academic behavior of men’s basketball players.

There were many reasons given in the literature as to why men’s basketball struggles to succeed academically. In most cases, the academic advisors agreed with four of those reasons. The literature proposed that men’s basketball players struggle academically because they are not prepared academically to handle college classes (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Ferris et al., 2004; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Holsendolph, 2006; Siegel, 1994). The advisors agreed that the type of athlete that is recruited in men’s basketball leads to some of the academic issues that are seen
with the sport. It was also suggested in the literature that the basketball players are not encouraged to do well academically (Adler & Adler, 1985; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Lucas & Lovaglia, 2002; Sperber 2000). The advisors shared that this can happen at several levels. They explained that some players are encouraged by their families and coaches to pursue basketball at the expense of academics starting when they are young. Also, the culture of men’s basketball in which these student-athletes live, does not stress academics (Adler & Adler, 1985). Finally, coaches have a great impact on the academic performance of their athletes, and the advisors shared that when the coach does not stress academics, the student-athletes do not succeed as much in the classroom. Both researchers and the advisors shared that the lure of professional basketball hurts the academic performance of men’s basketball. Many of the student-athletes have dreamed about becoming NBA players since they were very young, and that is the only goal they have when they enter college. Researchers shared that student-athletes are often treated like professionals, so they do not feel the need to behave as students (Adler & Adler, 1985, 1989; Gerdy, 2006; Sack & Thiel, 1985). The advisors did not say this directly, but they did refer to the power that basketball has, and how many people in the athletic department are often intimidated by the sport.

Men’s basketball brings in quite a bit of revenue and media attention, which gives it more of a professional feel. One advisor shared that basketball players could be prima donnas compared to other sports’ athletes. The term prima donna was also used in reference to men’s basketball in the literature (Cook, 2003). Using this term shows that men’s basketball players often expect to be treated specially, and that could mean that they do not expect to have to do their own work academically. Researchers and advisors agreed that there was a large time and energy commitment required to play collegiate men’s basketball. The advisors shared how they
thought the time demands on the players are crazy. They also explained that the schedule of games makes it very hard for the student-athletes to get into an academic rhythm. All the time that is required for a men’s basketball player to succeed at his sport makes it harder for him to succeed academically. By the time they can get to their schoolwork, they are often very tired. People rarely do their best work when they are tired. There was also agreement between researchers and advisors on the idea that the youth culture of basketball impacts the academic performance of college basketball players. Many youth basketball players have busy basketball schedules, and they are being watched by college coaches when they are in junior high. They are being taught at a young age that they will succeed through basketball, and they do not need to care about academics. It could be a great culture shock for them when they get to college and they are expected to do well academically.

There were a few areas in which the literature and the advisors differed. There were two reasons that were given by researchers that were not mentioned by the advisors. This could be because the universities I visited were different from the ones visited by the researchers. Also, there could be differences because I interviewed advisors and many of the researchers talked to basketball players. The literature proposed that basketball players often feel that they are treated differently by their professors (Adler & Adler, 1985; Bowen & Levin, 2003). The advisors shared that they believed that most faculty members did not treat the athletes differently. Most of them believed the professors expected the student-athletes to act as students and nothing more. However, the advisors did say there will always be faculty members that prejudge student-athletes based on their previous experiences with players in their classes. It may be possible that the advisors did not know how the student-athletes were treated in class.
Some scholars also suggested that there may be a racial component that leads to the poor academic performance of men’s basketball (Ferris et al., 2004; Lapchick, 2008; Siegel, 1994). This is something that none of the advisors brought up in the interviews. It is possible that the advisors are used to working with student-athletes of various races, and they look at them individually, not by race. It is also possible that the advisors were not as willing to talk about race being an issue because I am white. A few of the advisors did mention that student-athletes who come from poor, inferior schools can struggle more academically. Ferris et al. (2004) shared that poor, inferior schools can sometimes be code for schools where the students are mostly African-American. So there may have been a racial component to what the advisors shared, even if they did not say it directly.

The advisors brought up two more reasons for the academic performance of men’s basketball that were not in the literature. One was the pressure to win in basketball, which was mentioned by most of the advisors. Basketball coaches are paid a large amount of money to win games and that influences how they recruit and how they coach. It can lead them to recruit student-athletes that will find it hard to do well academically at a university. It can also cause them to not stress academics with their athletes. They can pass the pressure of winning onto the student-athletes they coach, and that can hurt the academic performance of those student-athletes. The other reason many of the advisors gave was related to coaching changes. The advisors shared that players often come to a university to play for a coach, not the school. If a coach leaves, many of the players he recruited will also leave. That hurts both the Federal Graduation Rate and APR of that team. This leads to a decrease in the academic numbers that are publicly reported.
The advisors suggested many reasons for why men’s basketball players do not graduate. Some of these reasons were comparable to those given for the general student-athlete’s failure to graduate. Two advisors suggested that the chance to play at the professional level might be more likely to affect a basketball player’s decision to graduate than it would the general student-athlete. Another factor more often associated with men’s basketball is the type of student being recruited. Four advisors said that men’s basketball players sometimes do not graduate because they are underprepared for college academically. Only one advisor mentioned that was a reason for the general student-athlete. In reference to the general student-athlete, both transferring and the coaching staff were mentioned more often. These differences can show a distinction between the general student-athlete and a men’s basketball player. With men’s basketball, the emphasis was more on the chance to play professionally and the type of student that is recruited. These reasons are tied more to the type of student-athlete a men’s basketball player is. They appear to be more likely to come into college with no plan to graduate. With the general student-athlete the emphasis was on the coaching staff and transferring. These reasons are more tied to the culture that is created by the coach and athletes who either leave to play more or to follow their coach. These athletes may come into a university planning to graduate, but things happen to change that.

