Integration and Experience of International Student-Athletes at NCAA Division I Institutions

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This dissertation titled
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Institutions

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Abstract

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Integration and Experience of International Student-athletes at NCAA Division I Institutions

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The purpose of this qualitative research study was to analyze and develop an in-depth understanding of the integration and experience of international student-athletes at National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I institutions in the United States. International student-athletes who participated in this study were not born in the U.S., and English was not their native language. An online questionnaire that contained 36 questions was emailed to international student-athletes at randomly selected NCAA Division I institutions. A total of 48 international student-athletes, including nine interviewees, from nine NCAA Division I conferences completed the online questionnaire. One-on-one interviews were conducted with international student-athletes who expressed their willingness to participate in the interviews. In-depth information was collected from the one-on-one interviews to better understand the challenges that international student-athletes faced during their time in the U.S., as well as the factors that eased their integration to the campus life in the U.S. The research data aligned with five main themes regarding the integration and experience of international student-athletes in Division I:

- Motivations.
- Recruitment process.
Adjustment and integration.

Development of international student-athletes.

Areas of improvement from participants’ perspectives.

Results revealed that the recruitment process of international student-athletes, which was different from that of domestic student-athletes in terms of the initial contacts from the coaches, the start of the recruitment process, the campus visits, as well as some recruiting advantages. This research also uncovered some specific challenges that international student-athletes might face such as the different educational and athletic systems, the balance between academics and athletics, the relationship with coaches and teammates, cultural differences and other challenges in life. Regardless of the challenges and difficulties during the adjustment, most participants valued and appreciated the opportunities of being student-athletes in the U.S. This research also provided constructive recommendations to athletics personnel to create the best possible environment for international student-athletes to excel in both academics and athletics. Recommendations for future international student-athletes were also highlighted based on the research data shared by interviewees.
Dedication

To my parents, and my grandparents.

&

To the special someone who has been the epitome of everything I’ve ever looked for, and has made me a better person than I thought I could ever become.
Acknowledgments

My dissertation will not be completed without the help or support from many people, who have inspired me throughout my academic journey, as well as in many aspects of life. When I am making every effort to better myself, these people are all out there with me, in different ways. All the people I love and care about, all the people I want to keep in my life and hopefully I can stay in theirs, I could not thank them enough.

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As I am about to earn a doctoral degree, I would like to thank Ohio University for being my second home. It is the place where I have earned two master’s degrees, and where I grow from a Bobkitten to a Bobcat. It means a lot to me. During the years I have spent at Ohio University, I attended three colleges for my graduate studies: the College of Business for my MBA degree, the College of Health and Science for my MSA degree, and the Patton College of Education for my Ph.D. I have received sufficient resources
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enhanced my desire to learn, and more importantly, we care about each other like a family.

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Chapter 1: Background and Introduction

According to Leask (2004), internationalization in higher education usually focuses on the movement of students, such as attracting international students to come to study in the United States, or encouraging domestic students to study abroad. The development of communication technology provides opportunity for distance learning, increasing the mobility of students from all over the world (Haan & Sherry, 2012). Given an increasing number of international students have been attracted to pursue higher education in the U.S., more attention has been paid to this student population, as well as the maintenance and development of programs and services that help international students have positive learning and living experiences on campus in the U.S. (Chow, 2012).

Intercollegiate athletics plays a significant role in higher education by enhancing student development through athletics involvement and bringing extra benefits to institutions in different ways (Duderstadt, 2003). Within the scope of internationalization in higher education, the global development of intercollegiate athletics is demonstrated by the increasing number of international student-athletes (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000; Zgonc, 2010). Especially in the last three years, the number of international student-athletes in all three divisions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) reached 15,600 in the academic year of 2013-2014, and increased to 18,366 in the academic year of 2015-2016; during the 2016-2017 academic year, there were 19,045 international student-athletes competing at NCAA affiliated institutions (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2014; 2016; 2017).
Current literature in higher education neglects the combination of both internationalization and intercollegiate athletics, not to mention a focus on the experience of international student-athletes (Lee & Opio, 2011). International student-athletes, often motivated by economic reward, opportunity of experiencing different cultures, and advanced sports training, pursue both academic and athletic excellence in the higher education institutions in the U.S. (Magee & Sugden, 2002). The purpose of this research study is to analyze and develop an in-depth understanding of the integration and experience of international student-athletes who are enrolled at NCAA Division I institutions.

**Statement of the Problem**

Increased attention has been paid to international students in general regarding their adjustment to college life and their overall experiences in the U.S. (Popp, Love, Kim, & Hums, 2010). However, as a special group of international students, international student-athletes have received limited attention. Given the fact that the number of international student-athletes attending NCAA Division I institutions has increased from 3,515 in 1999-2000 academic year to 19,045 in 2016-2017 academic year (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017), more specialized research about the adjustment process of international student-athletes and their overall experiences in both academics and athletics is needed.

As a special group of international students, international student-athletes must face additional difficulties and challenges than their domestic student-athlete counterparts, such as overcoming language barriers, understanding and fitting into the
educational system, adjusting to cultural differences, and so on (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). These difficulties and challenges will also affect the emotions and personalities of international student-athletes (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). Focusing on the experiences of international student-athletes will result in gaining a better understanding of the challenges that international student-athletes experience in their college life; and with the intentional focus on the experiences of international student-athletes, adequate support and services could be provided to international student-athletes during their adjustment process (Pirosca, 2011).

However, there has been limited attention paid to the experiences and satisfaction of international student-athletes during their campus life in the U.S., making it difficult to offer sufficient support and resources at the institutional level (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Furthermore, without sufficient implementations to better support and serve international student-athletes, it can be difficult for this group of students to fully integrate into college life without challenges. These challenges are likely to impact their retention, and the failure of an institution to keep outstanding international student-athletes might negatively affect athletic performance (Schulte & Choudaha, 2014).

**Significance and Purpose of the Study**

Intercollegiate athletics plays a significant role in higher education by enhancing student development through athletics involvement (Vanover & DeBowes, 2013). Intercollegiate athletics benefit students in terms of providing enjoyment via participation in sports events, and offering the opportunities for students to positively compete in a learning environment (Kontaxakis, 2011). Students can also enhance their spirit of
teamwork and sense of belonging from participating in athletics competitions (Duderstadt, 2003).

In terms of revenue generation, extraordinary athletic performance helps to attract public attention, sponsorships and enhance institutional reputation. Outstanding athletic programs and strong institutional reputation can also attract both outstanding student-athletes and non-athlete students (Segelman, 1995; Toma & Cross, 1998).

Role of international student-athletes. International student-athletes attend higher education institutions as a special group of international students, as they are required to fulfill additional responsibilities that involve representing the varsity teams in athletic competitions as athletes. Sometimes there is a lack of domestic student-athletes being available for coaches to recruitment. For example, while most standout domestic student-athletes already committed to big programs in large institutions, the next available domestic student-athletes do not meet the needs of coaches from smaller institutions (Jara, 2015). In this case, in order to improve the team performance and to create a winning program, coaches would look for outstanding international student-athletes to recruit (Jara, 2015).

An increasing number of international student-athletes are pursuing their college degrees and participating in college sports at universities in the U.S., particularly at the NCAA Division I level (Love & Kim, 2011; NCAA, 2006; NCAA, 2010). Although the current population of international student-athletes does not account for a large percentage of the total population of student-athletes in the U.S., the percentage of international student-athletes is particularly high in certain sports. For instance, according
to the 2016-2017 demographic report published by the NCAA, the top five sports that have the largest percentage of international student-athletes in all NCAA divisions are tennis, ice hockey, squash, skiing, and golf. To be specific, more than 20% of collegiate tennis players are international student-athletes; more than 1,000 international ice hockey athletes are competing in NCAA; for skiing and squash, although there are less than 150 international student-athletes for either sport, the percentages of international student-athletes in both sports are larger than 12%; the number of international student-athletes playing golf accounts for 10.3% of the total of all golf athletes in NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017). The top five sports that have the largest proportion of international student-athletes competing at the Division I level are synchronized swimming, gymnastics, water polo, field hockey, and rowing (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017).

As a part of international students in general, international student-athletes have enhanced the diversity on campuses by providing opportunities for domestic non-athlete students and domestic student-athletes to communicate and interact with talented individuals from other countries and backgrounds, as well as to learn from each other in the intercultural setting (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; McMurtrie, 2001; Stewart, 2013). The multicultural communications with international students in class and in extracurricular activities also change domestic students’ perceptions regarding the stereotypes of international students (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999; Pirosca, 2011). International students would also add value to the potential talents
in the U.S. after graduation, by achieving outstanding academic performance, and bringing different cultural aspects to research and teaching (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002).

Particularly for international student-athletes, who have to fulfill additional responsibilities in athletics, their increasing presence with overseas experience might improve the athletic performance by enriching the team environment and enhancing the spirit of teamwork (Weston, 2006; Wilson & Wolverton, 2008). Domestic student-athletes and athletic personnel could learn from international student-athletes about different cultures and backgrounds, enhancing the cultural sensitivity within the athletic department as well as being helpful for international student-athletes to adjust to campus well (Duchesne, Bloom, & Sabiston, 2011). In addition, developing suitable coaching strategies to embrace cultural diversity benefits the personal growth of both international student-athletes and domestic student-athletes (Duchesne et al., 2011).

When international student-athletes fit in the college life well, they will be happy and satisfied, and it will be easier for them to maintain the high level of performance in athletics, improving the overall performance of the athletic programs (Weston, 2006). The improvement of athletic performance could eventually enhance institutional reputation and attract more alumni giving (Etzelumeller, 2014). Since students are willing to pay for higher tuition to study at institutions with high reputation in either academic or athletics, the improved athletic performance could attract prospective applications (Smith, 2012). The increased fund raising generated from alumni giving and tuition could be used for marketing campaigns in athletics and international cooperation in academics, such as hosting athletic tours or establishing cultural exchange programs (Smith, 2012).
As said, international student-athletes play a significant role by improving the athletic performance, enhancing institutional reputation, as well as increasing the diversity both in the athletic teams and on campus (Lee & Opio, 2011; Weston, 2006). After graduation, if international student-athletes return to their home countries, the skills they have developed or enhanced, the experiences they share with people could be regarded as a good way to promote college sports and attract more global audiences to watch the college game broadcasting (Pirosca, 2011).

**Understanding the experience of international student-athletes.** During the adjustment process to college life, international students tend to face more challenges than domestic students, particularly in academics, social life, as well as psychologically (Andrade, 2006; Olivas & Li, 2006; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Weber, 2007). In addition to the common challenges for international students in general, international student-athletes represent their institutions in competitive college sports. It is important to develop a deeper understanding of such a special group of students, particularly about their experience of being both international students and student-athletes, starting from their recruitment, including how they overcome the difficulties in the adjustment process, how they fulfill their responsibilities as both students and athletes, and how their development in different aspects prepare them for their future after graduation. In this case, sufficient support could be provided to create a best possible environment that is favorable to international student-athletes’ learning and performance.

Applying student development theories is helpful for providing sufficient support to international student-athletes. For example, Involvement Theory (Astin, 1984)
emphasizes the efforts made for learning and personal development highly influence student engagement in campus life; and the more students be involved, the more benefits they receive (Evans, Forney, & Guido-Dibrito, 1998). Retention Theory (Tinto, 1987) states that successful adjustment and integration to campus life will lead to students’ decisions of staying in the institution, and the adjustment and integration in both academics and social life during the first year play a critical role in the retention decision-making process of students. Understanding and applying Involvement Theory could help to develop more effective services and support for the entire student population during their transition to college life, while Retention Theory would assist to identify the suitable methods to increase the satisfaction level of students. It is also important to understand that social adjustment and institutional commitment are related to the retention rate of international student-athletes, while the academic adjustment is related to the graduate rate of international student-athletes (Chickering, 1969; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).

In addition to the unique experience gaining from athletic participation, international student-athletes benefit more from the overall experience during the years they spend in the institutions (Kontaxakis, 2011). Therefore, it is significant to look at the overall experience of international student-athletes on campus, including how they maintain good level of performance in academics, how they communicate with other students and faculty and staff outside of the athletic department, how they overcome the difficulties, etc. A welcoming institutional environment with sufficient support and services helps international student-athletes have pleasant experiences and fit in the campus culture smoothly (Weston, 2006). In addition, the pleasant campus life helps
international student-athletes perform well in athletics, which benefits the institutions by creating winning programs and attracting talented student-athletes around the world (Weston, 2006).

In order to have the institutions provide sufficient resources and support to make the adjustment and integration of international student-athletes easier, it is important to understand what international student-athletes experience in academics, athletics, and the overall campus life, especially to know the challenges they face (Pirosca, 2011). As a special group of international students, international student-athletes will have more complicated challenges to overcome since they have additional responsibilities as student-athletes, and they have particular expectations towards the institutions regarding their special needs as both international students and student-athletes (Peterson et al., 1999; Pirosca, 2011). For example, coming from the minority background, international student-athletes tend to question their academic or even athletic ability, making it more difficult for them to overcome the emotional challenges and social challenges during their adjustment (Person, Benson-Quaziena, & Rogers, 2001; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Some international student-athletes may feel their skin colors are the factors that isolate them from other domestic teammates or classmates (Person et al., 2001). Some international student-athletes who have unique stressors that make them be more vulnerable to mental diseases or emotional crisis might require counseling services (Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1996). Under these circumstances, international student-athletes need helps provided by professional staff from academics, athletics, and student affairs, and understanding the difficulties and challenges that international student-
athletes must deal with helps coaches and athletic administrators to better support international student-athletes during their recruitment process and adjustment to college life (Meadows, Pierce, & Popp, 2011; Person et al., 2001).

**Focus on international student-athletes in Division I.** Among all three divisions within the NCAA, Division I institutions have the largest enrollments of international student-athletes as well as the largest athletics budgets to provide the greatest scholarship opportunities (NCAA, 2014). The latest statistics from the NCAA indicate that 10,761 international student-athletes participated in college sports at Division I institutions during the 2016-2017 academic year (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017). International student-athletes enrolled at NCAA Division I institutions account for around 56% of the total number of international student-athletes within all divisions of the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017). Therefore, it is meaningful to place the specific focus on the international student-athletes at Division I institutions.

Constructive practices to ease and enhance the internationalization of intercollegiate athletics in NCAA Division I could benefit the higher education institutions in other countries, which may promote cooperation among higher education institutions in different countries and regions, such as exchanges programs for students and faculty, knowledge sharing through research projects, as well as development of international curricula (Hristova, Petrovska, & Dimitrova, 2013).

**Literature Gap**

The entire process of international student-athletes playing college sports for their institutions starts from the decision of choosing which institution to attend. However,
there is limited research about the decision-making process of international student-athletes when they choose which institutions to attend, and what motivate international student-athletes to pursue higher degree and play college sports in the U.S. (Kontaxakis, 2011). After arriving at the institutions, international student-athletes are involved in an adjustment process. There also is limited research about the challenges that international student-athletes need to overcome during their adjustment process and the entire four years spent in the institutions, such as the language barrier, cultural differences, and the differences in both academic and athletic systems that they need to overcome to be fully adjusted to academics, athletics, and ordinary life (Tung, 1988).

Schulte and Choudaha (2014) pointed out that there was limited research about the retention rate of international students in general. It is also not surprised that there is little research about the retention rate of international student-athletes particularly. In addition, the majority of literature that discusses student-athletes of different races merely focuses on Latino or Asian student-athletes, solely talking about African American student-athletes (Person et al., 2001).

The lack of attention paid to the internationalization of intercollegiate athletics and international student-athletes will limit the support provided to international student-athletes. Without sufficient support, it will be difficult for international student-athletes to have favorable experience with the athletics programs or the institutions, which affects the retention rate as well as the future recruitment of international student-athletes (Kontaxakis, 2011; Trendafilova, Hardin, & Kim, 2010).
The Goals of this Study

In order to fill in the literature gaps, this research study will analyze and develop insightful understanding of the integration and experience of international student-athletes in both academics and athletics, starting from the recruitment process and enrollment decisions, covering their adjustment, and to the graduation. This research study will also place a focus on the supportive services that international student-athletes have received or would like to receive during their time in the U.S., as sufficient guidance and support will help international student-athletes have better transition in academics, athletics, and social life.

Understanding the integration and experience of international student-athletes helps to create a campus environment that is favorable to international athletes’ learning and performance (Wang, Callahan, & Goldfine, 2001). Providing the best possible environment to international student-athletes to achieve a high level of satisfaction will ultimately lead to a better performance on and off the field, as “when respondents were satisfied in both environment dimensions, they were labeled as ‘promising commitment’ for they were likely to continue to pursue higher professional goals within the organization” (Zhang, DeMichele, & Connaughton, 2004, p. 207). The more satisfied international student-athletes are with their athletic and overall experience in college, the more likely they will stay in their teams and continually represent their institutions (Trandafilova et al., 2010).

In addition, this research study aims to provide recommendations and develop strategies and supportive approaches particularly for international student-athletes. For
example, practical approaches can be recommended to student affair personnel for
assisting international student-athletes to maintain their mental health and deal with
stressful issues (Person et al., 2001). On the other hand, with specific guidance and
recommendations, international student-athletes can make full use of the support and
services provided.

**Research Question**

The process of internationalization of intercollegiate athletics, from start to finish,
includes but is not limited to the following: recruiting student-athletes from other
countries, assisting international student-athletes to fit into the competitive college sports
in the U.S., helping international student-athletes to meet athletic standards and academic
eligibility, and preparing international student-athletes for their future after graduation
(Zonder, 2013). International student-athletes play a significant role in the
internationalization of intercollegiate athletics, and it is meaningful to understand their
experiences and to provide sufficient support to help them overcome the difficulties or
challenges they might encounter when playing college sports in the U.S.

**Primary research question.** With the purpose of understanding the overall
experience of international student-athletes as they pursue both college degree and
college sports in the U.S., the primary research question of this research study is: How do
international student-athletes integrate to campus life, especially considering the
challenges they face being a student and an athlete? The answers to this primary research
question exist throughout the entire process that international student-athletes go through,
from their decisions of choosing which institution to attend, their adjustment and
integration to campus life in the U.S., to their plans after graduation. Therefore, sub-question categories will focus on the recruitment process, the adjustment and integration of international student-athletes, including the difficulties or challenges that international student-athletes experience, as well as the factors that smooth their overall experiences (Meadow et al., 2011).

**The recruiting process.** This process includes the Contact Period, the Evaluation Period, the Quiet Period, and the Dead Period (University of Louisiana at Lafayette Office of Compliance, 2015). During the Contact Period, international student-athletes have the first contacts with the athletic personnel from prospective institutions, although these are not in-person contacts (University of Louisiana at Lafayette Office of Compliance, 2015). Both the academic and athletic performances of international student-athletes will be evaluated by athletic personnel during the Evaluation Period (University of Louisiana at Lafayette Office of Compliance, 2015). According to Ridinger and Pastore (2000), the process of recruiting international student-athletes could be conducted either through “Athletic Scouting Services” or through summer tours aboard or hosting tours that invite student-athlete teams from other countries (p. 34). A common recruiting strategy that has been adopted by coaches is through the "talent pipelines", which are established by the close relationship among student-athletes from particular countries (Bale, 1991). This continuous supply of international student-athletes from particular countries to play certain sports started in the 1960s and 1970s, and it has brought championships for teams that utilize this recruiting strategy (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).
During the recruitment process, understanding international student-athletes’ motivation of playing college sports in the U.S. and how international student-athletes received information of prospective institutions and athletic programs will be helpful for coaches and other athletics personnel to develop attractive recruitment packages to attract outstanding international student-athletes (Meadows et al., 2011; Popp, Hums, & Greenwell, 2009). Motivations for athletic participation were categorized by Duda (1989) in the Purpose of Sport Questionnaire into the following seven factors: mastery/cooperation, physical active lifestyle, good citizen, competitiveness, high-status career, enhance self-esteem, and social status/getting ahead. Understanding the motivations of international student-athletes plays a fundamental role in understanding how international student-athletes chose which institution to attend. International student-athletes tend to be attracted by the institutions that have outstanding athletic programs (Burnett, 2010). In addition, international student-athletes have concerns regarding immigration status and other challenges in daily life; these concerns should be considered by athletic personnel during the recruiting process, so that adequate support and assistance could be emphasized as the advantages of the institution and the athletic program (Zonder, 2013).