Some of the reasons given by advisors to explain why student-athletes do not graduate were unique to men’s basketball. One reason was the pressure to win at the college level. Men’s basketball coaches are paid big money to win; in fact they often receive bonuses for winning (Masin, 2007). That pressure influences who they recruit, and how much emphasis the coaches put on academics. The advisors also mentioned that people in the athletic department are often intimidated by men’s basketball. Basketball is a powerful sport with powerful coaches. The
power comes from the millions of dollars that are involved in Division I men’s basketball and the media attention that is received for the sport. Millions of people will tune in to watch who will become the NCAA national champion during “March Madness.” Going against that to increase the academic performance of the players could be difficult because the coaches want their players to be eligible and, therefore, put pressure on academic advisors to make that happen by any means necessary. Many of the advisors alluded to this happening at other universities, without giving specific examples. A final reason mentioned for just men’s basketball was the schedule of play. Basketball has around 30 regular season games; this does not include pre- and post-season tournaments. Men’s basketball teams can have games starting with preseason tournaments in the fall until the National Championship in April. These games can be almost any day of the week, which means the players often miss class several times during the season. This makes it more difficult for them to succeed in the classroom. These reasons all affect the chances men’s basketball players have to do well academically and graduate.

The Culture of Men’s Basketball

Men’s basketball has a culture unlike any other in collegiate sport. Men’s basketball players are steeped in this culture long before they enter college. Many young basketball players aspire to be in the NBA and, if they show talent, they are pushed by their family and coaches to go that direction. As some of the advisors indicated, there are kids who are never told, even by family members, that they can do anything other than basketball. Nothing else is ever presented to them as an option. These young players often join AAU teams. With these teams they travel to play, and they are scouted by college coaches. As Michael said AAU coaches are “sorta prostituting them out through these camps and through AAU tournaments to college coaches.” As young as middle school, college coaches have begun to watch some players. This can go to
the head of a young basketball player. They come to see themselves as great basketball players, and they do not care about academics. Everything academically may be taken care of for them. A couple advisors mentioned that sometimes these kids get through middle school and high school even though academically they should not have. This set of circumstances produces college athletes that have never had to focus on academics and do not think they have to focus on academics.

The youth culture of men’s basketball feeds into the culture that is seen at the college level. Many men’s basketball players enter college with no intention of graduating. They plan to bide their time until they can play professionally. This phenomenon is aggravated by the NBA’s age-limit rule that now offers little option other than to have the players go to college for a year. Combine that with the fact that basketball players may graduate from high school even though academically they should not have, and this leads to student-athletes who are not prepared to perform academically at the college level. These student-athletes are starting out academically behind their classmates, and it can be a real struggle for them to catch up to their peers. This can be especially true if they have never been taught how to be students. These things lead to a culture in men’s basketball where student-athletes put very little emphasis on academics. Many never learn how to be students, and many never aspire to become students.

The culture of Division I men’s basketball is also unique. As Kirk pointed out, they have the budget of football with a lot fewer people. They often have more coaches, graduate assistants, and managers than they have players. This means that many things are done for them, including one-on-one attention in practice, someone to get their equipment, and someone to help make sure they know where they should be. In football, there are so many players that individuals rarely receive a large amount of individual attention from coaches and the media.
There may be some key players that do, but most do not. In basketball, most team members receive individual attention. Likewise, non-revenue, or Olympic sports do not have the budgets of basketball. They may even have to do fundraising in order to be competitive, and they have to work to get fans and possibly even some media attention (Pennington, 2008). They rarely have the same opportunities to play professionally as men’s basketball players have. These differences produce different sport cultures. As Kirk said, these factors can make men’s basketball seem like a “prima donna” sport. The general culture of men’s basketball typically focuses on athletics more than academics. This contributes to the academic numbers that are seen with Division I men’s basketball, which are lower than in any other sport.

Coaches’ Roles in Creation of College Basketball Culture

The culture at the college level is also strongly influenced by coaches. Coaches have a major impact on the academic performance of their athletes. The academic advisors all agreed on that fact. Many shared that if a coach supports and pushes academics, the players will do better in the classroom. If they do not care about or emphasize academics, then the players will be less likely to succeed in the classroom. Student-athletes often have a high regard for their coach. As Cynthia pointed out, players come to play for a coach more often than they come to play for a school. As a result, Kirk indicated that the coach becomes the world to the student-athlete. This means that, whatever the coach stresses, the student-athlete will also be likely to stress.

For coaches who are paid millions of dollars to win games, it may be difficult to focus on academics. In some conferences, basketball can bring in millions of dollars. Men’s basketball budgets have “more than quadrupled” in the twenty years between 1985 and 2005 (Wolverton & Lipka, 2007, ¶10). Teams that make the NCAA tournament get a cut of hundreds of millions of dollars (Whiteside, n.d.). Winning teams bring in money through higher ticket sales and
tournament money. Athletic departments and universities obviously want winning teams. This puts pressure on coaches to win. Coaches often lose their jobs because they are not winning. Rarely do they lose their jobs if their players are not graduating. This leads coaches to bring in athletes that are very athletically talented, but not necessarily academically prepared to be at a university. It also encourages coaches to not stress academics. Once again, if coaches do not stress academics, the student-athletes that play for them are unlikely to see the importance of academics as well.

Coaches exercise a great influence on the role academic advisors can have. Many of the advisors admitted that they can only be as successful as the coaches enable them to be. Academic advisors do not have the power to discipline student-athletes. They cannot make them run more, not start games, or sit on the bench. Only the coaches can do that. Some of the advisors pointed out that taking away the student-athletes’ ability to play their sport is the punishment that leads to the most change. It hits them at the heart of what they want to do. When coaches support the academic advisors, they are willing to discipline the students through these means. If the coach does not support what the academic advisors are trying to do, then it is very hard for the latter to do their jobs. Kirk shared that at that point, you can only rely on your relationships with the student-athletes. Some coaches have so much power on a campus that academic advisors could be intimidated into feeling that they must “help” the student-athletes do better in class through dishonest means. Some coaches are even regarded as celebrities. They are in commercials, have written books, and they appear often in the media. It can be very difficult for an academic advisor to prevail against these coaches. Overall, the coach can make or break the academic advisor’s job.
More at Risk Basketball Players Allowed Into a University

Men’s basketball is a revenue sport on many college campuses with the possibility of bringing in millions of dollars (Whiteside, n.d.). It is also one of the most covered sports in the media, as you can tell by watching ESPN. Coaches are paid millions to win. This is not necessarily true for other sports. Olympic or non-revenue sports do not typically bring revenue into an athletic department. They also usually do not get very much media coverage, if they get any at all. Most women’s sports do not get the media attention that men’s sports do, even if they are revenue sports. This makes men’s basketball different because it is more likely that an at-risk men’s basketball player will be allowed into a university than in any other sport. This is also likely for football because that is a revenue sport that is very visible. An at-risk player is one that does not meet the academic entry requirements for a university, but is admitted as a special case. Special permission has to be obtained for these players to gain admission. A couple of the advisors mentioned that there were more academically underprepared basketball players allowed into college than in other sports.

The Lure of Professional Sports

The NBA has a huge impact on men’s basketball at every level. Kids dream of becoming the next big NBA star. Joravsky (1995) shared that parents were willing to let their kids travel two hours to school each day so that they could play for the best high school team. Parents also dream of their kids becoming professional basketball players. That is often the reason that kids join AAU teams. The athlete and/or their parents have decided on a career path, AAU basketball to college basketball (maybe) to NBA basketball. This career path does not require a college degree. It does not require them to do well academically at any level. Basketball players learn that if they “win for the coaches…they’ll let you get away with almost anything” (Joravsky,
1995, p. 48). Being a basketball star can “help” the player get through high school academically. The hope of playing in the NBA is a big dream that most of these players will not be able to accomplish. Only a small percentage of basketball players have a chance to play NBA basketball.

The link between college basketball and the NBA is very strong. Some of the advisors even referred to college basketball as a minor league for the NBA. Many NBA players were once college basketball players, and oftentimes they did not get their degree before they left college. This is likely to become more prevalent with the age-limit rule the NBA has instigated. Men’s basketball players who wish to go to the NBA now have little choice but to spend at least a year in college before they can enter the draft. Players such as Greg Oden (Ohio State) and Derrick Rose (Memphis) who could have gone to the NBA after high school under the previous age-limit rule, instead spent a year in college. During that year it is possible that they only did the minimum to be eligible in the fall and nothing in the spring (Katz, 2008). They were not in college to do well academically; they were there to bide their time until they could become professional athletes. Would Kobe Bryant or Lebron James have stayed in college if the age-limit rule had been in effect when they came out of college? In all likelihood, they probably would not have. All of the advisors said that they would like the age-limit rule to require the athletes to be older before they are eligible for the NBA draft. They hoped that with another year or two in college, the student-athletes would be more likely to graduate, or at least consider coming back to college when their professional career was over.

Aside from the NBA, men’s basketball players have the chance to play professionally in Europe. This is more of an option than in any other professional sport. The advisors shared that a large portion of their basketball team could possibly play in Europe, and they could make six
digits doing that. This gives men’s basketball players another avenue to take instead of getting a college degree. Europe has also recently become an option for players that have just graduated from high school. Instead of going to college for a year, they can spend that year playing in Europe. Brandon Jennings, is the first person to decide to do that. He had originally agreed to play at Arizona, but he changed his mind partly because he did not have the academic scores to get admitted to Arizona, and he has chosen to play in Europe for a year instead. As Michael shared, it will be interesting to see where that leads. It is possible that more athletes will see that as an option and fewer “one-and-dones” will make their way into collegiate basketball. If this occurs, the chance to play professional basketball in Europe could help the academic performance of Division I men’s basketball. It could help because players who do not want to go to college will instead have the chance to play in Europe for a year. Then there could be fewer one-and-dones in college basketball. However, as the literature shows, many players are not choosing that route (Glier, 2009). Most players are still choosing to spend one year in college before they try to enter the NBA draft.