**The adjustment and integration.** Successful adjustment of international student-athletes to college life, as defined by the Adjustment Model developed by Ridinger and Pastore (2000), is demonstrated by the satisfaction level and the performance of international student-athletes in both academics and athletics (Meadow et al., 2011). The Adjustment Model developed by Ridinger and Pastore (2000) evaluated the four factors
(personal, interpersonal, perceptual, and cultural distance) that will influence the adjustment process of international student-athletes in academics, athletics, social life, personal-emotional development, and institutional attachment (Meadow et al., 2011). For the international student-athletes whose first language is not English, they will need to overcome the challenges caused by the language barrier. In addition, regardless of whether they speak English as well as native speakers, international student-athletes have to adjust to both the institutional culture and the American culture that are new to them.

In general, the most demanding challenge for international student-athletes is to maintain the balance of being a student and an athlete (Kontaxakis, 2011; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). In addition, it will be interesting to identify whether there is to any relationship between the athletic success and the academic performance for international student-athletes.

It is essential to create an embracing environment for international student-athletes to better integrate to campus life. One way to do so is to establish cultural awareness among domestic student-athletes, which can be achieved and enhanced by institutional policies (Person et al., 2001; Peterson et al., 1999). Institutional policies regarding affirmative actions could help to avoid discriminations towards international individuals, providing opportunities for fair competitions (Plaffenroth, 1997). If an institution does not have a supportive culture or resources for international students and international student-athletes, it would be difficult to maintain or increase the retention rate of these two groups of students (McKindra, 2009). Policy-making personnel play significant role in shaping an institution with a multicultural dimension that can embrace
international students and provide sufficient supports and services to them (Plaffenroth, 1997). As an institution’s attitude towards internationalization will be reflected by the mission and strategic plan of the institution, it would be meaningful to look at whether the institution has appropriate institutional initiatives to support international students and international student-athletes (Peterson et al., 1999). Therefore, in the sub-question category of adjustment and integration, specific questions regarding institution’s commitment to meet the needs of international student-athletes would be asked (Pirosca, 2011). Institution’s commitment to serve international student-athletes include assigning student affair personnel to provide counseling services to international student-athletes, providing sufficient financial aids to international student-athletes, and so on (Person et al., 2001; Peterson et al., 1999). It is also important to realize that some key problems that international student-athletes experience may be closely related to the operations of athletic departments, the team atmosphere, and the relationships between athletics and other departments on campus.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

In social science research, “delimitations address how the study was narrowed in scope” (Creswell, 1998, p.150). The major delimitation of this research study is that it focuses on the experiences of international student-athletes enrolled in an NCAA Division I affiliated institution. The majority of higher education institutions that sponsor varsity sports are members of the NCAA at the Division I level, and Division I institutions provide sufficient programs and more opportunities to the largest amount of student-athletes among all three divisions in NCAA (The National Collegiate Athletic
The total of international student-athletes attending Division I institutions account for the largest percentage of the total of international student-athletes in all three divisions in NCAA, and the international student-athletes in Division I tend to encounter greater challenges and have heavier training than those in other divisions (Kontaxakis, 2011; The National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary for athletic personnel and student affairs personnel to develop deeper understanding of the experience of international student-athletes in Division I.

The generalizability of this research study might be limited, since it focuses solely on the experience of international student-athletes enrolled in NCAA Division I institutions. It is also difficult to analyze all international student-athletes as a whole group, since they come from different countries with different backgrounds. Due to the limited participation rate of international student-athletes, not all international student-athletes from Division I institutions would complete the online questionnaire or participate in the interviews. When it comes to the data analysis, information generated from interviews and online questionnaires should all be analyzed and interpreted taking the relatively small sample size in consideration (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). In addition, the experience of participants in this research study might not fully represent the experience of all international student-athletes in all the three divisions in NCAA, and the experience of international student-athletes from NCAA Division I could just partially represent the cases in other NCAA divisions.

It is necessary to consider that there might be few international student-athletes play basketball or football, while there would be a lot of international student-athletes in
track & field teams. In this case, among the international student-athletes that would participate in this research study, the researcher expected to have 12 interviewees from different sports so that the different experience of international student-athletes playing different sports could be studied, and there would not be a large percentage of participants in certain sports.

Limitations may also exist in data collection. Some athletics departments may not provide a complete roster of international student-athletes, or the contact information of international student-athletes could not be accessed from campus directory.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Internationalization.** The concept of internationalization has various interpretations in the large scope of higher education, and therefore leads to different initiatives for institutions to implement their internationalization based on the needs from different stakeholders, such as faculty members, students, community, governments, etc. (Trilokekar, 2007; Yang, 2002). As commonly accepted, internationalization was defined by Knight in 2006, as the ongoing integration of programs with international perspectives to the three dimensions of higher education: teaching, research, and service (American Council on Education, 2014; Zolfaghari, Sabran, & Zolfaghari, 2009). During the process of internationalization, domestic higher education institutions could have the opportunity to develop relationships with the institutions in other countries, in terms of distance learning or international campuses, students and faculty exchanges, and joint academic and research programs, etc. (Hristova et al., 2013; Knight, 2004).
Intercollegiate athletics. Intercollegiate athletics is defined as the sports played at the college level by student-athletes who meet eligibility requirements, and it demonstrates the campus diversity, sports culture, and student participations (Duderstadt, 2003; Oregon Legislature, 2013).


Division I. As one of the subdivisions of NCAA based on football sponsorship, Division I institutions usually have the largest student populations, manage the largest athletics budgets, as well as provide the most sufficient scholarships to student-athletes (The National Collegiate Athletics Association, 2017).

Varsity teams. Varsity teams are referred to the elite teams that consist of extraordinary student-athletes who represent the university to compete in NCAA conferences and national tournaments (Sheldon & Watson, 2011).

Student-athletes. Student-athletes are referred to those students who represent their higher education institutions for competitive athletic events as varsity team members while pursuing academic degrees (Watt & Moore, 2001).

International students. International students are defined as the enrolled students who are legally studying at higher education institutions with their student visas, and do not have English as their first language (Andrade, 2006).
**International student-athletes.** NCAA defines international student-athletes as the student-athletes “who have completed any portion of their secondary education in a non-United States educational system” (p. 4). NCAA International Student Records Committee (2013) stated, “International student-athletes from American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are treated as domestic student-athletes” (p. 8). International student-athletes share the common characteristics of international students, and most of them are not native speaker of English (Kontaxakis, 2011). Regardless of what definition it is, all international student-athletes are required to meet the amateur eligibility requirement set by NCAA.

In this research study, international student-athletes are defined as the student-athletes who either do not hold the U.S. citizenship or were born outside of the U.S. without English as their native language, had pre-secondary education in other countries but now are pursuing higher education in the U.S. and playing college sports (Meadows et al., 2011).

**Methodology**

The purpose of this research study is to analyze and develop an in-depth understanding of the integration process and the overall experience of international student-athletes who are enrolled at NCAA Division I institutions. With such a specific focus, using a qualitative methodology allowed me to study the phenomenon of international student-athletes adjusting themselves to the campus life and gaining experience from both academics and athletics.
Since international student-athletes were involved in this research study, multicultural elements such as cultural differences and language barriers were considered when designing the interview questions and online survey (Morrow, Rakhsha & Castaneda, 2001). When using qualitative research methods to deal with the multicultural elements, the significance of research context would be emphasized, and the experiences of participants would be addressed as well (Morrow et al., 2001).

Selected institutions and international student-athletes were chosen by purposeful sampling, since this sampling technique is the most beneficial method for maximizing the understanding of the phenomenon or the individuals, as well as for conducting in-depth study with rich information (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The selected universities are all member institutions in NCAA Division I, in which athletics teams recruit relatively larger number of international student-athletes or have more sufficient resources and support for international student-athletes than the institutions in other NCAA divisions.

In addition to the literature review of the previous research regarding international student-athletes and their experiences in both academics and athletics, the official website of NCAA, the athletics websites of the institutions that research participants attended were also reviewed as the sources of research data.

The online questionnaire was designed to look for the demographic information of participants such as their background and athletic level in their home countries, as well as other key aspects of participants’ experience as being international student-athletes in the U.S. Sub-questions that asked about the recruitment, adjustment, and overall experience of international student-athletes were included in the online questionnaire. For
example, in the section of recruitment, participants were asked about how they received the recruiting information from their current athletic programs. In the section of adjustment and integration, questions were designed to retrieve the information about the challenges that international student-athletes might face, as well as the factors that would eased their integration.

One-on-one interviews were conducted to collect in-depth information to answer the primary research question. Since the desired sample size for achieving saturation and conducting deep analysis is twelve (N=12) for most research study especially in terms of conducting interviews (Morgan, 1997; Sandelowski, 1995), having twelve international student-athletes from NCAA Division I institutions to participate in the interviews would be ideal to achieve saturation. The online questionnaire was first distributed to the international student-athletes at randomly selected NCAA Division I institutions, and invitations of interview participation were distributed to those international student-athletes who expressed in the online questionnaire that they would like to participate as interviewees. Among the total 48 international student-athletes that participated in this research by completing the online questionnaire first; and at the end of the online questionnaire, 16 of them indicated their willingness to participate in a single one-on-one interview. A total of nine participants scheduled and completed an interview.

Considering the total of international student-athletes and the total of NCAA Division I institutions are much larger than a researcher could handle, random purposeful sampling was used to add credibility of this research study (Patton, 1990). Convenience sampling and snowball sampling were also used so that more international student-
athletes could be encouraged to participate in this research study. To be specific, convenience sampling was applied to recruit participants that were accessible more easily to the researcher because of the friendship between the researcher and the athletic personnel at some Division I institutions (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Observations were conducted during the face-to-face interviews in person or via Skype video to know more about the impacts of interviewees’ experiences through their facial expressions, and emotions. Most interviewees were smiling when they talked about their pleasant experience as a student-athlete in the U.S. For example, when talking about the extraordinary facilities and game day atmosphere during the face-to-face interview with a Big Ten swimmer in person, her eyes literally lighted up as she described how much she was amazed by the culture of collegiate sport in the U.S. Interviewees’ facial expressions and the change of tones when they described their experiences also inspired me to ask follow-up questions during these semi-structured interviews. Participants’ reflection on their experience, and their facial expressions and emotions expressed in interviews also led to the conclusion in the data analysis that the majority of participants, including all interviewees appreciated the opportunity of pursuing higher education and playing college sports in the U.S.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into six chapters and an appendix section. Serving as the first chapter, this chapter provided a brief introduction, the rationale for the research, the rationale for using qualitative research methods, and it introduced the research
question as well. Chapter Two presents the literature review, focusing on the previous research about international student-athletes and their experiences in the U.S. The third chapter describes the research methods including the sampling techniques, the data collection and analysis process, and the strategies to enhance credibility. Research findings of individual cases will be presented in Chapter Four, while the results of the cross-case analysis will be presented in Chapter Five. Chapter Six will conclude all the findings of this research study and point out the limitation of this research study. It also includes the recommendations for future improvement in terms of providing efficient supports and resources to international student-athletes and enhancing both professional and personal development of international student-athletes. The appendix section includes the online questionnaire.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

As Maguire (2004) stated, research about international student-athletes is still in its infant stage, both conceptually and practically, and research on this topic is still in need to be expanded after years of development (Love & Kim, 2011). The purpose of this research study is to analyze and develop an in-depth understanding of the integration process and experience of international student-athletes who are enrolled at NCAA Division I institutions.

This section of literature review examines the previous research and studies related to the significance of international student-athletes in the internationalization of college sports, the overall development of international student-athletes, as well as the possible implementations to attract more international student-athletes to play college sports in the U.S., and to make their experiences enjoyable and beneficial. In addition to the theoretical frameworks, this chapter introduces four main literature streams: internationalization in higher education, role and benefits of intercollegiate athletics, global development in intercollegiate athletics, and the experience of international student-athletes.

Internationalization in Higher Education

Internationalization could be defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2004, p.11). Higher education has been changed to fit in the internationalization. Internationalization is integrated in all three elements of higher education: teaching, research, and service, and it is not limited to the expansion that
across national boundaries but also the cultural differences that exist in the same territory (Jane Knight & International Association of Universities, 2006; Zolfaghari et al., 2009). Higher education in the global setting has been moving towards the direction with more focus on international issues, and have been changing accordingly to meet the administrative and economic needs of government (Marginson, 2011; Zolfaghari et al, 2009). The process of internationalization brings benefits to institutions by enhancing the institutional reputation in a global setting, developing more cooperation with institutions in other countries, attracting international students and faculty, as well as sending domestic students and faculty abroad (Hristova et al., 2013). During the process of internationalization, institutions could be more involved in their global development by recruiting international students from diverse backgrounds (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Peterson et al., 1999; Urban & Palmer, 2014).

Internationalization in higher education usually focuses on the international mobility of labor, such as attracting international students or sending domestic students to study abroad (Haan & Sherry, 2012; Leask, 2004). According to the latest data from Institute of International Education (2016), more than one million international students attending U.S. colleges and universities during the academic year 2016-2017, demonstrating an 85% of increase from the number of international students a decade ago (Institute of International Education, 2017). International students bring in new learning perspectives and initiate the cultural exchanges with domestic students, making larger impact on those domestic students who have no learning or living experience in other countries (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; McMurtrie, 2011; Urban & Palmer, 2014). Since
an increasing number of international students have been attracted to pursue higher education in the U.S., more attention has been paid to both international students and the sustainable development of programs and services for international students to have positive learning and living experience on campus in the U.S. (Chow, 2012).

**Significance of Intercollegiate Athletics**

With a unique purpose, which is different from the higher education and college sports systems in other countries, intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. promotes competitive college sports in the academic context and the academics embrace competitive college sports with educational purpose (Zillmer, Kaburakis, & Constantinides, 2015). As stated by Brand (2006), “A college education is not only an exercise in gaining factual and skill-based knowledge; it is an opportunity to develop a value system, a set of enduring goals, and a perspective on life” (p. 18). College sports has been embraced in higher education in the U.S. since the middle of the 19th century, and some institutions become famous because of their eye-catching athletics events instead of their academic rankings or research achievement (Brand, 2006). Large portions of institutional budgets are given to college sports, and those Division I institutions that are classified in the "power conferences" have gained primary benefits brought by their outstanding athletic programs (Alexander & Kern, 2009; Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Chu, 1989; Mixon & Ressler, 1995).

Regarding the impact of intercollegiate athletics on tuitions, Mixon and Ressler (1995) found that intercollegiate athletics could generate tuition revenues by attracting students from other states since they would like to get in a university that has strong
athletic programs even if they have to pay more tuition (Alexander & Kern, 2009). Although prospective students would be willing to pay more tuition to get in their preferred universities, institutions do not necessarily increase or lower their tuition due to the performance of athletic teams (Smith, 2012). Although the tuition may not be changed, student fees might be increased to continually support the success of intercollegiate athletics, especially for the institutions that have strong football programs (Smith, 2012).

Serving as an integrated part of higher education, intercollegiate athletics provide opportunities to students to gain learning experiences and interpersonal development from physical activities and athletic competitions with peers (Brand, 2006; Weston, 2006). Intercollegiate athletics has great impact on students by inspiring them via athletic entertainment, excitement and team spirit, helping their character development (Bell, 2010; Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Zillmer et al., 2015). Regarding student-athletes’ personal development, intercollegiate athletics enhance self-esteesms, leadership skills, teamwork, sportsmanship, and other personal traits via individual exercises and team sports (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009; Bowker, 2006; Brand, 2006; Denhart et al., 2009; Simmons & Childers, 2013). Frey (1986) pointed out that playing college sports could also enhance the academic performance of student-athletes.

Competitive athletics also help both non-athlete students and student-athletes enhance their confidence in physical self-concept and appearance by keeping them in a good shape and improving their body images (Simmons & Childers, 2013). Physical self-concept is defined as “an individual's perception of him- or herself in physical areas such
as strength, endurance, sport competence, and physical appearance” (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007, p 161). Non-athlete students and student-athletes care about their body image, and would like to participate in physical fitness activities and seek out appropriate nutritional information to maintain their weight control (Kennedy & Reis, 1995; Simmons & Childers, 2013).

Smith (2012) stated that athletics performance affect perspective applications. Successful athletics programs would enhance institutional reputation at national level and therefore attract more student applications since students are willing to attend the institutions with higher rankings earned by either athletics or academics (Alexander & Kern, 2009). Successful athletics performance would also bring back attentions from alumni and therefore earn alumni giving as a good source of financial supports and community resources (Chu, 1989; Denhart, Villwock, & Vedder, 2009; Simmons & Childers, 2013).

It is necessary to understand that intercollegiate athletics also has cultural influence on students, institutions, and communities, by enhancing the shared values and beliefs that are generally defined as institutional culture, as well as by creating the bonds between institutions and communities (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Denhart et al., 2009). Intercollegiate athletics also enhance diversity among campus by the student-athletes who come from different backgrounds (Denhart et al., 2009). However, Charzisarantis and Hagger (2007) raised the concern that competitive college sports made student-athletes be more motivated by rewards.
Global Development in Intercollegiate Athletics

Intercollegiate athletics connects institutions, students and communities, and the trend of international outreach takes place in the area of intercollegiate athletics, bringing benefits to not only the students and the athletics, but also the institutions (Brand, 2006; Knotaxakis, 2011; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000; Weston, 2006).

Looking at internationalization through the angle of intercollegiate athletics provides new perspectives for institutional administrators to develop suitable strategic plans for the international outreach of the institution as a whole (Brand, 2006). Increasing initiatives of internationalization have taken place in intercollegiate athletics in the U.S., largely demonstrated by the increasing number of international student-athletes that are recruited (Love & Kim, 2011; Meadows et al., 2011). The history of recruiting international student-athletes started from the beginning of this century, when first group of track-and-field student-athletes from Canada played for college teams in the U.S. (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Since then, institutions with large athletic programs have been recruiting international student-athletes and provided athletic scholarships (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). In each of the recent years, approximately 3,000 international student-athletes join the varsity teams at Division I institutions in which more sufficient financial aid, facilities, equipment, and services are provided than those in other divisions (Abbey-Pinegar, 2010; Love & Kim, 2011).

Increasing number of international student-athletes. According to the latest NCAA participation and demographics search, there were 10,761 student-athletes identified as “nonresident aliens” attending Division I institutions during the academic
year of 2016-2017, accounting for an approximately six percent of the total number of student-athletes in Division I, and the number of international student-athletes in Division I increased from 3,515 in the academic year of 1999-2000 to 10,761 in the academic year of 2016-2017 (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017). Although the total number of international student-athletes does not account for a large proportion of the total population of student-athletes, the percentage of international student-athletes is high in certain sports; the top five sports that have the largest percentage of international student athletes in NCAA all divisions are tennis, ice hockey, squash, skiing, and golf (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2017). However, concerns have been raised that the increasing number of international student-athletes may lead to less opportunities or resources available for domestic student-athletes (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000, p. 33).

International student-athletes play an increasingly important role in intercollegiate athletics by improving athletic competitiveness, contributing to successful athletic programs that enhance institutional reputation, as well as enhancing the diversity on campus (Lee & Opio, 2011). Considering the significant role of international student-athletes, it is beneficial for institutions, athletic departments and student-athletes themselves to understand various aspects of the experience of international student-athletes from different perspectives (Meadows, Pierce, & Popp, 2011). Weston (2006) identified the influences that international student-athletes would bring by playing college sports in the U.S.: International student-athletes improve their athletic team performance and play a significant role in winning championships. International student-athletes who have outstanding performance in academics can also motivate their domestic teammates
and classmates to do well (Weston, 2006). In addition to building up the team spirit, international student-athletes also provide cross-cultural learning experience by interacting with their domestic teammates, coaches, staff, and classmates (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000; Urban & Palmer, 2014; Weston, 2006). When international student-athletes return to their home countries, the skills they have developed or enhanced in the U.S. and the experiences they share with people at home could be regarded as a good promotion of college sports and can attract more global audiences to watch the broadcasting of American college games (Pirosca, 2011).