*Academic Advisors as Liaisons*

Many of the advisors shared that one of their most important roles is to act as a liaison between the students, coaches, and faculty. Many athletic departments do not allow coaches to talk to faculty members. They do not want coaches to pressure faculty members to do anything dishonest for the student-athletes. Therefore, if there is a problem the coach would like to discuss, they have to do it with the team’s academic advisor for athletics. Then the advisor is the one who talks to the professor about the issue. Often professors tell academic advisors about issues and the advisor goes to the coaching staff. That makes the academic advisor the go-between for the professors and the coaching staff. Academic advisors also may talk to professors
on behalf of the student-athletes with whom they work. The student-athletes will come in with problems that the advisor will help them work through. This may include talking to the faculty member or meeting with the student-athlete and the professor. Also, academic advisors for athletics may contact faculty members to check on the student-athlete’s grades or participation.

Being a liaison between athletics and academics can put a great deal of pressure on academic advisors for athletics. Coaches can ask the advisors to do things or ask for things that are not on the level. The advisors did not share personal experiences where this happened, but they did mention that they have heard of it at other universities. Since coaches cannot ask for things from faculty members themselves, they may ask the advisors to intervene. This can put the advisor in a difficult position. Coaches can be very influential in an athletic department, and disagreeing with them may be difficult. On the other hand, doing exactly what they ask could lead to academic dishonesty. It can also be hard for academic advisors for athletics to talk to faculty members. While the advisors interviewed said that the faculty members were for the most part supportive, they all had dealt with faculty members who were not. It can be a challenge to explain to faculty members the constraints placed on the life of a student-athlete, and explain that they really do need to miss class. The advisors have to work with faculty members to make sure the student-athletes do not miss tests or assignments. If a faculty member is not willing to help, it can be very hard for the academic advisor to help the student-athlete succeed in that class. Being a liaison can make the academic advisor’s job more challenging, but it is a necessary role they must fill.

*The Eligibility Game*

When coaches recruit athletes that are not academically prepared for college or do not care about academics, it can become an eligibility game for advisors. As Kirk shared, “when you
deal with basketball, honestly, it is eligibility, eligibility, period.” Coaches brought in those players so they could help the team win games. For them to help the team win games, they have to be eligible to play. The coaches put pressure on the academic advisors for athletics to keep the players eligible. If they are not eligible, often the advisors are blamed, even though it was the student-athlete that did not do the work or did not go to class. Many of the advisors expressed that they wanted their student-athletes to graduate. Sometimes they had to deal with student-athletes that were not going to graduate. They tried to help the student-athlete get as far as they could in college before they left. However, if the student-athlete does not care about academics and doing the work, there is little the academic advisor can do. At that point, they just have to help the student-athlete understand that if they want to play they have to be eligible, and they advise them on how best to do that.

The pressure to keep student-athletes eligible can lead to cases of academic dishonesty. Coaches are paid to win, and they cannot have their star player(s) sit on the bench because they are ineligible. If those same players do not care about academics and they are not going to class and doing their work, it can put pressure on other people to make them eligible. This could mean asking faculty members for extensions on assignments or more time to take tests, treatment that is not typically provided for the average student. It could also lead to finding someone else to do the work for the student-athletes. Advisors could be pressured to ask faculty members to change grades or give student-athletes extra credit that is not available for the average student. When it is all about eligibility, the odds of academic dishonesty may increase.

What is Done for Basketball Players?

There are many services that are provided for men’s basketball players. Most of what is done is also provided for other student-athletes, though many advisors expressed that they spend
more time helping the men’s basketball team academically. The academic advisors for athletics help them schedule their classes around their sport. Someone else orders their books for them. Someone meets with them on a regular basis to make sure they are on the right track. Most of the time freshmen and other student-athletes who are struggling academically are required to do two to ten study table hours. These hours are set aside for them to study so there is no excuse for them to not get their work done. Academic advisors check with faculty members to make sure the student-athletes are getting their work done and to find out what their grades are. Advisors recommend when the student-athletes should get tutors, and sometimes they help find tutors for the student-athletes. All of this illustrates that academic advisors do as much as they can to help student-athletes, including men’s basketball players to do well academically. The advisors all expressed that they want the student-athletes they work with to graduate. It can be very trying for them when the athletes do not graduate because they do not put as much effort into their academics as they can. It can be difficult when the advisors feel like they are doing more to help the student-athlete succeed than the student-athlete does for himself.

Men’s basketball players are rarely held accountable for their academics. If they do poorly then someone else takes the blame. This person is often the academic advisor that works with the team. They are the people that the coaches turn to in order to keep the players eligible. If they are not doing well academically, the advisors are expected to do more. This is not always the case. When coaches support academics and are willing to punish their players when they do not perform academically, then some of the accountability falls on the player. When coaches will not punish the players by making them run or sit the bench, then there is nothing to keep the players accountable. It becomes the advisor who is accountable for the academic performance of
the men’s basketball players. This shows again how the coach can impact the academic performance of student-athletes and the role of the academic advisors for athletics.

_Taking Scholarships_

When a basketball player comes into a university with no intention of graduating, they are often taking a scholarship away from someone who wants a college degree. Cynthia gave this as a reason that she would rather men’s basketball players go straight to the NBA instead of spending a year in college. College can be very expensive. Some of the advisors shared that some student-athletes do not graduate from their university because they cannot afford to attend once their scholarships expire. For some people, an athletic scholarship may be their only chance to get into college. When a basketball player who is amazingly athletic, but has no intention of getting a college degree is given a full ride scholarship, that chance is taken away from someone who wants to graduate. This could be seen as unfair to the student who would like a degree.

_Summary_

The advisors of men’s basketball addressed many important issues regarding their athletes. Much of what they said agreed with what I had found in the literature. I found it interesting how much focus was put on the culture of men’s basketball both in the literature and by the advisors. The advisors shared that the big differences between the academic performance of men’s basketball and the average student-athlete is the culture of men’s basketball. The basketball culture also does not put much emphasis on academics, and that starts in youth basketball. Joravsky (1995) found that William and Arthur started focusing more on athletics as they began high school. Planning on becoming an NBA player seems to be part of the men’s basketball culture. The players may not see the need for an education because they think they are going to make all the money they need being a professional basketball player. The advisors and
researchers mentioned the importance of the coach in creating the culture and the coach’s impact on the academic performance of the student-athletes. The pressure that is put on college coaches to win is enormous, and that impacts how the coaches see academics. That in turn changes how the players focus on academics. The culture of basketball is unique, and it has not focused on academics for a long time. It is this culture that makes the role of an academic advisor more challenging. It forces the advisors to advise for eligibility. They have to work with men’s basketball players that do not want to be in college and try to keep them eligible. The advisors are put in a position where they have to act as a liaison between the coaches and faculty members to try to keep the players eligible. This culture is also hurting students that would like to get a college degree, but do not have the same athletic talent as the student-athletes that are getting scholarships to play basketball when they have no intention of graduating. It can be a frustrating system in which the academic advisors work, and the root of it all is the culture of men’s basketball. Changing the culture could prove to be a very difficult task.
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

To increase the academic performance of men’s basketball, the culture of men’s basketball has to change. The issues with men’s basketball all seem to come down to the culture of the sport, which does not value academics. The lack of a focus on academics seems to happen at every level of the sport and with the coaches as well as players. This change has to happen at all levels, starting with the NBA all the way down to youth basketball. Many of the changes have to happen at the collegiate level where the NCAA, college presidents, athletic directors, and coaches have the control. Whatever is done has to be across the board. If only a handful of universities make changes, they will suffer for it. The top players and coaches will just avoid going to those universities. The changes have to be for all universities.

How to Change the Culture

To change the culture of men’s basketball it is important to start at the top. The NBA influences every level of basketball. Children dream of becoming the next NBA star. The NCAA is sometimes considered a minor league for the NBA. DeCourcy (2008) explained how whatever happens in the NBA tends to run downhill to the NCAA. Therefore, to change the culture of men’s basketball, the NBA has to have some involvement. There are several ways that the NBA could help to increase the academic performance of collegiate men’s basketball. One way is to change the age-limit rule. This could be done by requiring athletes to be at least two years removed from high school. That would possibly make the student-athletes more accountable for their academics. They would have to be eligible for three semesters instead of one. The age-limit rule could also be changed by making it more like baseball, where the athletes can either choose to go to the draft directly from high school or wait three years after high school. With that, if the athletes really do not want to go to college, they would not feel that they have to go. If they do
choose to go to college, then they have to make an effort to stay. The NBA should also be more willing to work with the NCAA. DeCourcy (2008) shared that the relationship between the two groups has not been that great. Just having better communication between the two levels could help to increase the academic performance of men’s basketball. Finally, if the NBA would push succeeding academically while athletes are in school, be that college or before, men’s basketball players may be more successful academically. They could do this by having players and coaches speak to those groups and express the importance of an education. They could give a benefit to athletes who have a college degree. I doubt they would do that, but it could help the NBA too. Players with college degrees could be more mature and less likely to do something to embarrass the league.

The next level down is the NCAA. The NCAA makes the rules for college basketball. They choose eligibility rules and through that they can strongly impact the academic performance of men’s basketball. Several of the advisors expressed that some of the difficulties they faced were a result of lowered academic standards to get into college coupled with increased academic standards to stay eligible. These are things under the NCAA’s purview. They could increase the academic performance of men’s basketball by increasing the academic standards to get into college. That would lead to student-athletes that are more academically prepared for college work. It could also lead to student-athletes focusing more on academics at younger ages. The NCAA could also impose harsher punishments on teams that do not perform academically. The threat of losing a scholarship or two has not seemed to make much of a difference. Taking away tournament eligibility and NCAA standing could possibly be more effective. Finally, the NCAA could put a salary cap on college coaches. This is something that they are considering. If they find they can legally do this, it could be very helpful. With less
money at stake, the coaches may feel freer to push academics instead of just winning. However, the NCAA seems to be intimidated by men’s basketball. They have rarely given the harshest punishments that they could. Myles Brand seemed to have more of an impact on college athletics when he was a university president at Indiana than he now has as the president of the NCAA. The NCAA knows that its money comes from the member schools. They do not want to push anyone away. This limits the power that they have over collegiate athletics.