Given the increasing enrollment of international student-athletes, it is significant to understand the adjustment process that international student-athletes experienced and what they have gained from those experiences (Popp et al., 2010). Understanding more about the international student-athletes themselves and their experiences helps coaches and athletic administrators improve the athletic programs by providing sufficient supports and resources to international student-athletes, which will bring in more international student-athletes with outstanding performances in both athletics and academics.

**Experience of International Student-Athletes**

As stated, international student-athletes play a significant role and carry the expectation of helping their teams and athletic programs have better performance (Popp, Pierce, & Hums, 2011; Trendafilova et al., 2010). Therefore, it is necessary and beneficial to understand the experiences of international student-athletes, which will also affect international student-athletes’ satisfaction towards the athletic programs and the institutions.
Motivations.

Typologies of migrant athletes. Maguire (1999) and Magee and Sugden (2002) developed the typologies of migrant athletes by conducting interviews with athletes playing certain sports. Instead of simply classifying international student-athletes to different groups, their typologies of migrant athletes were to demonstrate the various motivations that affected international student-athletes' decision of pursuing college degrees and playing sports in the U.S.

According to the model developed by Magee and Sugden (2002), migrant athletes could be categorized as the following different types: Mercenaries, Nomadic Cosmopolitans, Returnee, and Settler. Mercenaries are categorized as the international student-athletes who pursue their higher education and athletic development in the U.S. because of the adequate financial aids they could receive from the higher education institutions that they are admitted to (p. 429). A nomadic cosmopolitan is an international student-athlete who is attracted by the opportunity of learning a new language and experiencing a different culture when playing sports and studying in the U.S. (p. 432). The returnee is an international student-athlete who returns to their home countries after graduation. Lastly, the settler, is characterized as a migrant athlete who stays in the country where they play sports; within the context of intercollegiate athletics, the concept of Settler also applies to those international student-athletes who stay in the U.S. for at least one academic year, and those who continues to pursue graduate degree or work in the U.S. after finishing their undergraduate studies (p. 105).
Popp, Hums, and Greenwell (2009) conducted a research study to explore whether there is a difference between the perspectives of international student-athletes and those of domestic student-athletes in NCAA Division I, regarding their purpose of playing sports. This was also the first research study in which the Purpose of Sport Questionnaire developed by Duda in 1989 was used for a cross-cultural analysis. Popp, Hums, and Greenwell (2009) reviewed the seven factors that Duda (1989) categorized regarding the motivations for individuals to participate in sports. They also stated that international student-athletes who experienced different training systems in their home countries had different motivations of participating in college sports.

Love and Kim also conducted research in 2011 to enhance the understanding of sport labor migration. Typologies of migrant athletes developed by Maguire (1999) and Magee and Sugden (2002) have been used as the frameworks in Love and Kim’s research in 2011, in which the authors indicated that international student-athletes are motivated by financial supports, different cultural experiences, and a more promising future after graduation.

In general, motivations for international student-athletes to participate in intercollegiate athletics in the U.S could be classified into one or more of the following categories:

- International student-athletes would like to pursue higher education and play high level of sports at the same time (Love & Kim, 2011). Based on the information collected in their research about migrant athletes in 2001, Love and Kim stated that it was relatively more difficult for international student-athletes to pursue
higher education while playing high level of competitive sports in their home countries. Results from Burnett’s research in 2010 showed that international student-athletes valued the opportunity of playing high level of sports as well as gaining higher education at the same time. Participants in a qualitative analysis regarding international student-athletes’ perspectives conducted by Meadows, Pierce, and Popp (2011) also shared that Division I institutions in the U.S. provide more and better opportunities for international student-athletes to play college sports than the institutions in their home countries do.

- International student-athletes are attracted by the resources and supports provided to them, such as the general services for international students, the resource and services that are particular for student-athletes such as athletic scholarships, athletic academic advising, and sports medicine support (Trendafilova et al., 2010; Popp et al., 2011).

- International student-athletes are attracted by the athletics performance and operational system of outstanding athletics programs (Burnett, 2010).

- International student-athletes are motivated to play college sports in the U.S. by gaining experiences in a foreign country and exploring different culture (Love & Kim, 2011).

- International student-athletes might be inspired by their role models who are professional athletes, and would like to join in the professional leagues after completing their post-secondary education. There are also international players in the professional leagues in the U.S., such as Major League Baseball (MLB), the
National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), and the National Football League (NFL) (Weston, 2006). Playing college sports in the U.S. would be a solid start for international student-athletes who would like to pursue their career as a professional athlete.

- International student-athletes value the social benefits of participating intercollegiate athletics, and they also value the peer recognition that they have received from playing college sports (Burnett, 2010; Yan & McCullagh, 2004).

In her master’s thesis about international student-athletes’ participation in college sports and its impact on the experiences of both international and domestic student-athletes, Zonder (2013) stated that international student-athletes’ motivations to play college sports affected their experience during the recruiting process.

**Recruitment of international student-athletes.** Recruiting international student-athletes is a significant factor to the success of an athletic program (Duchesne et al., 2011). Given the general recruitment in higher education has been outreached to the global level, recruiting international student-athletes is an inevitable trend for institutions to achieve more in both competitive athletics and academics, as well as to enhance the diversity on campus (Weston, 2006; Zillmer et al, 2015). Reaching out to international student-athletes has been a rising trend since 1998 (Wilson & Wolverton, 2008). Athletic programs recruit international student-athletes to make the teams be more competitive to win more games, especially under the situation that it is hard to recruit domestic top student-athletes who would prefer to play for the powerhouse institutions (Weston, 2006; Wilson & Wolverton, 2008). Recruiting international student-athletes could also help
coaches establish and extend their international network with potential recruits, bringing in more international student-athletes in the future (Duchesne et al., 2011). However, recruiting international student-athletes also bring up some concerns regarding eligibility issues, limited scholarships opportunities and athletic resources (Hoffer, 1994; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).

International student-athletes start their unique journey of pursuing higher education and playing college sports in the U.S. from the recruitment process, when they start to seriously consider the opportunity of participating in intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. As the recruitment process establishes a solid foundation of developing an outstanding intercollegiate athletic program, it is essential to make sure that both the institution and the athletic department fulfill their obligations well when recruiting international student-athletes (Weston, 2006). Meadows, Pierce, and Popp (2011) pointed out that it would be beneficial for athletics personnel to know how to inform prospective international student-athletes about the recruitment process and make sure the student-athletes receive correct information. During the recruitment process, the athletics personnel must clearly explain to international recruits about the recruiting procedures including the tryouts and on campus visits, as well as the eligibility requirements and available services such as financial aids; it will also be helpful for international student-athletes by having some ideas of the challenges that they may encounter (Weston, 2006).

Popp, Love, Kim and Hum (2010) stated that prospective international student-athletes could gain institutional and athletics information online and receive admission materials and other recruiting information mailed by the institutions. In addition to the
online communication, the process of recruiting international student-athletes could also start with hosting summer athletic camps or tours that invite international student-athletes, or with the so-called “Athletic Scouting Services” (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000, p. 34). The contacts from coaches usually include phone calls or email communications that may bring up visits, college showcase, as well as some in-person meetings with the coaches before making the decisions (Zonder, 2013). International student-athletes who participated in the research study conducted by Meadows, Pierce, and Popp (2011) revealed that international student-athletes tend to gain more information about playing college sports in the U.S. from their families or friends who participated or are still participating in the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S., than from the coaches of perspective institutions directly (Meadows et al., 2011). Since the recruitment process started, some international student-athletes have paid a lot of attention to the NCAA rules (2010).

**College selection process of international student-athletes.** The decision-making process of international student-athletes could be very different from that of domestic student-athletes. For example, prospective international student-athletes will consider more factors that will influence their experiences of playing college sports and pursuing higher education in the U.S. before they make their final selections (Meadows et al., 2011).

Burnett (2010) analyzed the case of University of Johannesburg in South Africa, regarding students’ participations in sport activities on campus, with the purpose to identify the factors that affect the decision-making process of student-athletes when
choosing institutions to attend. Although this case study was specifically for an institution in South Africa, it is helpful to explore the factors that affect international students’ participation in intercollegiate athletics. Burnett (2010) acknowledges that prospective students tend to be attracted by institutional reputation in the academic field, as well as the outstanding sports programs and efficient support and services.

Popp, Pierce, and Hums conducted a comparison in 2011 to identify and compare the factors that affect the decisions of international and domestic student-athletes when choosing which NCAA Division I institution to attend. Popp et al. (2011) stated that international student-athletes considered a solid college degree, athletic scholarships or other forms of adequate financial support, and the student athlete experience that could lead to ideal employment after graduation as the important factors. During the process of deciding which institution to attend, international student-athletes take the team culture and their relationships with coaches into consideration, in addition to the performance of the athletic programs and possible financial aids they could receive if admitted (Le Crom, Warren, Clark, Marolla, & Gerber, 2009; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003; Popp et al., 2011). Smith (2012) also pointed out that international student-athletes consider institutional prestige and size when choosing institutions. The location of the institutions and the team atmosphere within the athletic program were also identified in Zonder’s research in 2013 as the important factors that international student-athletes considered. In summary, the relationships with head coaches and the team-building environment were the two main factors that determined international student-athletes’ decision of which institution to attend (Popp et al., 2011; Trendafilova et al., 2010).
Adjustment of international student-athletes. Adjustment to college life was defined as a process of experiencing challenges and difficulties in an unfamiliar environment and getting along with the new environment from various aspects (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990). Chartrand (1992) related the adjustment process to institutional commitment and the comfortable feelings in both academic development and mental development. Baker and Siryk (1989) developed the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) to get comprehensive understanding of adjustment issues. However, the SACQ had not been applied to student-athletes (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).

Challenges exist in fulfilling the responsibilities in academics and athletics. Comparing with non-athlete students, student-athletes have to fulfill their athletic responsibilities that are additional to the academic workload (Denhart et al., 2009). During the adjustment process, international student-athletes face some inevitable challenges in various aspects simply because they come from other countries. According to Person, Benson-Quaziena, and Rogers (2001), international students also tend to question their abilities especially in the academic field, due to others’ perception towards them as a minority. International student-athletes also need to deal with language barrier, cultural differences that exist in social communications, living habits and food, as well as the difficulties they might experience when maintaining their eligibilities and playing in a different system for college sports (Meadows et al., 2011).

In order to fulfill the academic responsibilities as a student and the athletic responsibilities as an athlete, international student-athletes need to maintain the balance between academics and athletics by having effective time management to make sure their
academic performance would meet the eligibility requirement while their athletic performance would also be on point (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000; Denhart et al., 2009). Burnett (2010) pointed out that spending too much time on training would affect student-athletes’ academic accomplishment. Some international student-athletes find it difficult to have more time to put more effort to deal with challenging majors (Denhart et al., 2009). Therefore, sometimes student-athletes would rather choose to study easier subjects to maintain eligibilities, instead of being in those majors that could better their intelligence development and career development (2009).

Person et al. (2001) listed out the challenges that student-athletes of color will face particularly, including maintaining balance between academics and athletics, lack of medical care for sport related injuries, inadequate financial support, risk of sexual harassment, and racism on campus, etc. Weston (2006) emphasized the challenges for international student-athletes include limited resources, academic and amateurism eligibility, and the adjustment due to the different athletic structures in their home countries. To be specific, international student-athletes need to meet all the academics and athletics eligibilities as required in NCAA regulations, challenges and difficulties would occur due to the different educational and athletic system in their home countries (Weston, 2006). In addition, international student-athletes would need to compete with domestic student-athletes for limited athletic resources and financial support (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Resources and support for each sports team may vary, and those programs that generate more revenues tend to receive more institutional supports (Goff, 2000). In
this scenario, it is not guaranteed that international student-athletes would receive equal resources and support regardless of which sport they play.

**Adjustment model.** The Adjustment Model proposed by Ridinger and Pastore (2000) was the first model about the adjustment process of student-athletes, discussing the adjustments in different areas, the main components that affect the adjustment process, as well as the satisfaction and performance of international student-athletes (Meadows et al., 2011; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). This model created the fundamental understanding of individual’s adjustment that influenced by four primary factors. First, personal factors, which refer to how confident student-athletes are with their abilities in both academics and athletics, as well as their personal dedication to put in academics and athletics (Popp et al., 2010). For international student-athletes, their confidence of learning English as a second language should also be considered. The personal dimension also includes individuals’ previous experiences outside of their home countries and their willingness to explore around the world (Popp et al., 2010). Next, interpersonal factors, which refer to students’ relationships with the key individuals that play important role during students’ adjustment to college life (Popp et al., 2010). For international student-athletes, those key people include university administrators, faculty, coaches and other athletic staff, as well as their teammates. It is important to know that the interpersonal relationships between students and academic advisors and/or student affairs personnel also affect how students achieve their academic goals, athletic goals, career goals, and personal goals (Trendafilova et al., 2010). Student-athletes’ relationship with the coaching staff has significant impact on their adjustment process (Trendafilova et al.,
When it comes to the relationships with teammates, international student-athletes who experience similar cultural adjustment tend to be bonded with each other more easily (Trendafilova et al., 2010). Third, perceptual factors, which include the services and resources that student-athletes expect to receive, as well as the overall performance of the athletic program and institutional reputation (Popp et al., 2010). Among all the resources, international student-athletes value financial aid most, and will be more likely to be attracted to the institutions that can provide sufficient athletic scholarship (Popp et al., 2010). Last but not the least, cultural distance factor, which demonstrates the differences between the cultures of international student-athletes’ home countries and the cultures of the institutions that international student-athletes attend; international student-athletes who come from a similar or more westernized cultural background would likely have an easier adjustment process when they come to the U.S. as well (Popp et al., 2010).

Ridinger and Pastore (2000) also emphasized the significance of the adjustment process to college life in their research. Specially, adjustment processes not only exist in academics, athletics, social life, but also attach to institutional commitment and personal emotions (Meadows et al., 2011; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Personal and interpersonal factors, cultural differences, the perceptions of international student-athletes, international student-athletes’ expectations of the resources they would receive in academics and athletics will influence the adjustment process (Meadows et al., 2011; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).

Popp, Love, Kim, and Hums conducted research in 2010 to review the Adjustment Model proposed by Ridinger and Pastore (2000). The authors examined the
personal, interpersonal, and perceptual dimensions and proposed a revised model for evaluating international student-athletes’ adjustment, as Ridinger and Pastore’s model failed to include the family factor on the adjustment of international student-athletes (Trendafilova et al., 2010).

As stated, international student-athletes play an increasingly important role in intercollegiate athletics, and it is essential for coaches and athletic administrators to understand the adjustment of international student-athletes and to help international student-athletes fit in the campus life in the U.S. (Meadows et al., 2011). Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, and Ross (1994) and Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) suggested that international student-athletes would adjust to the campus life in the U.S. more smoothly by developing constructive relationships with coaches, teammates, and other university personnel as soon as they get into the institutions (Popp et al., 2010). Fortunately, coaches have been paying increasing attention to the overall well-being of international student-athletes: Coaches understand international student-athletes’ concern during the decision-making process and are willing to provide sufficient support to international student-athletes when needed (Trendafilova et al., 2010). In addition, the direct support from domestic teammates is significantly helpful for international student-athletes to have better adjustment to the new environment in both athletics and academics (Trendafilova et al., 2010).

**Cultural adjustment.** Craven (1994) proposed that coaches and other athletics personnel should have adequate knowledge of cultural differences and should be able to have related discussion with international student-athletes so that they can have easier
transition to the campus life in the U.S. Institutions should also take the responsibility of providing cultural adjustment support to international student-athletes (Weston, 2006).

Model of culture shock. The definition of culture shock has been modified within the literature throughout the years. According to Oberg (1960), culture shock could be defined as the difficult experience that individuals go through in social life due to the changes in the different cultural settings (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004, p. 168). Later, culture shock was described by Befus (1988), Searle and Ward (1990), and Anderson (1994) as the adjustment process of individuals in different cultures. Paige (199) described culture shock as a learning process of different cultures. According to the Social Skills and Culture Learning Model of Culture Shock developed by Furnham and Bochner (1982), it could be difficult for international students to adjust to the campus life in the U.S. due to the cultural differences between their home countries and the U.S., as well as the different social awareness when they interact with domestic students. Due to the cultural differences, international students may have different interpretations of others' behaviors in a team setting (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). An expanded model of culture shock was developed based on Furnham and Bochner’s (1982) model, since Furnham and Bochner failed to measure the effect of culture-specific social skills on the cultural adjustment process, without taking additional variables into consideration. The expanded model developed by Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) included (a) the social interactions that international students have with domestic students, faculty and staff; (b) the connection between international students and other people from their home countries; (c) the difficulties that international students experience in social interactions.
This expanded model explained the phenomenon of culture shock more specifically (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004).

Institutions and the athletics departments tend to pay more attention to the academic support and training support for international student-athletes than the support or services for their cultural adjustment (Popp et al., 2010). Cultural differences play an important role in the overall experience of international student-athletes. When addressing the cultural differences that may affect students’ participation in physical activities, Yan & McCullagh (2004) provided supporting evidence for their argument that gender differences and age-related differences will have more impact on individuals in a cultural environment. International student-athletes may also experience discrimination and race-related issues, which more likely to be happened with African student-athletes (Lee & Opio, 2011). For example, international student-athletes will be affected by the stereotypes that closely associated with their races and cultural backgrounds, making it harder for them to adjust to the campus life in a foreign country (Lee & Opio, 2011). It is also necessary to understand that domestic student-athletes have different perceptions towards international student-athletes they interact with (Zander, 2013).

**Development of international student-athletes.** International student-athletes develop in different aspects of life as they fulfill their responsibilities as student-athletes.

**The person-environment theory.** The Person-Environment Theory was proposed by Holland (1997), emphasizing the interactions between individuals and the environment surrounding them, such as how the individuals change the environment and how the environment influences the individuals (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, Patton,
& Renn, 2010). According to the Person-Environment Theory (Holland, 1997), individuals tend to fit in the environment where they could make good use of their intelligence and skills and get along with other people who share the similar values. In addition, individual’s behaviors will also be influenced by the environment. Therefore, the Person-Environment Theory could be applied to international student-athletes regarding their overall experience of playing college sports in the U.S., as they will need to consider both the team environment and the institutional environment, and their performance in both academics and athletics will be affected by faculty, academic staff, classmates, teammates, coaches, and other athletic personnel (Evans et al., 2010).

**Student development theories.** Student development theories focus on the developmental process of students’ skills and capabilities through the education they have received at their institutions.

*The cognitive-structural theories.* The cognitive-structural theories play an important role by demonstrating and explaining the hierarchical process of individuals when they evaluate and develop the meaning of their experiences (Evans et al., 2010). The social cognitive theory could be applied to discuss the positive experience of international student-athletes. Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) emphasized that positive experience of students in academics, athletics, and other extra-curriculum areas will enhance their social cognitive development and will constructively affect their career development.

*Chickering’s seven vectors (1969).* Chickering’s seven vectors would be applied to explain the competence development of international student-athletes. Intercollegiate
athletics provides students the opportunities to develop their intellectual competence and manual skills competence through college education and athletic participation. International student-athletes would also have the opportunity to enhance their interpersonal competence by communicating and interacting with coaches and teammates, as well as developing mature relationships with them. The process of international student-athletes developing the purpose of their experiences in the U.S. would also reflect Chickering’s seven vectors.

*Cultural competence.* Cultural competence also plays an important role in the personal development of both athletic personnel and international student-athletes, and could bring constructive impact on the institution’s athletic performance. According to Cross (1991), athletic personnel with cultural competence would be able to acknowledge the cultural differences and would adjust consulting services provided to international student-athletes accordingly. On the other hand, as the cultural competence being developed, both international student-athletes and domestic student-athletes would see the value and positive influence of cultural differences and understand that cultural differences will affect individual behaviors and the interpretation of those behaviors (Cross, 1991).

*Theory of involvement* (Astin, 1984). Involvement was defined as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” by Alexander Astin (1984, p.297). Student involvement measures the efforts that students put in their educational experience, both mentally and physically (Astin, 1999). Student involvement includes but is not limited to the time students spend on academic studies,
extracurricular activities, and the communication with faculty and other institutional personnel in a campus setting (Astin, 1999). It is important to understand that student involvement should be regarded as a continuous process that affects students’ performance in both academics and athletics. Students’ interactions in an academic environment, institution’s academic ranking and the institutional administration will also have specific impact on students’ athletic involvement (Astin, 1999). Student involvement theory would be helpful for individuals to understand how to involve international student-athletes more in the campus life so as to gain more positive experience from athletic activities, academic events, and social life (Burnett, 2010).

Retention of Student-Athletes

“Student-athlete retention was defined by utilizing the Academic Progress Rate (APR) instituted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association in February 2005” (Le Crom et al., 2009, p. 1). Le Crom et al. (2009) discuss the factors that affect the retention rate of student-athletes, including their gender, the sports they play, as well as athletics scholarships and other financial aids they could receive. According to the research findings, when considered alone, receiving athletic scholarships did not significantly affect student-athletes’ retention rate (Le Crom et al., 2009). Female student-athletes had higher retention rate than male student-athletes, and student-athletes playing individual sports had higher retention rate than those playing team sports (Le Crom et al., 2009). When the above three factors were all considered, the effect on retention rate became significant (Le Crom et al., 2009). When considering whether to stay in the institutions, male student-athletes placed most attention to their grades, while female student-athletes
consider more factors especially their satisfactions of both athletic departments and institutions when making dropout decisions (Le Crom et al., 2009). Male student-athletes also consider more about their career of being professional athletes after graduation since they have more opportunities to play for professional teams and could earn more salary than female student-athletes do; and in this case, it would be easier for male student-athletes to drop out before graduation to start their professional sports careers once they are drafted to the professional teams (Le Crom et al., 2009). Also, managing the balance between academics and athletics is time consuming, which could also lead to the dropout decisions of student-athletes (Le Crom et al., 2009; Perrelli, 2004).

**Retention of international student-athletes.** While the academic adjustment is related to the graduate rate of international student-athletes, social adjustment and institutional commitment are related to the retention rate of international student-athletes (Chickering, 1969; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Magee and Sugden (2002) stated that the actual support that international student-athletes receive affects their overall experience and satisfaction during their school years in the U.S. Sufficient support that helps international student-athletes perform well in both academics and athletics will contribute to the high level of satisfaction of international student-athletes. In addition to the support provided by the institution and the athletic department, the direct support from the coaches has significant impact on the experience of international student-athletes (Magee & Sugden, 2002). It is essential to understand that coaches’ characteristics such as their backgrounds and personalities will influence their coaching philosophies and how they interact with international student-athletes (Duchesne et al., 2011).
International student-athletes value the support and caring from their coaches, especially those who have developed certain understanding of cultural difference and have helped the international student-athletes have balanced development in academics, athletics, and in personal life (Duchesne et al., 2011). Researchers also pointed out that coaches and other athletic administrators would need to develop better understanding of international student-athletes regarding their academic and athletic experience in the U.S. (Popp et al., 2011; Trendafilova et al., 2010). International student-athletes also appreciate the recognitions and rewards from coaches for their outstanding performance in athletics (Duchesne et al., 2011). The better the relationships with coaches and teammates, the more satisfied international student-athletes will be.

**Summary**

Given the increasing focus on internationalization in higher education and the global development of intercollegiate athletics, more research studies about international student-athletes have been conducted. However, there is limited literature about the specific experience of international student-athletes. Although there is research or analytical models about what motivates international student-athletes to pursue college degree and play college sports in the U.S., there is limited research about the detailed decision-making process of international student-athletes when they choose which institution to attend. Some literatures provided information about the challenges that international student-athletes need to overcome, but there is a lack of in-depth analysis regarding the difficulties that international student-athletes experience during their adjustment process in academics, athletics, and personal life. Few previous research
mentions the challenges for international student-athletes regarding their cultural adjustment, which will largely affect their overall satisfactions during the years they spend at the institutions they attend.

Schulte and Choudaha (2014) pointed out that there was limited research about the retention rate of international students in general. In addition, the majority of literature that discusses the student-athletes of different races merely focuses on Latino or Asian student-athletes, solely talking about African American student-athletes (Person et al., 2001). Also, there is a literature gap regarding the significance of relationships between international student-athletes and faculty (Trendafilova et al., 2010).

The lack of attention paid to the global development of intercollegiate athletics and international student-athletes will also limit the support provided to international student-athletes, making their experience with the institutions and the athletic departments less favorable, therefore affecting their retention rate as well as the future recruitment of international student-athletes (Kontaxakis, 2011; Trendafilova et al., 2010).
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research study is to analyze and develop an in-depth understanding of the integration process and experience of international student-athletes who are enrolled at NCAA Division I institutions. This chapter discusses the research methodology that is applied to this research study. The primary research question is introduced in the first section of this chapter, indicating the research phenomenon being explored in this research study. The themes that sub-questions focusing on are also specified in this chapter. The second section of this chapter includes a review of methodologies for qualitative research, followed by the explanation of why qualitative methods are applied for this study. The narrative and phenomenological approaches are applied to analyze the experiences of international student-athletes. The third section of this chapter includes the research design, such as the sampling methods and participants. The process of data collection is provided in the fourth section of this chapter, followed by the data analysis plan. Credibility of this research study is also discussed, followed by the research limitations.

Primary Research Question

The primary research question for this study: How do international student-athletes integrate to campus life, especially considering the challenges they face as being a student and an athlete?

I looked for research data under three main themes to answer the primary research question. Under the theme of recruitment, I explored how international student-athletes made their decisions when choosing an institution to attend. Sub-questions aimed to
understand how international student-athletes heard about the opportunities of playing college sports in the U.S., and what factors influenced their final decisions to play college sports in the U.S. Under the theme of adjustment and integration, sub-questions were asked to identify the challenges that international student-athletes would face, as well as the factors that would ease their integration in both academics and athletics. Sub-questions that aimed to understand the experience of international student-athletes during their adjustment process asked about international student-athletes’ impression about their institutions, the athletic departments, and their teams. Sub-questions under this theme also asked about the challenges or problems that international student-athletes faced when they first arrived on campus. Sub-questions under the third theme were about the overall experience of international student-athletes when they were playing college sports and pursuing education in the U.S., especially to see what support or services from the athletic departments and institutions would be helpful, as well as to get some insights from international student-athletes about what they went through during their time in the U.S.

**Research Design**

The purpose of this research study is to analyze and develop an in-depth understanding of the integration process and experience of international student-athletes who are enrolled at NCAA Division I institutions. Qualitative research methods including interpretations and analysis make the research phenomenon more understandable without raising hypotheses or questions (Denzil & Lincoln, 2005; McLean, Jensen, & Hurd, 2004). Qualitative research methods provide the researcher the opportunity to look at the
details of their research topics and analyze them in depth (Patton, 1990). In contrast to quantitative research methods that focus on the cause-effect relationship within the issues, qualitative research methods aim to understand and explain the information provided by participants and participants’ behaviors, specifically when the research is related to social or human issues (Creswell, 1998; Morrow & Smith, 2000). Qualitative research methods are also helpful for analysis that is applied to diverse populations (Evans et al., 2010). Therefore, qualitative research methods were applied to conduct this research study because they were helpful and suitable for interpreting the phenomenon of international student-athletes pursuing college degree and playing college sports in the U.S., as well as for understanding the factors that affected the integration and overall experiences of international student-athletes. In the specific case of this research study, qualitative research methods were appropriate for understanding the specific context in which international student-athletes interact with other people on campus, and for understanding how the campus environment and people around them influence their experience. Qualitative research methods also help to understand the recruitment process as well as the adjustment process of international student-athletes, by developing explanations for those processes and international student-athletes’ behaviors (Maxwell, 1996).

This research certainly considers some multicultural elements as the essential context of participants’ experience of playing college sports and pursuing college degree in the U.S. In addition, the diverse population in this research study refers to the group of international student-athletes who have different backgrounds, cultures, native languages
and experiences. Considering the multicultural elements and the diverse population, qualitative research is suitable for developing comprehensive understanding of participants’ experiences, making their voices heard, as well as including the self-awareness and self-reflection of the researcher throughout the research process (Morrow et al., 2001, p.582-583).

**Narrative analysis.** Narrative analysis is most suitable for understanding the experiences of research participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18). Understanding the experiences of research participants by being engaged in the life stories of research participants play significant role in understanding the research phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41). In the case of this research study, narrative description was used to provide some background of the previous athletic experiences of participated international student-athletes in their home countries, as well as to tell the stories of participants during their time in the U.S. In the case of this research study, understanding the experiences of international student-athletes will help to develop better services as well as to secure more resource and support for international student-athletes.

**Phenomenology.** Phenomenology allows the researcher to understand the experiences of research participants in order to explore the phenomenon, by not only describing the experiences, but also interpreting and analyzing the meanings behind the scenes (Creswell, 2007; p. 59). In the case of this research study, phenomenological method was used to understand the essence of the phenomenon of international student-athletes coming to the U.S. for both higher education and college sports, by analyzing
and interpreting the perspectives and reflections of participated international student-athletes regarding their experiences in the U.S.

**Sampling techniques.** When conducting qualitative research with the purpose of getting insightful information regarding a phenomenon or individuals, purposeful sampling would be the most beneficial method to use for maximizing the understanding of the phenomenon or individuals, by selecting participants who have solid knowledge and information regarding the research phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). In the case of this research, participants were purposefully selected as they needed to meet the eligibility requirements set by the NCAA as an international student-athlete, and as non-native English speakers but had certain level of English competency to share their experiences. International student-athletes whose native language is not English tend to experience language barrier that might make it more difficult for them to adjust to the campus life in the U.S. Criterion sampling was also applied to this research study in terms of selecting international student-athletes whose first language was not English.

Convenience sampling was applied to recruit two participants, as these two international student-athletes were introduced to the research by their current assistant coach who knew me. I reached out to the participants with the recommendation from their assistant coach, and both participants completed both the online questionnaire and the one-on-one interviews.

Snowball sampling technique could be used so that international student-athletes who complete the online questionnaire and participate in the interviews could encourage other international student-athletes to participate in the research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech,
According to Patton (1990), the depth of information provided by the selected participants outweighs the sample size in terms of strengthening the validity of qualitative research. The desired sample size for the one-on-one interviews is 12 participants. Sandelowski (1995) pointed out that the sample size should be set as suitable for achieving saturation and conduct deep analysis. It would be difficult to have in-depth discussion with less than six members as the desired sample size for interviews, while it would be hard for the researcher to coordinate with more than 12 members (Morgan, 1997). Saturation will be reached with 12 interviews, when no more new ideas emerge (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Therefore, in order to guarantee there would be enough number of interviewees to reach research saturation, all of the 16 research participants who expressed their willingness of being interviewed were contacted by the researcher to set up one-on-one interviews. In the end, nine participants completed a single one-on-one interview.

In the process of recruiting participants, I reached out to international student-athletes directly after getting their contact information from their campus directory. Two participants were contacted upon the recommendation of the assistant coach of their current team.

Participants. Participants identified for this research were (a) enrolled in the NCAA Division I institutions at the time they completed the online questionnaire; (b) representing their institutions in intercollegiate athletics; (c) were not born in the United States; (d) non-native English speakers. Preliminary online research was conducted to
identify the participants. Team rosters were accessed from the athletic websites of Division I institutions and I looked up the email addresses of international student-athletes from their campus directories. International student-athletes were reached out by emails directly from me, with the invitation to participate in the online questionnaire. The international student-athletes who agreed to participate in one-on-one interviews confirmed their email addresses on the online questionnaire, and I emailed them the consent forms and scheduled the interviews.

Athletic conferences in NCAA Division I represented within this study included the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), the Mid-American Conference (MAC), the Big 12 Conference, the Big Ten Conference, the Big East Conference, the Southeastern Conference (SEC), the Ivy League, the Pacific-12 Conference (PAC-12), and the Sun Belt Conference. Research participants who ultimately completed an interview represented the Sun Belt Conference (2), the MAC (1), the Big 12 Conference (1), the ACC (1), and the Big Ten Conference (4).

Data Collection

Approval to conduct this research study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University. As explained above, international student-athletes regarded as the potential participants were identified from team rosters of the varsity teams at Division I institutions, and their contact information were accessed from the campus directories of their institutions. Considering the possible limitation on responsive rate, unlimited Division I institutions were randomly selected with the purpose of recruiting as many research participants as possible.
Emails with informed consent were sent to the potential participants, explaining the purpose and process of this research study and inviting the potential participants to complete the online questionnaire. In addition to the explanation of the research purpose and process, potential benefits and risks that participants would receive from attending the research were also addressed in the informed consent. Regarding the potential benefits, participants would have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences as international student-athletes who pursue both education and athletics in the U.S., and there would not be any risks of participating in this research study. The informed consent also addressed that all information provided by participants would be confidential, and participants could withdraw from the research at any time.

The online questionnaire covered two main parts with a total of 38 questions. Part One (demographic section) asked the information about international student-athletes’ family background, athletic and educational background in country of origin, and current athletic and academic level. Part Two included three sections (i.e. recruitment, adjustment, the overall experience) for exploring more detailed information about international student-athletes’ experiences in the U.S., to gain better understanding of the challenges they face as well as the supports they received in both academics and athletics. International student-athletes who completed the online questionnaire were considered as research participants. Those participants who expressed their willingness of being interviewed at the end of the online questionnaire would receive informed consent for attending the interviews via emails, in which I scheduled the interviews with them.
Interviews are helpful for the researcher to not only collect in-depth information to answer the research questions, but also understand more about the phenomenon from different perspectives during the interactions with interviewees (Handerson, 1991). In the specific case of this research, interviews were either conducted at the institutions where the participants attending or via Skype video/phone calls, providing the most convenience to the participants (Devers, 1994). The interviews were semi-structured, giving the participants opportunities to share their experiences in a relaxed way, and the interviews were conducted in English except for the three interviewers who spoke the same native language as I do. Open-ended questions were developed for the interviews, encouraging participants to share their experiences more freely and emerging follow-up questions easily during the interviews.

Each interview lasted around 45 minutes. After each interview, I reviewed the information collected and sent out follow-up email with the interview transcript attached to the interviewee as a member check, to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretations in data analysis. During the interviews, I also observed interviewees’ nonverbal expression as they shared their experiences, which was helpful for me to develop accurate understanding of the information provided by the interviewees (Patton, 1990).

In addition to the NCAA website that provides information on intercollegiate athletic rules and regulation, the websites of the athletic departments of selected institutions were also reviewed for the supports and resources that each of the selected institutions provided to international student-athletes.
Data Analysis Process

Collected data was classified and analyzed by themes so that the experiences of international student-athletes would be described in a structural and detailed way. Narrative analysis approach was applied as the most appropriate approach to describe experiences and help to transform the experiences in an understandable way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Case-by-case analysis was applied to the experience of each interviewee, while cross-case analysis was conducted to identify the common themes and to compare the differences among all participants’ cases, especially among the interviewees’.

Data transcription provides opportunities to the researcher to get more familiar with the research topic and to develop in-depth understanding of the information collected (Riessman, 1993). The data collected from the interviews with participating international student-athletes was transcribed and coded to classified schemes (LeCompte, 2000). The coding process is important for describing the context of the setting, including the information that the researcher expect to find before conducting the research, and the surprising information found during the research (Creswell, 1998). For the individual cases in this research, coding was used to identify the within-case theme for each case and to conduct cross-case theme analysis, so as to compare the similarities and differences among the cases (Creswell, 1998). Schemes were analyzed to see how they indicate the key factors that would affect the experiences of international student-athletes. Interview transcripts were emailed to interviewees to make sure the information and interpretations were correct and to avoid any misunderstanding. All files created for
the interviews and online questionnaire were stored appropriately and only me had access to those files.

**Research Credibility**

**Reflexivity.** I reflected about myself during the research process to enhance reflexivity and showed recognition and appreciation to the interviewees (Patton, 1990). During the data collection, I reflected on the information that interviewees provided in the online questionnaire, and adjusted the interview questions appropriately (LeCompte, 2000). During the data analysis, I reflected my role as an international student who had direct experience of receiving institutional support and services. Since I was also a student-athlete when I had my undergraduate study in China, I compared my experience as a student-athlete with the experiences of those participants who originally came from China. I highly appreciated the willingness of participation of all the participants especially the interviewees as it was not easy to recruit international student-athletes for research to share their insights regarding their experience of playing collegiate sports and pursing higher education in the U.S.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation method studies the human behavior from various perspectives to develop comprehensive and deep understanding (Cohen & Manion, 2000, p. 254). When triangulation method is applied to a specific phenomenon, multiple approaches for data collection and analysis would be used to conduct the research study (Chenail, 1997). In the case of this research study, various formats of data were collected, such as online questionnaire, interviews, and websites analysis. In addition, the data collected was analyzed and compared as both individual cases and cross-cases analysis. I
also emailed the interviewees for member checks to make sure their information during the interview provided was correctly recorded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Rich description.** Rich description was provided when introducing the demographics of participants and demonstrating each case of interviewees. Each individual case was described to showcase the experience of interviewees in details.

**Confidentiality.** All the research data collected from participants were confidential. Participants’ names were not associated with any information they provided. Each interviewee had an assigned pseudonym for transcripts and the final dissertation paper. The recorded interviews were stored appropriately and only I had the access. In addition, all recorded files were destroyed when the research was complete.

**Research Limitations**

The generalizability of this research study was limited, since it solely focused on the experience of international student-athletes attending NCAA Division I institutions. It was also difficult to analyze all international student-athletes as a whole, since they come from different countries with different backgrounds. Although complete team rosters of all the selected institutions were provided, the campus directory of some other institutions were not open to public, which limited the recruitment of potential participants. Due to the limited participation rate of international student-athletes, not all international student-athletes at NCAA Division I institutions would participate in online questionnaire or interviews (Zonder, 2013). Regarding the interviews, it is necessary to clarify that the particular sports that the interviewees played could not be arranged in advance. In addition, the experiences of the participants could not fully represent the experiences of
all the international student-athletes in NCAA Division I, and the experiences of international student-athletes in NCAA Division I could only partially reflect the situation in other NCAA divisions. Therefore, when it comes to the data analysis, information generated from online questionnaire and interviews would be interpreted and analyzed with taking the relatively small sample size in consideration (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000).
Chapter 4: Research Findings – Individual Cases

This section summarizes the research process of this phenomenological study that aimed to investigate the experiences of international student-athletes in NCAA Division I in depth. This summation includes a synopsis of the data collection and analysis process, followed by the overall demographics of all participants, and concludes with the comprehensive narratives of the nine interviewees.

Summary of Methodology

Data collection. In order to answer the primary research question of “How do international student-athletes integrate to campus life, especially examining the challenges they face being a student and an athlete,” online questionnaire and one-on-one interviews were conducted for me to study the phenomenon of international student-athletes adjusting themselves to the campus life and gaining meaningful experience from both academics and athletics.