At the individual college level both the college president and athletic director can affect the academic performance of men’s basketball. As mentioned in the literature, college presidents now have more of a say in the NCAA. They could push the suggestions that were previously stated for the NCAA. Also, the college president has the ultimate say at their university. It could be a challenge for them to go against the athletic department, but they can do it. The presidents could limit the at-risk athletes that they allow into their university. Limiting at-risk players could lead to more men’s basketball players that are academically prepared for college. The presidents could also put more pressure on the athletic department to increase the academic performance of the men’s basketball team. College presidents can punish the athletic department by withdrawing funds; most athletic departments would struggle without money from the university. The athletic director can also limit the number of at-risk players they allow in their program. Additionally, the athletic directors can give more power to academic advisors, so that their suggestions have more weight in the department. Finally, it is the athletic director that hires the coaches. They could make a point to hire coaches who would focus more on the academic performance of the student-athletes with whom they work.

It has been expressed time and again the importance of coaches to the academic performance of men’s basketball and the success of academic advisors for athletics. Having a
coach that supports academics would help the team culture to focus more on academics. Since
the coach has such an impact on the job of academic advisors, it would help if the advisors had
some say in who is hired as a coach. Advisors could be invited to participate in the interview
process, so they can ask prospective coaches about their views on academics. Their opinions
could also have some weight when it comes time to decide who to hire. Academic advisors have
to work closely with coaches and have good communication with them, so it would make sense
that they would have some say in who is hired.

Another way to have coaches help support and create a culture on their team that focuses
on academics is to hold the coaches accountable for the academic performance of their team.
This could mean including a bonus for coaches that end a semester with all of their players
eligible. It could also include having a punishment if a certain percentage of players are not
eligible. It is important that coaches win, but it should be just as important that their student-
athletes do well academically. There should be more equivalent benefits for winning and keeping
players eligible. Also, if coaches are fired for not winning enough, they should also be fired for
not keeping enough players eligible. They are working at a university. They should work to
support the goals of that university, which is to help students, including student-athletes, to work
toward a college degree, and become well-rounded citizens. If coaches were held more
accountable for the academic performance of their basketball players, then they would recruit
athletes that were better prepared academically for college and less likely to be one-and-done.

Another way to change the culture of men’s basketball is to make the student-athletes
more accountable at the college level. One advisor guaranteed that doing this would change the
culture and increase the academic performance. Currently, quite a bit is done for men’s
basketball players. If they do not do well academically, they are often not the ones that are
blamed. The advisors are blamed because it is their job to help the student-athletes academically. The system is blamed for the poor academic performance of some players. If the student-athletes were held accountable for doing well academically, then they would need to do better. It would be interesting to see how basketball players would perform academically if there was no one to help them at all, and if they were benched if they did not keep a certain GPA. Some players may do better in that setting, some might do worse because they truly need that support. It would not be fair for student-athletes that were recruited, even though they should not be in college, to not have any help once they get there. It would help most if there were consequences for not going to class and getting work done. This is a good way to keep the student-athletes accountable. For men’s basketball players, the most effective punishment is to take away their sport by making them sit the bench or not start. These punishments would have to come from the coach. That requires a coach that supports academics as well as the advisors. It also requires good communication between the academic advisors and coaches.

Men’s basketball players could also be held more accountable for their academics by having it in their contract with the school that they would pay back their scholarship money if they do not graduate. This is an idea that I have had for awhile and it was also brought up by an advisor. Cynthia said, if they do not graduate, “we want our money back.” Many of these athletes are getting tens of thousands of dollars to go to college. They are getting their college paid for, so they could get a degree for free. Many people struggle to pay for college. Some people cannot even go to college because of the cost. If players were required to pay back whatever money they received if they did not graduate, perhaps more players would focus on graduating. This would help increase academic numbers. It would also help the athletic department because they would be getting scholarship money from basketball players that left early. Those student-athletes could
leave to play professionally, and they most likely would be making plenty of money to pay back the money they received. There would be fewer athletes that just left because they were not doing the work. They would want to do the work so they would not have to pay.

There could be a clause in the contract that allows the student-athletes to transfer colleges if there is a coaching change, and if they do not graduate from there, they would only have to pay for the money they received from the college. Additionally, there should be a clause that excludes athletes that have to leave the university for personal emergencies. If there were more consequences for not graduating, then more men’s basketball players may make that a priority. It would also encourage one-and-done athletes to find another path other than college basketball. This could open up more scholarships for student-athletes that want to get a college degree.

The influence of the culture of collegiate men’s basketball truly starts when the players are young. This became clear when a couple of the advisors mentioned that sometimes basketball players are never told that they can do anything else by anyone, not even their families. This is what Joravsky (1995) witnessed as he did research for *Hoop Dreams*. One way to change the culture may be to introduce someone at the youth level who can inform the youth that they can be more than basketball players. Just putting the idea in their heads may help to increase the academic focus. Also, it may help for AAU teams to have academic advisors, and/or tutors that meet with the players and travel with the team to help them with their academics. If they’re traveling during the summer when there is no school, the advisor can still be there teaching them good time management and studying skills.