Preliminary online research was conducted to identify the international student-athletes attending Division I institutions. Team rosters were accessed from the athletic websites of randomly selected Division I institutions and I looked up the email addresses of international student-athletes from the campus directory. International student-athletes were contacted by me with emails, with the invitation to participate in the online questionnaire. The international student-athletes who agreed to participate in one-on-one interviews confirmed their email addresses on the online questionnaire, and I emailed them the consent forms and scheduled the interviews.
**Online questionnaire.** The online questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part of the online questionnaire consisted of 13 questions that asked participants about their age, year of class, nationality, native language, sport, their previous athletic status in home country, and whether they have received any scholarships or not. The second part of the questionnaire collected information from participants concerning their experiences during the recruitment phase, their adjustment to the U.S. and their institutions, and their overall experiences. A total of 48 international student-athletes from multiple NCAA Division I institutions completed the online questionnaire.

**Interviews.** Nine participants completed the one-on-one interview. Three interviews were conducted with the interviewees in person, while the rest were conducted through Skype video calls. The one-on-one interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions, which encouraged participants to share their experiences more freely. The interviews served as the collection of in-depth information about the integration process and experience of being an international student-athlete, which allowed me to answer the primary research question and to understand more about the phenomenon from different perspectives through the interactions with interviewees (Handerson, 1991). Interview questions aimed to ask for interviewees’ insight based on the information they provided in the online questionnaire.

**Data analysis.** Narrative analysis approach was applied as the most appropriate approach to use an understandable method to describe the experiences of participating international student-athletes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The detailed experience and insights shared by each interviewee were analyzed as an individual case, while cross-case
study analysis was conducted to identify the common themes among all the individual cases and to compare the differences among the individual cases and the differences existed in the information shared by all participants. Research data collected from both the online questionnaire and the interviews were transcribed and coded. Interview transcripts were emailed to interviewees as member checks to make sure the information and interpretations were correct and to avoid any misunderstanding. All files created for the interviews were stored appropriately and only I had the access. All the audio files of the interviews were destroyed after the interviews were transcribed. All collected data were analyzed and classified by themes so that the experiences of international student-athletes could be described in a structural and detailed way, indicating the key factors that affected those experiences.

**Demographics of Research Participants**

International student-athletes who participated in this research study represented 28 different countries and 25 different native languages. Table 1 demonstrates the country of origins and the number of participants from each country. As demonstrated in Table 1, the top three countries that had most participants in this research study were China, Germany, and Turkey. The nine international student-athletes who also participated in the one-on-one interviews were from Germany, China, Japan, the Netherlands, Malaysia, and Colombia. Participating international student-athletes competed in the following eight different conferences: The Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), the Big East Conference, the Big Ten Conference, the Big 12 Conference, the Ivy
League, the Mid-American Conference (MAC), the Pac-12 Conference, and the Southeastern Conference (SEC).

Table 1  
*Participant Demographic – Country of Origin*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*Participant Demographic – Native Language*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 3, among all the research participants, the largest number of participants were collegiate tennis players. In addition, seven participants were swimmers, five were track & field athletes, five were rowing athletes, and each sport of soccer, fencing, and volleyball had four participants.
Table 3

*Participant Demographic – Sports*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine skiing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diving</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track &amp; Field</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participants Profiles*

As shown in Table 4, four participants were in their freshman year when they filled out the online questionnaire, 17 participants were in their sophomore year, 12 participants were juniors, while 15 were seniors.
# Table 4

**Participants Profiles – Class, Nationality, Native Language, and Sports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
<th>Sports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>Track &amp; Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Alpine Skiing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Xhosa</td>
<td>Track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Track &amp; Field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>Hebrew/Russian</td>
<td>Fencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Fencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>Slovenian</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Language (Country)</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Golf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>Track &amp; Field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>Wolof</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Diving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Estonian</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia/Germany</td>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Participant Demographic – Athletic Status in Home Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athletic Status in Home Country</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly ranked in the nation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National team member</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school/middle school varsity team member</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National champion and record holder</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-pro athlete</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional athlete</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club athlete</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amateur athlete</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 5 above, the majority of research participants already had high level of sports performance before they came to the U.S. to play college sports. Thirteen participants were or still are national team members representing their home countries; additional six participants were highly ranked in their respective sports.

Interviewees Profiles

This section presents the research data collected from the nine interviewees. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participating international student-athletes according to qualitative research guidelines and Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirement. The make-up of the interviewees included one male and eight female
Table 6

*Interviewees Profiles – Sport, Conference, Nationality, and Native Language*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Conference</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Native Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Women’s Rowing</td>
<td>Big Ten</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Women’s Tennis</td>
<td>Big Ten</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Women’s Tennis</td>
<td>Sun Belt</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Women’s Soccer</td>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>Women’s Tennis</td>
<td>Big 12</td>
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**Profile 1: Samantha.** Samantha, a 22-year-old German student-athlete competing in women’s rowing for a Big Ten institution, was majoring in Biology and Pre-Medical. She was in her senior year of college at the time she completed both the online questionnaire and the interview. She came to the U.S. in 2013 after completing her high school education in Germany.
Samantha really wanted to come to the U.S. for higher education and college sports, and her parents generally were very supportive for her decision, although their biggest concern was that Samantha would be so far away from home for such a long time. Samantha first got the information about her current institution and the rowing team from her current coach. Unlike the domestic student-athletes who were recruited to the team by coaches or as the “walk-on” through college admissions process in the U.S., Samantha was recruited at the world rowing championships by her current coach. During the recruitment process, she also needed to take English tests and went through additional process that were particularly for international student-athletes. She pointed out that international student-athletes would need to work very closely with their coaches to go through those additional process. Samantha did not have the chance to visit the campus before she committed to the institution as she was in her home country at the time, which demonstrated another difference between international student-athletes and domestic student-athletes in terms of recruitment. Although the coach considered her status of an international student during the recruitment process, she did not think she had recruiting advantage as an international student-athlete.

In addition to her current institution which was her first choice, Samantha talked to the recruiting staff from some other big institutions including UCLA, University of Michigan, and Indiana University. She thought her status of an international student somehow affected her choice options of institutions. During her decision-making process, Samantha mainly considered her interactions with the coaches, as well as how the coaches introduced her about the college life in the U.S. Samantha also considered the
academic success of perspective institutions. Samantha did not regret about her decision of attending her current institution.

Thankfully, there had been a large number of international student-athletes attending her current institution, and there were some student-athletes from the same home country as Samantha in the past; therefore, the coaches on her current team were aware of some of the challenges that international student-athletes would experience, such as language barrier, and they helped Samantha adjust to the new environment quickly.

Samantha had set some goals for herself to achieve during her time as a student-athlete in the U.S. She wanted to earn a college degree as well as to win a national title in rowing. With the career goal of being a doctor, Samantha switched to her current major, the relatively easier one than other medical specific majors that could lead her to the planned career path. Her choice of major was not affected by her status of international student-athlete.

To Samantha’s surprise, being a student-athlete in the U.S. was very different than being a varsity athlete in her home country. First of all, being a student-athlete in the U.S. was a serious commitment, which changed Samantha’s previous perception regarding intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. In Germany, the academic system was separated from the intercollegiate athletics, and since there was no organization like the NCAA, the administrative rules were set by coaches. Although her previous training in Germany was intense, it was nothing in comparison to the intensity in the NCAA, especially in the conference that her current institution competed in. Her current weekly
schedule of practice included two practices per weekday, one practice on Saturday, and no practice on Sunday. Comparing to her four-people training group in Germany, her current varsity rowing team was huge with a total of about 40 student-athletes. Within such a large team and under such a competitive environment of college sports, Samantha was pleasantly surprised to see the team was actually like a family, in which every team member cared for each other. The supportive and family-like team environment certainly helped Samantha had an easier transition, and training with such a large group made it easier and had more fun. Another major difference was that tremendous support was provided to student-athletes in the U.S. For example, due to the limited facilities in the school area, Samantha’s friends in Germany would need to spend a lot of time on driving to get to a practice field. In Germany, the professor did not really care about providing support to student-athletes; while at Samantha’s current institution, the support provided was really helpful for student-athletes to major in what they wanted to study and still maintained high level of athletic performance.

Samantha was impressed by the support and help that she received to make her transition to the campus life in the U.S. much easier. She arrived on campus only a week before her freshman year started. Her teammates helped her figure everything out, such as opening bank account, setting up cell phone, showing her around campus, taking her to practice and grocery shopping, and etc. The support from her teammates played a significant role in her transition, making her feel like home very quickly. All the team members got along well with each other, and Samantha did not see any difference
between her relationship with other international teammates and that with her domestic teammates.

Samantha regarded her great relationship with her coaches as another most important thing to her athletic performance and personal development. Before coming to the U.S., Samantha did not have a pleasant relationship with her coaches at the time and it led to some personal issues. It was important to have her current coaches to provide support both on and off the field, not only wanting her to perform well in athletics, but also developing well as a person.

As one of the ten international student-athletes on the team, Samantha expressed that international student-athletes added different dimensions to the team, by bringing in good technical components, enhancing the high level of performance, and making the team more competitive. Having other international student-athletes on the team also provided Samantha the opportunity to know more about different cultures and different individuals, which also benefited her personal development. Samantha got to know the international student-athletes on the other teams by attending athletic events such as the annual banquets and the meetings about the NCAA rules and regulations, by sharing training facilities, or by recognizing each other in class. However, no event was organized particularly on purpose for international student-athletes to get to know each other.

In terms of athletic support, Samantha received full athletic scholarship that basically covered everything she needed on campus, and the athletic department had very sufficient budget to provide facilities, equipment, and gears to student-athletes. In
academics, especially during the beginning of the adjustment process, Samantha received sufficient support. The athletic department provided free tutoring to student-athletes, and student-athletes could schedule their tutoring sessions based on their practice arrangement and class schedule.

Samantha thought she definitely had a smooth transition and were fully adjusted to being an international student-athlete in the U.S. Regarding the services that could ease the adjustment process of international student-athletes in the future, Samantha would like to see different types of orientations being organized for international student-athletes. She encouraged future international student-athletes to not to be afraid to be far away from home, because pursuing higher education and playing college sports in the U.S. would be a great experience in many aspects.

**Profile 2: Michelle.** Michelle, a Japanese tennis player representing a Big Ten institution, majoring in Marketing with Media Production minor, was 21 years old and in her senior year at the time of the interview.

Michelle first got the information about her current institution and the team from a coach and a male tennis player she knew in Japan. Both the coach and the male tennis player happened to play for her current institution before. Regarding the general information about college sports in the U.S., Michelle was informed by her sister who used to play tennis for another institution in the U.S.

Michelle was a highly-ranked tennis player in her home country, and she was recruited by her current assistant coach through Facebook messages. She decided to come
to the U.S. in the January of the same year school started, which was a very late decision compared with other athletes.

Considering the fact that being able to speak English is a must to get a job in Japan, Michelle’s parents were very supportive for her decision of coming to the U.S. Meanwhile, her parents were concerned about the safety issues as they did not know much about the institution or its environment.

During the decision-making process, unlike some other student-athletes who made all five visits, Michelle only visited her current institution. When she first arrived on campus, she was very impressed by how large the institution was, as well as the incredible facilities for athletics. She decided to attend the current institution because of the sufficient resources provided to student-athletes, the great people and atmosphere on campus, especially with the recommendation from her coach and friend who used to play for the institution. Michelle also thought that her status as an international student affected her choice options.

In order to meet the eligibility requirement for international student-athletes, Michelle had to pass TOEFL and SAT, which was really a challenge for her, and the athletic department was worrying about whether she could keep up with classes after being admitted. In her first semester at the current institution, a tutor was assigned to her for every class, regardless of how easy the class was. She also went to meet with her tutor at the academic center that was only for student-athletes every day.

Michelle had not made up her mind of which major to study until her sophomore year when she found herself being interested in marketing, especially sports marketing
and branding, social media, and advertisement. Although the business school at her current institution was very difficult to get in, Michelle decided to accept the challenge. She was accepted into the business school after her sophomore year and had been doing well since then.

Michelle shared some differences between being a student-athlete in the U.S. and being a student-athlete in Japan. The intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. was much more competitive than she expected. Student-athletes in Japan would not have scholarship or tutoring; while in the U.S., student-athletes could receive scholarships that cover full tuition, books, housing and food, as well as some extra money to cover the extra cost of living. In Japan, there would be a clear hierarchy within the team, and the freshmen athletes even would have few opportunities to actually play. In the U.S., student-athletes would receive much more resources, have more opportunities, and be more recognized because of the sports culture. Hearing the cheers from the fans in the airports, and experiencing such a strong sports culture made Michelle valued the experience of being a student-athlete in the U.S.

During the adjustment process, Michelle made great effort to speak up and to overcome the language barrier, and she also appreciated the support from her advisor, professors, coaches and teammates, who all understood her struggles as being an international student-athlete. Michelle had incredibly well relationships with her teammates, especially those international teammates who understood each other better than domestic teammates would understand them. In addition, Michelle received great
help from the free sports psychology services provided, especially during her freshman year, when she was struggling with language and her athletic performance.

Doing well in both academics and athletics was a challenge for Michelle. During her first two years in college, she got injured a lot due to the lack of sleep and lack of time to have lunch caused by her busy schedule as a student-athlete. Michelle shared her busy schedule as a student-athlete: she would have three to four hours of classes in the morning, and then three hours of tennis practice plus an hour lifting or conditioning in the afternoon; after practice, she would either go home or to the student-athlete academic center to study. Michelle also shared in the interview that more information about academics and practice schedules should be provided to international student-athletes before they arrived on campus. Some international student-athletes that she knew once had some struggles as they had no idea how things would be like, or how hard it would be to maintain the balance between academics and athletics.

Regarding athletic support in general, student-athletes could see athletic trainers and nutritionist on daily basis. Various types of food were provided for student-athletes to refuel before and after practice. Michelle regarded the services and support she accessed to was much more and better than some professional athletes would have back in her home country. Although Michelle was not allowed to take any other scholarship since she already had the athletic scholarship, the full athletic scholarship had covered almost all her expenses to pursue higher education and play college sport in the U.S. Her current institution also provided sufficient resources for student-athletes in the area of career development, including job fair and flexible internship opportunities.
Michelle addressed that there were many opportunities for her to know the international student-athletes on the other varsity teams, such as attending the leadership academy that was organized for student-athletes only. She was also pleasantly surprised to see there were more international student-athletes on campus than she expected.

In terms of personal development, Michelle found it became easier to express herself. She grew from a shy student who could not raise hand in class to a more confident individual as an international student-athlete. When she was a sophomore, Michelle once thought about becoming a professional tennis player, but considering her physical disadvantages on the court that might limit her competitiveness, she changed her mind. She planned to stay in the U.S. after graduation and hopefully to work in the area of sports marketing, at companies such as Nike or IMG, or to work with athletes, or to work in the TV broadcasting industry as a producer or a coordinator.

Michelle certainly regarded being an international student-athlete in the U.S. as the best opportunity for an eligible individual to pursue higher education and play college sport at the same time. This experience provided her much more opportunities and options to explore the future than being a tennis player in her home country.

Profile 3: Sophia. Sophia, a 23-year old Japanese tennis player representing an institution in the Sun Belt Conference, was in her senior year when she participated in the interview for this research study. Sophia was majoring in Global Business with Marketing concentration, as she did not want to become a professional athlete after graduation.
Sophia had been training in China for around four years before she met the Head Men’s Tennis Coach from her current institution. At the time, the Head Men’s Tennis Coach was coaching for the academy in summer. During the conversations with the Head Men’s Tennis Coach, Sophia expressed her interest of playing in Division I in the U.S., but had not made up the mind of which institution to attend. The coach suggested Sophia to apply for college in the U.S. as soon as possible so that her age would meet the eligibility requirement for being a student-athlete in the U.S. Considering the opportunity of receiving scholarship as well as how good her current institution would be as described by the Head Men’s Tennis Coach, the 19-year old Sophia was persuaded to pursue higher education and play collegiate tennis in the U.S. Later, Sophia talked with the Head Women’s Tennis Coach from her current institution and some players on her current team on Skype. The coach and players were very nice, which was a huge factor that Sophia decided to commit to her current institution. Before considering playing collegiate tennis in Division I, Sophia was trying to play professional tennis. Therefore, although there were some institutions emailing her at the time, she did not pay that much attention to. When her current institution showed up in her plan at the right time, it automatically became her first choice. Sophia’s parents were very happy about the admission and scholarship offered by her current institution, because they really wanted Sophia to attend Division I institutions in the U.S.

Sophia mentioned that she thought her recruitment process was different from that of domestic student-athletes, and the major difference was that as an international student-athlete, she did not get to visit the campus before she committed. Comparing with
other international student-athletes on her team, Sophia found that her recruitment process was unique as well, since her teammates all were directly contacted by the Head Women’s Tennis Coach. During the recruitment process, the coach considered Sophia's status as an international student, making sure Sophia have all required documents and test scores ready. It was very helpful since the Head Women’s Tennis Coach had previous experience of recruiting international student-athletes. As an international student-athlete, Sophia shared that the recruiting advantages included enhancing the diversity of the program and bringing new perspectives to the team, and etc. Those were also the reasons that the coaches looked for talented student-athletes not only in the U.S., but also those from the other countries. Sophia also stated that international student-athletes positively affected the team performance. For example, players from different countries had different play styles; they would adapt to others’ play styles as it was helpful for them to play better.

Sophia stated that the status of being an international student affected the choice options of the institutions that she planned to attend, mainly because it was difficult for international student-athletes to visit the campus before they committed. In addition, due to the status of international student, Sophia had to take the TOEFL and some more tests than domestic student-athletes should take.

Sophia elaborated on her experience of feeling discriminated because of the cultural differences when she first arrived in the U.S. At the time, she was stereotyped regarding her English as being an international student from Asia, and it took a while for other people to realize their assumptions were wrong. It was also hard for her to join in
the conversations with Americans as the cultural barrier existed. Sophia appreciated the welcoming environment on campus, which made her feel like home. Her teammates also provided tremendous support during the past two years. Her head coach cared about the student-athletes and the whole team was like a family. Sophia also appreciated all the supportive staff in the athletic department.

Before she came to the U.S. for collegiate tennis, Sophia played tennis individually, which was very different from playing in a team in Division I. Playing individually felt more focused and it was more like a professional format, which also put more pressure on Sophia, because she would need to try her best to make the money, time and effort that the athletic department spent on herself worth it. While playing collegiate tennis in a team environment, Sophia appreciated the support from her teammates and the great team atmosphere, which lessen her pressure of striving for best performance.

Being a student-athlete in college was very different from playing tennis in the academy. When Sophia was training in China, she attended online school to keep her education. Being a student-athlete who went to classes on an actual campus, Sophia had to manage her time well, to maintain the balance among academics, tennis, and social life, especially as she would like to make sure she would do well in academics, instead of only being good at her sport.

As a collegiate tennis player in Division I, Sophia had three morning workout sessions each week, with two and half hours of daily practice in the afternoon on weekdays. At the beginning, it was an intense training schedule for Sophia to adjust to, as she needed to spend more time on academics than she was in the academy where she took
classes online. By the time of interview, Sophia said that she had fully adjusted to her busy schedule as a student-athlete.

Sophia received full athletic scholarship, which was very helpful for her campus life in the financial aspect. In Sophia’s understanding, the decision of offering athletic scholarship to the players was mostly depended on whether the coaches see the players fit for the team. Student-athletes would need to maintain certain level of GPA for their athletic scholarship, and Sophia confirmed that she could also apply for academic scholarship as long as she met the requirement, regardless of the fact that she already received athletic scholarship. Sophia shared that as a student-athlete, the goal of doing her best for the team actually motivated her to maintain her GPA at a high level.

Sophia once thought about transferring to a higher-ranked institution for academic reason, but the athletic department at her current institution did not make the transferring happen. The athletic department did not provide a clear explanation, however, in Sophia’s opinion, “it just sounded like they wanted me to stay, because I was like the best player at this time”, as another student-athlete was allowed to transfer. Sophia realized it was difficult for student-athletes to transfer since the athletic department and the team had put in investment on the athletes.

Regarding the relationships with teammates, Sophia shared that international student-athletes tend to have closer relationship with each other than with domestic student-athletes, as they could share their feelings or thoughts as being far away from home. Sophia had made friends with a lot of international student-athletes on the other teams, and she was very close to some of them. Instead of meeting other international
student-athletes on different teams during formal athletic activities, Sophia preferred to get to know them in casual occasions, such as at the study hall only for student-athletes, or through the friends she already knew. Sophia also knew many international collegiate tennis players from other institutions. As many varsity teams had international players, Sophia believe that people had paid enough attention to collegiate tennis.

Sophia agreed that student-athletes sometimes would receive more support and assistance than non-athlete students due to their dual roles as both a student and an athlete. However, she did not think student-athletes were treated favorably. Among all the academic support and services, Sophia’s favorite was the study hall that was for student-athletes only. It was a good place not only for studying, but also for student-athletes from different teams to catch up with each other.

Regarding her future plan, instead of playing professional tennis, Sophia would like to work in the area of sports marketing after graduation, as sports had always been an important part of her life. Playing professional tennis would be very challenging and she was excited about other career options.

General speaking, Sophia had learned tremendously from the experience of being an international student-athlete in Division I. It was such a once-in-a-life time experience that had special meaning to Sophia. She not only learned more about herself, but also learned more about playing in a team environment. She also learned about better time-management and became more self-disciplined. Being away from home, Sophia got to experience the cultural differences and to make new friends, as well as to become more independent.
Sophia suggested future international student-athletes to be prepared once they decided to play college sports in the U.S.; it would be very important for them to be able to maintain the balance between academics and athletics. Prospective international student-athletes should also be ready to embrace new cultures, new friends, and new challenges. Sophia emphasized that international student-athletes would need to make great effort to adjust to the cultural differences.

On the other hand, Sophia would like to see more events to be organized for international student-athletes to gather together, or have some student organizations particularly for international student-athletes, so that international student-athletes could have the opportunity to share with those who were from the same countries or had similar experience.

**Profile 4: Victoria.** Victoria, a junior soccer player from Colombia, was representing a MAC institution and majoring in communication with a minor in journalism and marketing. She was a national team member of her home country, and she was the only international student-athlete on her varsity team at her current institution in the U.S.

Victoria started playing competitive soccer at the age of 15, which she regarded as a very late start of playing competitive soccer. It has been a rough process for Victoria to become the athlete she is today. Knowing she would be a professional athlete in the future, her family made great effort to encourage her to come to the U.S. to play soccer in a better-developed system. Victoria’s family was very excited about her decision of playing collegiate soccer in the U.S., and have been very supportive throughout the entire
Her family’s only concern was actually she playing soccer back in her home country.

Victoria initially planned to attend another institution and had already completed all the required tests as an international student-athlete. However, there were some problems when her high school grades were transferred to meet the NCAA eligibility requirement, which brought down her GPA. Also, given the fact that her SAT score was not high enough for that institution to accept her GPA, she found out that she could not play in Division I only a month and a half before her first season in the U.S. would start. In this case, Victoria had to consider playing in Division II as she already took the previous year off to play for her national team. After her agency sent her information about Division II institutions, New York Institution of Technology was the first one among those Division II institutions to offer scholarship. Knowing herself would end up playing in Division I, Victoria decided to play for New York Institution of Technology first, as the first step to move up to Division I.

Later, Victoria got the information about her current institution and the team from the recruiting agency that some of her national teammates and her high school peers worked with in her home country. As the opportunity came, Victoria received offers from several Division I institutions and decided to play for her current institution because of the beautiful campus and the outstanding academic program in communications. Victoria was also attracted by the big goals that her current soccer team aimed to achieve. As an individual who had always been striving to be excellent as an athlete and a person, she was attracted and motivated by the project that the soccer head coach was working on to
change the culture of the soccer team as well as his high standards and goals. The head coach shared with her the process he wanted to complete in order to make the program better and to eventually win the championship. Victoria found it was very encouraging to start from zero and improve all the way up.

When she was in New York, Victoria had a full athletic scholarship and an academic scholarship. Her current institution offered her 75% athletic scholarship, which covered tuition, housing and a small portion of meal plans. The athletic scholarship certainly provided great help to Victoria in terms of covering living expenses in the U.S. Regarding academic scholarship, Victoria was allowed to apply but she was not qualify according to the requirement at her current institution.

At the time when Victoria was playing for New York Institution of Technology, there were around six international student-athletes on the team, which was quite different from the current circumstance. During the conversations with the current head coach, the head coach expressed his concern as Victoria would be the only international player in the team, and it might be hard for her to get into a new team culture, in terms of the team being open to a new player. Although Victoria was the only international student athlete on the soccer team, she did not need to worry about the immigration paperwork or related issues, as she had been in another institution in New York before she played for the current institution. For her, the enrollment process was simply being transferred from another institution to the current one, which was similar to that for a domestic player.
For domestic soccer players, college recruitment would start as early as during their first year of high school, while the recruitment process for Victoria to get in the current institution started only two months before the season kicked off. As a former varsity team player quitted out of sudden, Victoria was recruited as the replacement. Regarding the recruiting advantages of international student-athletes, Victoria shared that international student-athletes were recruited generally because of their higher level of athletic performance than domestic student-athletes, and people would certainly have higher expectation of international student-athletes. Victoria also mentioned that another recruiting advantage of international student-athletes would be to bring in different views of playing the sport, which would enhance the diversity in athletic dimension.

Victoria realized the importance of academics during the year she paused her education due to the national team duty. As she did not have any formal education during that year, she spent time on reading for self-learning, as well as on writing to express her thoughts and let out her stress. When Victoria started her college life in the U.S., she chose communication as her major because she liked writing. Although English was not her first language, it was not a language barrier to her either. Therefore, having communication as the major of study was not a challenge for her. However, Victoria pointed out that for those international student-athletes who did not have sufficient language proficiency in English, it would not be a smart choice to choose the majors that require knowing of a large amount of vocabularies.

When Victoria moved into the current campus, her head coach and assistant coach helped her to get in the dormitory. She did not receive additional support during her
transition period to the campus. Fortunately, Victoria did not have any hard time during her adjustment to the campus life at her current institution. She loved the campus environment of her current institution than that of her former institution in New York. Victoria was pleasantly surprised that the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. was more professional than she thought. Being a national team player in Colombia was very different from being a student-athlete in the U.S. Back in her home country, she was only considered as a soccer player. In the U.S., student-athletes are treated as athletes in general first, and then the athletes of a specific sport. Therefore, the fitness training in the U.S. is ten times better than that in Colombia. However, Victoria complained about certain NCAA rules that limited the time for soccer players to train with soccer balls to no more than five hours a week during off-season. During off-season, soccer players could do up to ten hours of conditioning but no ball allowed, which made Victoria feel like she was trained as a cross-country or a track-and-field athlete instead of a soccer player. If the conditioning rules could allow players to train with soccer balls, it would be more encouraging for her.

The high expectation would bring in some pressure for international student-athletes as they were always expected to play better than domestic student-athletes. In Victoria’s case, as she described, “maybe you make a good save, they’re like ‘that’s what’s been expected from you’. And other keepers from here make some good saves, ‘ah yes!! Good job!!!’ ” As Victoria expressed, due to the higher expectation, she would receive less encouragement when she did well, but received more blames when she messed up. She had the pressure to be a starter, and as a self-demanding person, “What’s
frustrating is sometime you don’t get that opportunity to show that you’re worth bringing in.” Victoria also admitted that having a father who was an outstanding soccer player back in their home country created huge pressure on her.

Victoria had some struggles in her relationships with teammates at the beginning, due to the cultural differences that included the differences in soccer cultures. In her home country, soccer was the sport that people were most passionate about, and people were constantly talking about soccer. While in the U.S., people were much less passionate about soccer, and some of her teammates only knew David Beckham, Messi and Cristiano, but not other outstanding soccer players who were not celebrity soccer stars. In this case, even though soccer was the most common thing between her and her teammates, Victoria felt like she could not talk much about soccer with them, except one teammate who was relatively more passionate about soccer than the rest of the team. During the process, she adjusted her initially high expectation of her teammates, and learned to understand them and accept both their soccer cultures and the American culture in general. Victoria also shared that she was completely against the drinking culture in college, especially from an athlete’s perspective. Although she and her teammates did not have many things in common, their relationships got better as she got to know her teammates and vice versa.

Victoria was excited to see the changes happening to the team. Take the last season as an example, the team created a particular hashtag to motivate players to change the team for better together. Although the results of the last season was tough and not what the team expected, the players and the culture were changing. For example, “Last
year, if we lost a game, like “whatever, oh we just want this season to end, and we are
tired”. But this year, like it hurt. Like that last game, it hurt. It was heartbreaking. I’m
happy to see my teammates cry. It’s horrible to say, cause you fight for your teammates.
But I’m happy to see how much it hurt.” The process of changing within the program
also gave confidence to Victoria that the team would get pleasant results the next season,
as the attitude of every player was constructively changed, and the players cared more
about their individual performance and the team performance.

Although there were sufficient resources provided to student-athletes on different
varsity teams, Victoria called for more support from the athletic department to the soccer
program as the soccer team was one of the teams that received the fewest support. To be
specific, compared with the big programs such as football and basketball, the soccer
program did not have enough marketing promotion on game days.

The athletics department at her current institution did not organize any event to
bring the international student-athletes from different varsity teams to get together.
Victoria only got to know a student-athlete from the Netherland only by the coincidence
of being the roommates during the past year. It was difficult for her to identify other
international student-athletes on the other teams if it was not through the events or
activities organized by the athletic department.

Victoria saw her roommate who was also an international student-athlete
struggling a lot to adapt to the American culture, as well as to adjust to the busy schedule
as being an athlete and a student majoring in architecture. Although academic advisors
and athletics academic advisors were assigned to help student-athletes, but they were not
the individuals that student-athletes could talk to on daily basis about everything in life. Therefore, Victoria suggested to have some psychologists on campus that international student-athletes could talk to, especially during the adjustment process. Victoria shared that, regardless of the language barrier, it was difficult to be a student-athlete. It was a challenge for her to maintain the balance between athletics and academics. As a student-athlete, she needed to make sure she was ready to compete in sports, and also took care of all the academic assignments, tests and etc. With the language barrier, international student-athletes would need to spend more time on readings and writing, and the language barrier sometimes might also affect their relationships with the domestic teammates. Some domestic teammates sometimes would make fun of her when she did not catch the words they were saying, or joked about her home country. It was annoying and she was disappointed and frustrated about it. In this case, Victoria thought it would be helpful if some athletic personnel could be the mentors to help student-athletes understand the different cultures, especially those simple things but with different meanings to student-athletes from different cultural backgrounds.

In the academic setting, Victoria shared that most of her professors were very supportive, while some of her teammates had those professors that did not care about student-athletes, and would not provide flexibility for student-athletes who needed to compete or travel for games. For some challenging majors, more understanding and support from professors were needed.

Victoria would certainly join in the professional soccer league after graduation. She once thought about dropping out of school to play in the professional team where her
father played before. After considering the advantage of getting a college degree, she decided to finish her college before being a professional soccer player. Being a student-athlete in the U.S. provided Victoria many opportunities to improve in both academics and athletics, as well as to know a new culture. This pursuit of being a professional athlete was also worthy of being away from home. Victoria suggested prospective international student-athletes to take the opportunity of having higher education and playing college sports in the U.S.

**Profile 5: Lorena.** Lorena, a 20-year-old tennis player from Malaysia, represented a Big 12 institution, with a major in Pharmacy and planned to work as a pharmacist in the U.S. after graduation. She was a national team tennis player in her home country.

Lorena got the information about her current institution and team from her head coach of the current team, who was transferred from another institution. Lorena got to know her head coach because of her sister, who was also playing tennis in NCAA Division I. Recommended by her sister, Lorena started to have conversations with the head coach, and the head coach asked Lorena to come to the current institution to play tennis as he was transferring to the current institution as well.

In addition to her current institution, Lorena also considered the institution that her sister was at and the former institution that her current head coach worked in. Lorena’s parents helped her look for schools and they initially wanted Lorena to go to the same institution as her sister. However, as her current institution was also a great university and provided a very good offer, her parents were very happy to see Lorena get
admitted to her current institution. As her elder sisters played college tennis in the U.S. as well, the only concern that Lorena’s parents had was worrying about Lorena being the youngest child in the family to study abroad. Her sister also gave her some ideas about the NCAA system and how it would like to play college tennis in the U.S.

The good offer provided by Lorena’s current institution included the athletic scholarship that covered full tuition, which was very helpful for Lorena to afford the education, especially as being in the pharmacy program. The athletic department also gave student-athletes some money on monthly basis for them to pay for rents and grocery. Lorena was very grateful for the athletic scholarship provided and for the caring from the athletic department to international student-athletes. For example, when she first arrived on campus, everything including housing was ready.

Lorena’s recruitment process was different from that of domestic student-athletes. Coaches would get to see domestic student-athletes play in person and domestic student-athletes could visit the campus. While for Lorena, an international recruit that was so far away, the coach could only know her performance based on the tournament results on internet, and could only evaluated Lorena by the conversations with her. During the recruitment process, she was invited for a campus visit, which she could not made it as she was so far away in her home country at the time.

When Lorena first arrived on campus, the team atmosphere was so bad that she thought about revoking her decision of attending her current institution and playing for the team. At the time, the players on the team did not get along well with each other. There were a lot of conflicts within the team and some players also got injured. As the
new head coach who recruited Lorena to the team, he replaced four players, and the team had been changing since then. The players became close friends and the team started to have a really good atmosphere. Most of the players on the team were international student-athletes, coming from different cultures and certainly with different personalities. Lorena was not that close to some of her teammates because of those differences, while she was closer to those teammates who came from the areas that near her home country.

Being a student-athlete in the U.S. was much more intense than being a national player in Malaysia. Lorena did not play in tournaments every weekend before she came to the U.S., while she needed to compete almost every weekend during the season in the U.S. The training for the varsity team was also intense. Lorena had two hours of practice and one hour of conditioning everyday, and the coaches pushed the athletes really hard. While in Malaysia, she did not need to do any conditioning, although she practiced four hours a day. To Lorena’s surprise, the conference that her current institution belonged to was much more competitive than other conferences she knew. When she was playing in Malaysia, she was playing individually, while in the U.S., she played for her team. In this case, Lorena also felt more pressure due to the expectations from coaches and from the athletic department.

At the beginning of her campus life in the U.S., Lorena was homesick, and her coach was the only person she knew and always talked to at the time. Another challenge for Lorena when she first arrived on campus was about how to eat well and healthily. Fortunately, the student-athletes got to meet with their nutritionists on weekly basis, and their nutritionists provided great assistance for them to have a balanced diet.
Although there were not particular events or activities for international student-athletes on different teams to get together, student-athletes from all the teams would have dinners together twice a week. The athletic department also encouraged student-athletes to go to different teams’ games to support each other.

In the academic setting, Lorena did not think international student-athletes were treated differently. Other than the academic arrangements that accommodated student-athletes for their travels and games, nothing else was specially set up for student-athletes in academics.

Regarding the services that institutions and athletic departments should provide to international student-athletes to make their adjustment process easier, Lorena suggested that the freshmen athletes should be allowed to live with their older teammates, instead of living in the dormitories that were far away from the rest of the team. It would be easier for the freshmen athletes, especially the international ones to adjust to the campus life with the support from teammates who would always be there for them.

Being an international student-athlete in the U.S., Lorena learned how to adapt to a new environment and to a new culture. Learning how to face and deal with the challenges instead of escaping from them had made a huge impact on her life. Lorena suggested future international student-athletes to be prepared for the amount of time that it would take for them to adjust to the campus life in the U.S., as being away from family and friends. Lorena suggested future international student-athletes should learn to take care of themselves, especially with the busy schedule, and to be open to meet new friends and get to know some people that one can trust.
Profile 6: Vivian. Vivian was a 20-year-old field hockey athlete from the Netherlands, studying in a Big Ten institution with the major in Kinesiology Movement & Science, which combined her professional interest and the sport she played. Before she came to the U.S., she played both field hockey and tennis in her home country and was in the highest club teams for both sports.

Vivian got the information about her current institution and team from the coach of her current team. Unlike the normal recruitment process, Vivian did not come to the current institution for the unofficial visit or the official visit. The coach of her current team went to the Netherlands to recruit her. After seeing some pictures and videos of her current institution, Vivian committed to play field hockey for her current institution.

Vivian’s parents were very excited for her to have such a great opportunity. They got to meet with the coach of her current team when he went to the Netherlands to watch Vivian play, and the good communications with the coach established the trust. Since Vivian had been keeping good communications with her parents since she came to the U.S., such as Skyping her parents on weekly basis, updating her parents with everything she was doing, and etc., her parents had no concern.

The current institution was the only institution that Vivian considered. She decided to come to the U.S. relatively much later than other international recruits, and most scholarships from other institutions were not available at the time. Considering the fact that without a scholarship, she could not afford having education or playing college sport in the U.S., Vivian decided to accept the offer from her current institution that provided her a full athletic scholarship, rather than risking to look for another institution
but ended up with no scholarship or worse offer. The full athletic scholarship that was provided by her current institution covered tuitions, books, housing, and food. Vivian also considered the good connections with the coaches and the teammates.

Due to her status as an international student, Vivian went to the international student office for registration and other required process.

Playing field hockey in the U.S. was very different from doing so in the Netherlands, but Vivian liked the way it was in the U.S. When in her home country, she practiced only two or three times and had a game each week, without any weightlifting training. At the time, Vivian wished there would be more practices on weekly basis. While in the U.S., she would have early practice every day. Although she would need to get up at 5:45 a.m. every day, she was very happy about it. Another major difference was the educational system in the U.S. that also embraced the athletics. At first, Vivian did not realize how much work it would take to be a student-athlete in the U.S. Thanks to the help from the academic counselors, who were very strict on Vivian about sticking with her practices and academic schedules, Vivian was able to establish a routine to get used to her busy schedule as a student-athlete.

In the area of academics, Vivian dealt with some challenges she met when working with non-athlete students in group projects. Some non-athlete students would assume student-athletes were not as smart as they were, and student-athletes could get into school only because of being good at their sports. When Vivian was able to answer some questions in class, her non-athlete classmates acted surprisingly, and it was funny to see their reactions. Also, as the non-athlete students would assume student-athletes be too
busy with their sports to take care of the academics, Vivian usually was assigned to the easiest task in the group projects. She also liked to study at the academic center for student-athletes only, where she could catch up with other student-athletes, as well as get some work done. Vivian was impressed by the broad spectrum of courses that students could choose in college in the U.S., and she pointed out that one would get to see some new sides of oneself by taking different classes. Regarding the academic scholarship, Vivian was not sure whether she could apply for it as she already had the athletic scholarship.

During her adjustment process, Vivian received specific support from one of the assistant coaches on the team, who used to be an international student-athlete and had experience of helping international student-athletes. The assistant coach had provided tremendous help to Vivian since she was still in the Netherlands. When Vivian first arrived on campus, her whole team was very supportive, and they had always been there for her.

Regarding the relationships with her teammates, Vivian bonded easier with her international teammates who came from Europe as well. And during the three-week long preseason training, in which the entire team stayed together, she got to know all her teammates very quickly. Her teammates were very friendly and really loved to know more about her. Vivian also got to know some international student-athletes on the other teams before she arrived on campus.

Vivian also thought that there was a high number of international student-athletes playing field hockey in the U.S. Almost every team she had played against had at least
one student-athlete from the Netherlands. To her knowledge, the top three countries that most international field hockey players come from are Germany, England, and the Netherlands, where field hockey is the biggest sport. Coaches in the U.S. would go to those three countries for recruits.

Vivian’s main motivation to play college sport in the U.S. was to gain new experiences. Being a student-athlete in the U.S. provided her the opportunity to gain positive experience, to see the new cultures, and to explore new places with the friends she had made in sports. Vivian suggested future international student-athletes to cherish the opportunity of being a student-athlete in the U.S., and not to be afraid of being oneself or opening up to others who are very welcoming. Regarding her future plan after graduation, Vivian considered the possibility of being a professional athlete, but was not certain about whether she could make it. At this point, she planned to get a job after graduation and keep playing field hockey as long as possible.