Junior highs and high schools can also have academic advisors for their athletic teams. Some high schools already have this service for their student-athletes (Mader, 2003). The sooner that the idea of academics can get into the mind of male basketball players, the more likely they
will see that as an option. This may seem like it is not something that collegiate academic
advisors for athletics can impact. However, they could be the ones to suggest to the AAU and
schools that academic advisors are important, necessary even. Maybe university programs could
“adopt” teams and teach them the importance of academics and study skills. It might also be a
good idea to have NBA players and/or college coaches go to visit teams and stress how
important an education is. However, that may seem like the university is trying to recruit, so that
would have to be done with sensitivity. Overall, just having someone at the youth level that is
telling the kids that academics are important and that they can be more than just basketball
players may help to change the collegiate culture of men’s basketball to focus more on
academics.

Future Research

This research has shown that there are several areas that could be examined more closely.
One area is the effect of the one-and-done athlete. This can be examined several ways. One way
would be to interview athletes, such as Greg Oden and Derrick Rose, that chose to enter the
NBA draft after one year of college. It would be interesting to see if they found any value in their
one year in college, and if they ever truly considered staying. Another group to interview would
be student-athletes that could have entered the NBA draft after one year of college, but chose not
to do that. Why did they choose to stay? Do they go on to graduate, or do they still leave early?
Also, coaches who have had one-and-done athletes, such as Lute Olson, could be interviewed.
They could provide insight into whether they knew the athlete was going to leave when they
recruited them, and if they ever encouraged the student-athlete to stay in college. Finally, a
quantitative study could be done that examines whether the number of men’s basketball players
leaving college after a year, or just early, has increased since the rule was implemented.
Another area to examine would be the influence of academic advisors on the academic performance of men’s basketball players. This can be done by interviewing current and former men’s basketball players. They could share how the academic advisors impacted their views on academics and how they treated their academic responsibilities. Research could also be done comparing the academic performance of men’s basketball players at universities with large academic services offices and those with small offices.

It has been shown that the culture of collegiate men’s basketball starts at the youth level. Youth basketball could be examined more closely. I found very little research on AAU basketball and its relationship to academics. It could be interesting to compare the academic performance of youth basketball players that are on an AAU team, and those that only play for their school. Research could also be done to examine the attitudes of youth basketball players toward academics. These players could be interviewed so they can give insight into what they think about their sport and academics, to learn where their focus lies.

**Summary**

The sociological imagination is used by researchers to find the intersection between personal biographies and social history. What I have found is that the academic performance of men’s basketball influences the lives of many people from student-athletes to academic advisors. The personal biographies that have been impacted by the academic performance of men’s basketball include athletes that have chosen to leave college early and advisors that have worked to help the student-athletes succeed academically. These individuals live within a society that has helped to create a culture in men’s basketball from the NBA down to youth basketball that puts little emphasis on academics. By finding this intersection, I have completed my intellectual journey (Mills, 1959). I have examined what academic advisors for athletics do, and how the
academic performance of men’s basketball impacts their jobs and lives. With this knowledge, I have become even more interested in pursuing advising as a career. The academic performance of men’s basketball is a serious issue with no easy solutions. As with many things in society, change takes time and people who are willing to fight for change.
REFERENCES


Halley, J. (n.d.a). European game may be option for hoops star. *USA Today*, Retrieved February 17, 2009 from Academic Search Complete.

Halley, J. (n.d.b). Traveling the country, Hamilton takes steps toward college, NBA. *USA Today*, Retrieved February 16, 2009 from Academic Search Complete.


APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Directions: Please do not put your name on this survey. Answer each of the questions to the best of your ability.

Please answer each of the following

Are you a?   ☐ Male   ☐ Female

With what race do you identify yourself?   ☐ White   ☐ Black   ☐ Latino   ☐ Other

What is your age in years? _______

How many years have you been an academic advisor for athletics? _______

How many years have you worked with men’s basketball players? _______

What other teams have you worked with in the past? ___________________________________

Do you work with any other teams currently?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, what other teams?__________________________

Have you worked at any other Universities?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, what other universities? _________________________

What degree(s) do you hold? ___________________________
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Overview

1. How did you become an academic advisor?
2. What would you say your job is as an academic advisor?
3. What are some measures for academic success?
4. Which is the most effective way of measuring academic success?
5. What do you think of when you hear the term student-athlete?
6. Do you believe more of the participants in your program are student-athletes or athlete-students? What is the emphasis athletics or academics?
7. What is the graduation rate of the student-athletes at (insert university)?
8. What do you believe is the most common reason student-athletes do not graduate?
9. What are the expectations of student-athletes in terms of their athletics and academics?
10. Do you believe too much is asked of student-athletes?

Men’s basketball specific

11. Why do you believe men’s basketball is behind other sports in regard to graduation rates and the APRs?
12. On average, what percentage of your basketball players graduate?
13. What are factors contributing to them not graduating?
14. How many of the basketball players in your program have the goal of making it to the NBA?
15. On average, how many basketball players from your program make it to the NBA?
16. In your opinion, is it better for a student to come to college for one year or go straight to the NBA?
17. Are you familiar with the NBA’s age-limit rule?
18. What do you think of this rule?