Profile 7: Kevin. Kevin was a Chinese fencing athlete representing an ACC institution, majoring in Philosophy. To him, fencing was more like a hobby than an athletic responsibility. Before he played for his current institution, he used to have fencing practices very casually. When the interview was conducted, Kevin just finished his junior year in which he stayed in Sweden for an exchange program.

Before he came to the U.S. for high school in 2010, Kevin trained with the regional professional team with limited concentrated training. In the current varsity team, Kevin had intense training, with a total of 12.5 hours of practice per week. During the season, he would need to spend additional 4 hours of training or travel for fencing
tournaments on weekends. Fencing had been an important part of his life; therefore, his parents did not have much concern about his adjustment to college life as an international student-athlete.

Kevin conducted some online research himself, and then he found the information about his current institution, as well as other institutions that had fencing programs. Kevin consulted with the college counseling office at his high school when he applied for colleges, especially regarding whether being a fencing athlete would be helpful for getting into college. As he did not have much winning records in fencing competitions, he did not put the plan of playing varsity fencing as his priority. In addition to his current institution, Kevin also applied for Princeton University, University of Michigan, New York University, Wisconsin-Madison, and another institution at the same level as Wisconsin-Madison. The current institution impressed him by its tradition and long history that he wanted to know about for understanding more about the American culture. Other than that, Kevin did not paid much attention to other aspects when making the decision of choosing which institution to attend.

Kevin’s recruitment process was different from that of domestic student-athletes. He reached out to the coach of the varsity fencing team before his freshman year started, and then met with the coach after getting into his current institution. He then started his training with his current team after some conversations with the coach, although he did not expect that he could actually join in the team.

Kevin’s current institution offered very few athletic scholarship opportunities for the student-athletes in the fencing program. In his understanding, the fencing program
would not attract many fans to purchase tickets for games or attract sponsorships; it was more like a sole investment for the institution instead of a program that could give back to the institution. In this case, offering scholarships to the fencing program would be regarding as an extra cost for the institution and the athletic department.

Kevin expected to have more resources provided to the fencing program than it actually received. When he was training with the regional team in China, although the training itself was less concentrated, sufficient fencing equipment such as metal fencing panels and unlimited blades would be provided to the athletes. However, due to the budget concern of his current varsity fencing team, he would need to repair the equipment until the equipment had to be replaced. Kevin also noticed that in most of institutions in the U.S., instead of the metal fencing panels, electric-conductive rubber was used as the fencing panel to save money, not to mention the fact that few institutions would like to spend their limited budget to build a permanent fencing facility. A big challenge for Kevin was the lack of coaching staff for Épée, the fencing form he played. Due to the lack of coaching staff for his weapon, Kevin found it difficult to improve quickly enough, which made him feel a little bit frustrated. Kevin brought up an insightful point that “the problem is more about distributing the resources equally than about whether there are sufficient resources”. For example, he often heard about the complaints regarding the football team would always have the most resources while the other varsity teams would need to share smaller facilities. Kevin also pointed out that the mental pressure that a student-athlete might suffer was out of his expectation, especially the pressure created by the relationships between coaches and athletes.
As an international student-athlete, Kevin acknowledged the efforts that had made by the athletic department at his current institution, such as organizing international athletes dinners, but he also called for more opportunities for international student-athletes from different teams to be grouped together. His way of knowing other international student-athletes was through the conditioning training that different varsity teams would run into each other in the facilities they shared.

During his transition to the college life, Kevin received specific support and helps from his teammates, who accounted for the largest portion of his social life on campus. The communications and interactions with his teammates also changed his previous perception that student-athletes might be rough and very energetic, and he was also very grateful that team bullying or hazing issues had never happened to him or other people he knew.

Although Kevin did not need to seek out for assistance in academics, he received great help for his career development. As required, he met with the director in career development area to work on his resume. Regarding personal development, Kevin expressed that “I think in college, being a student athlete sometimes could actually build up the confidence or even have the feeling of privilege.”

In general, as shared in Kevin’s interview, the institution, the athletics department, and his team had helped him in many ways, and had influenced him a lot in positive way. Kevin regarded playing college sports in the U.S. a very good experience, and he would like to see more Asian student-athletes play college sports in the U.S., not only for changing people’s stereotypes towards Asian students, but also for the own
constructive development for Asian student-athletes. Kevin also emphasized that student-athletes, both international and domestic ones, should be very passionate about the sports they play, regardless of what other purposes or motivations they have; because “the unique happiness of sports could only be obtained by loving sports.” Regarding his future plan after graduation, Kevin mentioned that he preferred to get a job, gaining some experience before returning to school for graduate study.

**Profile 8: Lydia.** Lydia was a Chinese student-athlete competing for a Big Ten institution in swimming. Lydia was 21 years old, and in her third year of college with a major in Sports Industry. Lydia received an 80% athletic scholarship, covering tuition and books, and partial of her housing expenses. She did not have the academic scholarship as her institution offered academic scholarships only to non-athlete students.

When Lydia first arrived in the U.S. in 2013 for higher education, she did not plan to participate in any intercollegiate swimming. She was thinking about quitting swimming, and that was the reason she came to the U.S., to change a living environment, as well as to change from a full-time athlete to a full-time student. She did not plan to apply for her current institution at first, while she was just curiously doing some online research to see which universities would have swimming programs. At the time, Lydia was taking some language classes in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program in the city where her current institution located. Some students in the same ESL program showed Lydia around the campus of her current institution, and she was immediately impressed by the swimming facility at the institution. She said she had never seen such an
impressive facility before, which was even better than the facilities for the Chinese national team.

Later, Lydia found herself still wanted to swim as swimming had been almost everything in her life for such a long time, so she reached out to the swimming coach at her current institution directly. Considering her English was not good enough at the time, she asked a friend to go with her when she had a meeting with the coach. Lydia showed the coach her certificates and records, expressing her strong interest of joining in the varsity team. And then the coach set up another meeting with her, bringing in an academic staff and a compliance staff to help her complete the application to the university, so that she could officially join in the team. The athletic department only took care of the recruitment, while the international student office took care of the immigration paperwork and other related documents.

Lydia’s parents were supportive of her decision to resume swimming at a competitive level, especially because joining in the varsity team was a good way to get into a better university. They also regarded being a student-athlete as a good experience for Lydia. The only concern that her parents had was that Lydia would get too busy or too tired because she would need to maintain the balance between academics and athletics.

Regarding the choice options of institutions, as her study-abroad agency helped her to look for prospective institutions, Lydia stated that the limited information she personally knew about the universities in the U.S. affected her considerations of the universities she planned to attend. Besides the current institution, Lydia considered University of Dayton, University of Utah, and University of Massachusetts. She really
wanted to get in the sports management program at University of Massachusetts, but the institution required applicants to complete the language program within three months. In this case, her parents worried that the intense requirement would bring so much pressure to her. Lydia decided to attend her current institution because of the outstanding sports facilities, as well as the coaches and teammates who were very friendly.

Besides the outstanding facilities, the institutional tradition in sports and the attention that college sports programs received from the fans also impressed Lydia. Witnessing the sports culture and the strong game day atmosphere around campus was an inspiring experience for her. She felt that watching college sports events created excitement, passion, as well as the sense of belonging to be loyal to a varsity team, which was very meaningful. She also expressed that it was safe to say that sport played an important part in American people’s daily life. Lydia pointed out that Americans did not pay enough attention to other sports that were not regarded as important as football, basketball, and baseball. Although people placed focus on swimming during the Olympics years because of Michael Phelps and other world famous swimmers, the collegiate swimming had not received sufficient attention.

Lydia regarded her recruitment as a completely different process from that of domestic student-athletes. Usually, recruits would be reached out by the coaches at high school swimming tournaments, while she reached out to the coach. Comparing with the recruitment process of other international student-athletes on the team, hers was different, too. Some international student-athletes participated in international junior competitions in swimming, where the coaches would go to watch and evaluate the athletes’
performances. And then the coaches would reach out to those potential recruits. In terms of recruiting advantage of being an international student-athlete, Lydia shared that for certain sports, international student-athletes from certain countries would have better athletic performance than domestic student-athletes. For example, as the athletic system in China being at a more professional level than the NCAA in the U.S., the Chinese student-athletes who were previously training under the Chinese athletic system would have higher level of athletic performance and would be more self-disciplined, making more effort in practice.

Lydia was a National Top 1 Category athlete in her home country. She pointed out that there was a huge difference between playing college sports in the U.S. and being a national team member in China. First of all, the athletics systems and the governing bodies in sports industry are different in both countries. Secondly, there is no clear difference between amateur sports and professional sports for the young athletes at college age in China, which places great pressure on athletes. In the U.S., playing college sports is much more interesting and with less pressure. For student-athletes in the U.S., it depends on themselves to decide whether to continue their athletic life or just quit.

Lydia wanted to be excellent in both academics and athletics during her college life in the U.S., but maintaining the balance between academics and athletics was a big challenge for her. In order to maintain that balance, Lydia would also need to sacrifice some social life and other things that non-athlete students would not need to worry about in daily life. She also realized that playing college sports in the U.S. was a huge commitment. Lydia had been struggling for her entire freshman year, and she constantly
persuaded herself that she would overcome the challenge eventually, and she did not want to quit without trying. At first, Lydia barely understood what instructors were saying in class, so she had to spend more time after class to go through the textbooks, which took a lot of her spare time. And she also needed to go to training. In this case, the language barrier made it more difficult for her to maintain the balance between academics and athletics. Lydia did much better during her sophomore year, and adjusted to maintain the balance very well. Being in the varsity team also helped her to overcome the language barrier as she would need to communicate with her coaches and teammates in English on daily basis.

During the adjust process, Lydia received specific support from the team and the athletic department. The Student-Athlete Support Services Office (SASSO) at her current institution was particularly for student-athletes. The services provided to student-athletes included the tutoring service. Freshmen student-athletes were required to have a tutor for each class. And each varsity team had an athletic advisor particularly for the program, and the athletic advisor kept tracking the GPA and homework of student-athletes. Regarding whether there were sufficient resources provided to student-athletes at her institution, Lydia expressed that it also depended on student-athletes themselves to take the initiatives to ask for the resources. Although the athletic department would provide the general information about the resources, student-athletes would need to ask for particular ones if they have some specific questions or concerns.

In academics, Lydia chose the major of Sports Industry more or less because of her being a student-athlete. She was really interested in knowing how the sports industry
in the U.S. could be so well-developed, and the knowledge and experience she could get from studying in this major would also benefit her career in the future, regardless whether she would stay in the U.S. or go back to her home country after graduation. As a student-athlete, Lydia needed to meet the NCAA eligibility requirements. As she always tried her best to get the highest grades she could get, she did not pay much attention to more details about the minimum requirement for eligibility. To Lydia’s knowledge, if a student-athlete failed to maintain the GPA no less than 2.0, the student-athlete would not be able to compete until the GPA would get back to no less than 2.0. For the student-athletes who received scholarships, the GPA requirement for them was also 2.0. There were only four international student-athletes on Lydia’s team, and she did not think there was a large number of international student-athletes competing in college swimming.

Being one of the few international student-athletes on the team, Lydia found the cultural differences between she and her American teammates created some sort of distance, even though they got along well with each other and sometimes would go out together. There were also differences between her and her international teammates. She was more introverted, while her international teammates were always very extroverted and would go out a lot. Lydia’s current institution had created a program to organize some small sessions for international student-athletes on different teams to get to know each other, but she had not got time to participate yet. Lydia also appreciated her coach’s consideration of her cultural differences. Her coach made great effort to try to know and
understand her cultural background, and he would not forcefully put American culture onto her either.

Regarding personal development, Lydia thought that the characters and personalities of student-athletes could be shaped from the sports they played. Receiving higher education in the U.S. changed her thought process, while playing college sport had constructive impacts on her. Lydia was motivated by the positive people around her to strive to get better and better. Being able to do both education and athletics at the same time gave her a lot of self-confidence; as she described, “it makes me feel like I’m a superwoman”. Influenced by the American culture, Lydia knew more about herself and figured out what she would like to do in future, since there would be many more career options than only being an athlete back in her home country.

Lydia suggested prospective international student-athletes to know more information about the institutions and the programs before they decided to come to the U.S. And particularly for Chinese student-athletes who had not paid much focus on academics under the Chinese athletic system, it is important to get prepared in advance for the different educational system that requires student-athletes to do well in both academics and athletics. Lydia planned to be a swimming coach after graduation, although she had not made up her mind to see whether to be a coach in the U.S. or in her home country.

**Profile 9: Jessie.** Jessie was a Chinese student-athlete playing tennis in the Sun Belt conference with a full athletic scholarship. Jessie was 20 years old and in her junior year of college, majoring in psychology.
Before she came to the U.S., Jessie had very few knowledge about the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. Regarding her recruitment process, Jessie shared that the difference in her case was that her coach back at home communicated with the coach in the U.S. before they had her involved in the process. Jessie received the information about her current institution and team from her coach in China who knew the Head Men’s Tennis Coach from her current institution. At the time, the Head Men’s Tennis Coach was having some coaching activities in China, so it was convenient for him to contact with her coach in China. Later, the coach of Jessie’s current team emailed her. Jessie did not think her choice of options of the institutions was affected by her status as an international student. To Jessie's knowledge, there were other two international student-athletes on her team had similar recruitment process as hers.

The coach of her current team, the full scholarship offered by her current athletic department, as well as the experience that she could receive by playing collegiate tennis at her current institution were the three determined factors that Jessie committed to her current institution. Jessie shared the information of her current institution and team with her parents, and her parents supported her decision of playing college tennis in the U.S. And because Jessie had been away from home for tournaments since she was at the very young age, studying abroad was not much different for her parents in this aspect.

Regarding the recruiting advantages of international student-athletes, Jessie shared that international student-athletes might have played more tournaments and have more oversea experiences than domestic student-athletes. Jessie had more institutions
besides her current institution to choose from during the recruitment process, but she did not submit applications to any of the other institutions.

At first, Jessie’s coach back in China was the one who had some concerns about her decision of coming to the U.S. to be a full-time student while playing college tennis at the same time. He was a little bit worried about her studies. Later, Jessie convinced him by showing her determination of pursuing higher education in the U.S., and he realized that everything would be good as Jessie started to adjust well to the campus life in the U.S.

Before coming to the U.S., Jessie had known many tennis players at her age who later also pursued higher education abroad and played college tennis. Therefore, Jessie believed that there would be many international student-athletes playing tennis in the U.S. Jessie shared that although college tennis had not received as much as attention as college football, people had paid more attention on college tennis than on other small programs such as college swimming.

Jessie shared that her actual experience on campus was different from what she was told before her arrival, as there were a lot of uncertainty while possibilities. To be specific, taking classes in college in the U.S. was different from she had imagined. During her first semester, Jessie was not so familiar with the educational system and how it worked in the U.S. Later, it became easier for her to adjust to the campus life and she did not experience much challenges in academics. Jessie shared that student-athletes at her current institution had to have above 2.0 GPA to receive athletic scholarships. However, she was not sure about whether she could also apply for academic scholarship
as she already received the athletic scholarship. Jessie switched her major from Athletic Management to Psychology, which she had been interested in since she was younger. She would like to know more about psychology from different dimensions, especially in the area of sports psychology. Jessie planned to continue for graduate studies after graduation, majoring in Sports Psychology.

Entire of her current team was consisted of international student-athletes. Jessie lived with three teammates and they spent a lot of time together. Although there were cultural differences, there was no conflict within the team. Among all the other teammates, Jessie had known an Asian teammate for quite a long time since before they committed to the current institution. Jessie pointed out that Asian teammates would communicate more with each other than with the teammates from Europe. As the athletic department did not organize any particular events or gathering for international student-athletes, the way to know other international student-athletes on other teams was by taking classes together.

Jessie thought her current institution and athletic department had been providing sufficient support and services to international student-athletes. Jessie's current head coach introduced the international student-athletes on the team to the athletic personnel who would be able to assist. The head coach also helped international student-athletes with some of their paperwork. Jessie appreciated the support from those professors who understood international students’ challenges and patiently provided clear explanation if international students had any question in academics. Regarding the resource that
provided to student-athletes particularly, Jessie mentioned that student-athletes would be assigned to live in the best dormitory on campus.

In terms of the advantages of being student-athletes in the academic setting, Jessie shared that although student-athletes at her current institution shared the same academic advisors as non-athlete students, student-athletes would have the priority to register for classes. Student-athletes would have travel letters provided to their professors for excused absenteeism. Other than that, Jessie did not think student-athletes were treated favorably.

The experience of being an international student-athlete in Division I had positive impact on Jessie, for her personal development in many aspects. When she was playing tennis in China, Jessie did not have spare time to do anything else besides the 6-hour daily training and playing in tournaments. While in the U.S., as a student-athlete, Jessie would have time for academics and other activities besides having approximately three to four hours tennis practice on daily basis, and she also enjoyed competing in the tournaments with her teammates’ support. Having more self-motivation for studies, meeting different people, gaining new experience and so on changed Jessie’s thought process and would be helpful for her future. Regarding the suggestions to prospective student-athletes, especially those from China, Jessie emphasized the challenges brought by language barrier, as there was not such a learning environment for those student-athletes in their home country.
**Chapter 5: Cross-Case Analysis**

This section presents the common themes that were identified from all participants’ responses. The identified themes and analysis were classified into five main categories (i.e. motivations, recruitment process, adjustment and integration, development of international student-athletes, areas of improvement from participants’ perspectives) to demonstrate the experiences of all participants, especially those of the nine interviewees. The themes were in order starting from the recruitment process through adjustment and integration phases. Under each of the main categories, key sub-categories were identified as well. For example, the main category of adjustment and integrations included the impressions of international student-athletes towards their institutions and teams, the challenges for international student-athletes, the factors that eased the adjustment process, and so on as sub-categories.

To better understand the experiences of all participants especially the nine interviewees, it is important to review the theoretical frameworks including the typologies of migrant athletes and the student development theories.

**Summary of the Theoretical Frameworks**

Typologies of migrant athletes were used to demonstrate the various motivations of international student-athletes regarding to pursue college degree and play college sports in the U.S. According to this model, the international student-athletes who were attracted by the opportunity of learning a new language and experiencing a different culture to have their college life in the U.S. could be categorized as Nomadic Cosmopolitan (Magee & Sugden, 2002, p. 432). The participants who decided to study
and play sports in the U.S. because of the adequate financial aids provided could be
categorized as the Mercenaries (Magee & Sugden, 2002, p. 429). The participants who
planned to return to their home countries after graduation would become the Returnees,
while the Settlers would refer to those international student-athletes who had stayed in
the U.S. for at least one academic year, and those who would work or continue to pursue

The social cognitive theory explained that the positive experience of participated
international student-athletes in academics, athletics, and other extra-curriculum areas
enhanced their social cognitive development and had constructive effects on their
personal development (Lent et al., 1994). The international student-athletes who
participated in this research also indicated that they had developed the meaning of their
experiences (Evans et al., 2010).

The person-environment theory (Holland, 1997) was reflected by the interactions
between participated international student-athletes and the team and campus environment
surrounding them. International student-athletes more easily fitted in the team that could
bring out their best athletic performance, as well as fitted in the institution that had the
institutional culture similar to their values. International student-athletes’ performance in
both academics and athletics would also be affected by their classmates, faculty and staff,
their teammates, coaches and other athletic personnel (Evans et al., 2010).

Several student development theories were applied to understand international
student-athletes’ development in academics, athletics, and personal dimension.
Chickering’s seven vectors (1969) were applied to understand the competence development of participated international student-athletes. Playing college sports in the U.S. provided international student-athletes opportunities to continue the development of their physical competence at a high level. Communicating and interacting with coaches and domestic student-athletes also enhanced the interpersonal competence of international student-athletes. It was important for both international student-athletes and domestic student-athletes to develop their cultural competence to acknowledge the cultural differences and to recognize the positive impact of cultural differences during the daily communications and interactions within the team, which would be helpful to improve athletic performance in a team setting (Cross, 1991).