19. How has this rule affected this university’s basketball program?

20. What affect do you think this rule has on DI college basketball?

21. Do you believe that this rule will encourage basketball players to go to college because they “have to?”

22. What do you think about that?

23. How do you think the NBA age-limit rule will impact college basketball? Why?

24. What do you say/do for athletes who are only there to play sports and do not want a college education?

**What to do/other**

25. What can be done about the academic performance of men’s basketball players?

26. If you could do anything to increase academic performance, what would you do?

27. Do you have any other comments on these topics?

**The academic advising field**

28. What are some challenges in your field?

29. What are some challenges specific to/at [insert university name]?

30. Do you have any advice for someone who wants a job in this field?
APPENDIX C: HSRB APPROVAL

August 12, 2008

TO: Megan Diehl
HMSLS

FROM: Richard Rowlands
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H09T013GE7

TITLE: The Academic Performance of Division 1 Men’s College Basketball: Views from Academic Advisors for Athletics

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of August 11, 2008, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on August 7, 2009. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), please send a request for modifications immediately to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, in writing (fax: 372-6916 or email: hsrb@bgsu.edu) upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/ Modifications:
Stamped original consent form is coming to you via campus mail.

c: Dr. Nancy Spencer

Research Category: EXPEDITED I7
APPENDIX D: CONTACT EMAIL SCRIPT

Dear ____________,

I am a Master’s student conducting thesis research on the relationship between athletics and academics as it relates to college men’s basketball players. It is common knowledge that men’s basketball comes in last of all college sports when looking at academic performance in terms of their graduation rates and academic progress rates. My study attempts to gain insight into why this is happening. I also would like to learn if the new NBA age limit rule will have any impact on this occurrence.

As an academic advisor for men’s basketball you have invaluable insight into the academic life of men’s basketball players. I would like to interview you face-to-face for my study. The interview can be scheduled at your convenience and it should last around an hour and a half. The interview will focus on the general relationship between academics and athletics, more specific questions about how this relationship works with men’s basketball players, the NBA age-limit rule, and other questions as they arise. Only the researchers will have access to the information from the interview, and any reference to you will be anonymous.

This is a great opportunity for you to have your voice be heard on these issues. Also, with the completion of this study we hope to have a better understanding of what is causing men’s basketball to fall behind other sports. With this understanding we can work to reverse this trend.

If you decide that you would like to participate please email me back at mldiehl@bgsu.edu. Thank you for considering to participate in this study. I look forward to working with you.

Thank you,

Megan Diehl

If you have any questions feel free to contact my advisor or myself at any time. Email will work the best.

**Investigator:** Megan Diehl  
Email: mldiehl@bgsu.edu  
Phone: (419) 372-6900

**Advisor:** Dr. Nancy Spencer  
Email: nspencer@bgsu.edu  
Phone: (419) 372-6927

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).
APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed consent form

Bowling Green State University
Informed Consent for Research Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: The academic performance of Division I men’s college basketball: Views from academic advisors for athletics

Investigator: Megan Diehl

Purpose- The purpose of this study is to gain the insight of the people that work the closest with men’s basketball players’ academic performance, the academic advisors for athletics. Their insight will be used to help understand why basketball teams have the worst academic records, what can be done to change that trend, and how the new NBA age limit rule will impact men’s college basketball.

Procedure- You will be asked to fill out a short survey about your demographic information. Once you have finished the survey the interview will be conducted. The interview will include questions on general student athlete’s academics, questions specific to the academics of men’s college basketball, the NBA age limit rule, and wrap-up questions. The entire interview should take approximately an hour to an hour and a half. If you consent the interviews will be tape-recorded. Any recordings will be deleted once the thesis is completed. A transcript of your interview will be sent to you for clarification purposes and to give you a chance to add any additional comments.

Risks- There are minimal risks to participating in this study.

Benefits- This study will be used to help members of college athletic departments respond to the NBA age-limit rule. It will also help further the understanding of what can be done to counter the poor academic records of men’s college basketball teams.

Confidentiality- Your participation in this study is confidential. Only the investigators will have access to the tape recordings, transcripts, surveys and any other data. No one in your athletic department will ever see any of the information without your permission. Also, your institution’s name will not be identified in any of the results that are published.

Voluntary Participation- Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate in this study at any time, your decision will not affect your relations with your athletics department or any individual involved with the research. If you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without any affect on your relationship with the investigators.
Questions: Before signing this form, please feel free to ask any questions on any aspect of this study.

If you have any questions about the study after you leave here you may contact the investigator or her advisor.

Investigator: Megan Diehl
Email: mldiehl@bgsu.edu
Phone: (419) 372-6900

Advisor: Dr. Nancy Spencer
Email: nspencer@bgsu.edu
Phone: (419) 372-6927

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).

I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice. I also understand that I can ask questions about any of the procedures.

Finally, I have been informed that the information about me obtained during the course of this study will be kept confidential unless I consent to its release.

I have read the informed consent document, and all of my questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant __________________________ Date: ________________

Please initial an option:

_____ You may quote me unconditionally, if you use a pseudonym

_____ You may quote me conditionally after I have reviewed the transcript

_____ You may not quote me.

Would you like to receive a copy of the findings?  □ Yes  □ No
If yes, please fill out the address you would like the findings to be sent to below:

____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________