According to Astin (1999), student involvement measured the continuous efforts that students put in their educational experience, including academic studies, extracurricular activities, communication with faculty and other institutional personnel and other activities in a campus setting. Student involvement theory was also applied to understand how to involve international student-athletes more in their campus lives, gaining more positive experience from athletic activities, academics, and social life (Burnett, 2010).

The Adjustment Model (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000) was applied to demonstrate that international student-athletes’ adjustment process was consist of four primary dimensions. In the personal dimension, participants reflected their confidence in both academics and athletics, as well as the dedication they put in both areas. Participants’ willingness of exploring the new country was also included in this dimension.
Interpersonal factors were demonstrated by the relationships between participated international student-athletes and their coaches and teammates, who played important role during their adjustment process in athletics. While in the academic area, the relationships between participants and their academic advisors had impacts on their achievement of academic goals, career goals, and personal goals. Participants’ expectations of the resources and services provided by their institutions and athletic departments reflected the perceptual factors (Popp et al., 2010). The differences between the native cultures of participated international student-athletes and the institutional cultures were indicated as in the cultural distance dimension.

The Model of Culture Shock was used to understand the difficulties that international student-athletes went through due to the changes in different cultural settings, since culture shock was also regarded as a process of individuals adjusting to different cultures (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004).

Motivations of International Student-Athletes

The motivations of participating international student-athletes reflected the model of Typologies of Migrant Athletes proposed by Magee and Sugden (2002). Some participants including Samantha, Vivian, Lydia, and Jessie decided to accept the offers because of the athletic scholarships and other resources provided, and they were categorized as Mercenaries (Magee & Sugden, 2002, p. 429). Some participants such as Michelle and Vivian were attracted by the opportunity of learning a new language and experiencing a different culture when studying and playing sports in the U.S., and they were regarded as Nomadic Cosmopolitans (Magee & Sugden, 2002, p. 432). Some
participants such as Victoria, aimed for playing in the professional leagues in the U.S. after graduating from college; for them, playing college sports in the U.S. was a must step of continuing their career paths. Other motivations indicated by the participants included to receive fulltime education, and to prepare themselves for their future careers, especially in the sports related areas although they did not plan to play professional sports. One interviewee from an ACC institution also provided insightful emphasis stating, “Student-athletes might have various motivations or purposes. Some might think oh I can attract some girls if I play college sport; some people would like to take the opportunity to work out for free, like, I don’t need to push myself to go to gym, there will be coaches who push me to do weight lifting, fitness and stuff; some people might think, oh I could get free apparel every year, sounds pretty good; and some people really love to go to practice. Different kinds of purposes. But in my opinion, if you don’t really love sports, sports won’t bring happiness to you.”

Based on the information shared by the participants, the intercollegiate athletic system in the U.S. that combines with the educational system has been very attractive to international student athletes. Participants valued the opportunity of pursuing higher education and playing high level of sports at the same time. Some participants indicated that it was impossible for them to have education and play sports at the same time in their home countries. Some participants used the path of playing college sports to attend institutions that have relatively better reputation and better academic programs.

**Goals and expectations.** Participants had set goals for themselves to complete during the time of playing college sports in the U.S.; those goals and expectations
reflected their motivation of being international student-athletes as well. In general, participants indicated that they aimed for doing well in both academics and athletics. Beyond academics and athletics, some participants wanted to break the language barrier in their daily communications with others and for their professional needs. Some participants expressed their desire of learning lifelong skills from such a unique experience as an international student-athlete. Many participants mentioned their willingness of gaining different kinds of new experiences in a new environment.

In athletics, most participants expected that playing college sports in the U.S. would enhance their athletic development by improving their sports skills. With such expectations, in addition to participating in conference tournaments, some participants were determined to win individual titles or team championship in conferences and to advance to NCAA tournaments for national recognitions. And those who expected to enhance their outstanding athletic performance looked forward to competing in international sports events such as the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games.

Beyond athletics, a certain number of participants shared that they did not expect to have so much work to do as student-athletes in the U.S. However, maintaining the balance between academics and athletics help them become more disciplined, which was beneficial for their personal development. Participants also had expectations toward the team atmosphere and resources provided by the athletic departments to their programs. Due to the competitive nature of collegiate sports, some participants expressed that they did not expect that the team would be like a family and teammates would get along closely with each other. Therefore, being on a team that had a welcoming atmosphere
was a pleasant surprise for those participants. Noticing their institutions and athletic departments placed much more focus on big sports programs such as football and basketball, some participants stated that they did not expect much support for their programs. A fencing athlete attending an ACC institution expressed that the fencing team at his institution had less resources than he expected. A tennis player from Big 12 conference was surprised that the team did not have a lot of achievements when she first got there, and the team atmosphere was bad. Meanwhile, she found that the conference that her institution belonged to was a lot tougher than expected.

After graduation, some participants planned to play professional sports either in the U.S. or back in their home countries, while some participants would like to pursue their career paths outside of the sports industry. Some participants responded that they were not sure what to expect and had not set any future athletic or personal goals yet.

**Recruitment of International Student-Athletes**

Compared with the recruitment process of domestic student-athletes, the recruitment process of international student-athletes is different in the aspects of (a) information sources; (b) recruiting advantages; (c) decision-making factors, (d) the effects of the status of international students. It was easier for coaches who previously had some international players on the team to know what to expect during the recruiting process.

**Information sources.** One of the main sources of recruiting information came from the coaches, including participants’ current coaches and former coaches in their home countries. For example, a female tennis player representing a Big Ten institution
first knew about her current institution from her coach back in her home country who also played for the same Big Ten institution before. A female tennis athlete in Sun Belt Conference was introduced by her coach in her home country to the Head Men’s Tennis Coach at her current institution. At the time, the Head Men’s Tennis Coach was doing some coaching job in China; and later, he introduced the athlete to the Head Women’s Tennis Coach. Another Sun Belt Conference tennis player was contacted by her current coach while she was training oversea. The majority of international student-athletes who participated in the research were reached out by their current coaches at international competitions. Some participants shared that the coaches traveled to athletes’ home countries to watch them play. These were also the ways that international student-athletes received information of their current institutions and the varsity programs.

Another source for international student-athletes to receive information was their friends or family members who played college sports in the U.S. before. The family members or friends who have played or used to play college sports in the U.S. provided more detailed information about the institutions and the varsity programs to international student-athletes, and it would be easier for international student-athletes to be introduced to the coaches in the U.S. by their family members or friends. For example, the interviewee whose sister was also a tennis student-athlete in the U.S. mentioned to a tennis coach about the interviewee’s interest of playing college tennis in the U.S., and when the coach was transferred to an institution in the Big 12 Conference, he recruited the interviewee and brought her into the varsity team.
Participants also indicated that they conducted some online research to have some brief information about the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. Some international student-athletes were already in the U.S. when they decided to join in the varsity teams at their current institutions. In that case, they reached out to the coaches directly and set up appointments with the athletic personnel to complete the recruitment process. For the interviewee from an ACC institution who also went to high school in the U.S., he received some information of the prospective universities from the college counseling office in his high school. Some participants received information of their current institutions and teams from the recruiting agencies in their home countries. For example, a soccer player from MAC got to know her agency from her national teammates and high school teammates who worked with the agency before.

According to the information provided by participants, the main differences existed in the following aspects:

- For domestic student-athletes, coaches would recruit them by watching them play in person in the U.S., while coaches would need to travel overseas to watch international student-athletes play in their home countries, or attend world championships to observe and evaluate international student-athletes and recruit them there. If coaches would not be able to travel overseas to watch the international student-athletes play in person, they would need to look at the competition results of the international student-athletes online and complete the recruitment process from there. A Big Ten tennis player shared that her assistant coach recruited her through Facebook messages. For some international student-
athletes who were already on campus at the time when they decided to join in the varsity teams at their current institutions, they reached out to the coaches first. For example, a fencing athlete in an ACC institution first had some conversations with the coach after the semester started, and then started his training with the varsity team as a procedure to officially joining the program. For a Big Ten swimmer who was only taking language courses at the time, she emailed the coach and scheduled a meeting to express her interest of swimming for the varsity team. After reviewing her records, the coach set up another meeting with her and the academic and compliance personnel to complete the application process. The swimmer also mentioned that the coaches normally would recruit international student-athletes at the international junior competitions, and domestic high school swimmers would be reached out in swimming tournaments.

- For domestic student-athletes, their recruitment process usually started in their freshman year of high school; while for some international student-athletes, they were not recruited until the beginning of the same year they started college or even only two months before the season started.

- Although coaches invited student-athletes for a visit during the recruitment process, international student-athletes usually could not make the visit before they committed to the institution because it was so far away from home. A tennis player from Sun Belt Conference regarded the failure to conduct a campus visit before committing as “the biggest setback” during the recruitment process. Also,
to her knowledge, only some big schools would offer scholarships to international student-athletes to visit the campus before they commit.

As emphasized by some interviewees, international student-athletes would typically need to spend more time to work with coaches during the recruitment process. In many cases, the coaches were the only contacts that international student-athletes communicated with during the recruitment process, and the contacts between them were mainly long-distance contacts online, while the domestic student-athletes would be able to meet the coaches in person before committing.

International student-athletes would also need to go through additional procedures that domestic student-athletes would not need to worry about, such as taking English proficiency tests and completing immigration paperwork. For example, in addition to the general requirement for student-athletes on Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) score and high school Grade Point Average (GPA), international student-athletes would also need to meet the requirement for the Test of English as A Foreign Language (TOEFL). The admission requirement for English proficiency of international students varies from different institutions.

**Recruiting advantages.** Regarding the recruitment advantages of international student-athletes, participants shared that international student-athletes would bring in different dimensions to the team, as well as provide different views and perspectives based on their diverse backgrounds and experiences. For instance, the interviewee who playing women’s soccer in MAC pointed out that people would expect international student-athletes to have higher level of athletic performance than local player, such as
better technical component of the sport, and could make teammates more competitive, “I think that’s a big plus as an international; and you have a different view of how to play, how to train. So, I mean diversity is always good.” A tennis player from Sun Belt conference shared that “International student-athletes probably have played more tournaments and have been to more places than the domestic student-athletes.” It was also insightful to hear a participant who was a tennis athlete in Big Ten conference point out that as tennis has been regarded as an international sport, it would be not surprised to see that more and more international tennis players have been recruited to participate in the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S.

**Decision-making factors.** As shown in the Table 7, participants mainly considered the institutional factors, the performance level of the athletic programs, the academic reputation, and the financial concern when they made their decisions of which institution to attend.

Regarding institution’s location, participants would consider how familiar they were with the area; and as international student-athletes who were far away from home, some participants chose the institutions located in a time zone that was convenient for them to contact their families online. Some participants decided to attend the institutions that their family or friends were already there. When it comes to the campus environment, participants stated that it was important to be in a welcoming atmosphere and be surrounded by great people. Participants also valued the resources that the institution could provide to students in general.
Participants paid much attention to the area of athletics. They considered the competitiveness of the conference and the performance level of the athletic program, as well as the resources provided to student-athletes, such as facilities, equipment, and etc. Team atmosphere and the relationships between international student-athletes and coaches were also demonstrated as two important factors that participants considered during their decision-making process. The relationships between participants and their current coaches was established through the interaction with the coaches during the recruitment process, such as how the coaches talked to the athletes, and how the coaches made effort to answer all the questions throughout the process. Some participants got to talk with their future teammates during the recruitment, and the team atmosphere became a huge part of their decisions of committing to their current institutions. Some participants also emphasized the international diversity of the team.

Participants certainly considered the good education that they could receive from choosing the institutions and the academic programs that have high reputation. A women’s rowing athlete from Germany explained in the interview that one of the reasons that she wanted to come to the U.S. was “I wanna study a really challenging major, but I also want to keep rowing, and that wouldn’t been worked if I was not in the states here.” As international students from different cultures, they also looked at the history and the culture of the perspective institutions.

Participants also expressed their concerns regarding the financial aids that they could receive from the institutions or the athletic departments. A field hockey player at a Big Ten institution further explained in the interview that she accepted the offer from her
current institution because athletic scholarships offered by other institutions had been
given away by the time she started her recruitment procedures. A swimmer in Big Ten
conference pointed out that she received limited information about the prospective
institutions before she came to the U.S., and it affected the choice options of the
institutions that she planned to attend.

Other factors that influenced research participants’ decision of pursuing higher
education and playing college sports in the U.S. include (a) getting in a higher education
system that allows them to play sports at the same time; (b) their desire to leave the home
country for a period of time; (c) having some experience in a foreign country and
improving English skills; (d) the opportunity to have more career options.

Table 7

*Recruitment – Decision-Making Factors that Considered by International Student-
Athletes When They Chose Institutions to Commit*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Institution</th>
<th>The Athletics</th>
<th>The Academics</th>
<th>The Financial Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>The conference and the sports program</td>
<td>Great education</td>
<td>Scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Relationship with the coaches and teammates</td>
<td>Choice of major/Good academic program</td>
<td>Low net tuition fees out of own pocket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reputation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus environment</td>
<td>Many resources for student-athletes</td>
<td>Lower score requirement for admission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student life and</td>
<td>International diversity of the team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The effects of the status of international students. Considering athletes’ status as international students, some coaches especially those who had previous experience of recruiting international student-athletes provided assistance to the athletes in terms of getting all the tests and documents ready.

Table 8
Recruitment – Participants’ International Student Status Considered by Coaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Conference</th>
<th>Coach(es) Considered the International Student Status of the Athlete during Recruitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Big Ten, Big 12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hockey</td>
<td>Big Ten</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>Big Ten</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>Big Ten</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>Big Ten, SEC, Big 12, Sun Belt</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpine Skiing</td>
<td>Ivy League</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diving</td>
<td>Ivy League</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>ACC, MAC</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>ACC, Big 12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>ACC, SEC</td>
<td>Some Yes, Some No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>Some Yes, Some No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowing</td>
<td>Big East</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing</td>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>MAC</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>Pac-12</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Choice options of institutions.** As shown in Table 9, the status of international student affected the choice options of institutions for international student-athletes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Status of International Student Athlete Affects the Choice Options of Institution</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probably Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Not</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Not</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some participants shared that their high level of athletic performance paved the paths for them to get in high-ranking institutions that they could not get in if only by their regular qualifications as international students. Some participants indicated that they considered the institutions that had lower academic requirement for admission. Some participants had to reconsider other institutions because they could not meet the TOEFL requirement at their first-choice institutions during a short period of time. Some interviewees emphasized that not being able to visit the institutions before committing affected their choice options of institutions.

**Choice of major.** During the recruitment process, when it came to choosing the academic major for admission, the majority of participants chose their majors simply based on their personal interests and career plans, while had nothing to do with being
international students. Some participants who were very passionate about their sports or had considered the possibility of being professional athletes in the future chose their majors that could also be applied to their sports or in sports related areas. For example, a swimmer from the Big Ten conference explained that she wanted to make good use of her experience as a student-athlete to work in the sports industry, especially would like to know how the sports industry in the U.S. could be such well developed. A tennis player from the Sun Belt Conference shared that she chose her current major because she would like to learn some new knowledge that could still be applied to the sports industry. A soccer player from MAC pointed out that it would be wise for international student-athletes to consider the language barrier when choosing their majors, “If it’s someone who just a year ago decided to learn English, I don’t think you would be smart to go into biology, or economy, or, you know, cause it’s hard.”

**Recruitment procedure in general.** Regarding the recruitment procedure in general, as shown in Table 10, while some participants did not think their recruitment process were different from that of domestic student-athletes, there were around as twice as many participants indicated that their recruitment process were different.

Considering the internationalization of the sport itself, a tennis player shared that since tennis was such an international sport, the recruitment process of tennis student-athletes was different than those dominantly domestic sports such as wrestling, sailing, football, softball, and baseball.
Table 10

Recruitment Procedure in General – Comparison with Domestic Student-athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same as That of Domestic Athletes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different from That of Domestic Athletes</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences of recruitment procedure also existed due to the nature of the sport, regardless of whether student-athletes were recruited from other countries or not. Take fencing program as an example: as shared by Kevin, a fencing athlete representing an ACC institution, the recruitment process of a fencing program would be much less formal than the recruitment process of the big programs such as football, basketball, and baseball. With sufficient investment from the athletic department and external sources, coaches in those big programs would have more resource to make more effort on recruiting players. In contrast, because of a relatively small target market, collegiate fencing generally would not receive large budgets from the institution, which would limit the flexibility of coaches to recruit high school fencing athletes. Also, due to the less competitiveness in this sport, if a student who had some fencing background and reached out to the coach to express the interest of playing for the varsity team, it was very likely that the student would be welcomed to the varsity team.

**Family reaction.** As indicated by Table 11, according to participants’ responses in the online questionnaire, the scale of family support regarding participants’ decision of coming to the U.S. for both higher education and college sports mostly fell on from 5 out
of 10 to 10 out of 10. Most parents were happy and excited for the participants to have
the opportunity to pursue higher education and play college sports in the U.S., and have
been very supportive and encouraging throughout the process.

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale of Family Support (from 0 to 10) Regarding International Student-Athletes’ Decision of Coming to the U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parents of a tennis player were happy about her decision of attending a Big 12 institution because of the institutional reputation and the sufficient resources offered by the institution. Another tennis player from China shared that because she had been traveling to other cities or countries for tournaments, her parents did not consider her playing collegiate tennis in the U.S. was much different in terms of being away from home. A Big Ten swimmer who did not think about joining in the varsity team until she was amazed by the facilities at her current institution, mentioned that her parents supported her decision to swim again because they understood that it would be good for
her to get into a better university by being a student-athlete, and it would also be a good life experience for her. For a female soccer player from Colombia, her family would actually be more concerned for her being an athlete in her home country because sports, especially women’s soccer, was not well developed there. Therefore, when she decided to come to the U.S. for college soccer, her family was very excited about it and was very supportive during the whole process.

While some parents had no concern at all, some other parents expressed their minor concerns. Parents who could not communicate with the coaches due to language barrier expressed their concerns as they did not know what to expect for their children’s campus life in the U.S. The parents of a Big Ten rowing athlete expressed that they thought four years of studying abroad would be such a long time, and being in the U.S. would be so far away from the family. For a tennis player at a Big 12 institution, her family’s only concern was she being the youngest one in the family that was going to live far away from home. A tennis player at a Big Ten institution said that her family expressed the safety concern regarding the gun control issues in the U.S. A Big Ten swimmer shared that her parents were only worried about her being too busy or too tired since she would need to maintain the balance between academics and athletics. Some participants shared that their parents were also involved in their decision-making process of choosing which institution to attend. Some parents either helped with the student-athletes to search for schools, or had the opportunity to communicate with the coaches. Some parents did not intervene much during the decision-making process. For example, for the interviewee who had been having fencing training after classes since high school
in the U.S., his mom had some idea of what would be like for playing college sports and trusted him to manage time well.

**Adjustment and Integration**

Adjustment to college life was defined as a process of experiencing challenges and difficulties in an unfamiliar environment and getting along with the new environment from various aspects (Bennett & Okinaka, 1990). Participants’ experiences reflected that the adjustment of international student-athletes was influenced by personal factor, interpersonal factor, perceptual factor, and cultural distance factor (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). According to Popp, Love, Kim and Hums (2010), personal factor could be demonstrated by the confidence of international student-athletes in both academics and athletics. For example, an interviewee from a Big Ten institution shared that her self-confidence was tremendously improved as she overcame the challenges during her time in the U.S., making she felt that she was more adjusted to the college life and could better maintain the balance between academics and athletics. In the personal dimension, international student-athletes’ confidence of learning English as a second language and doing well in their majors should also be considered. Adjustment also exists in personal emotions (Meadows et al., 2011; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). For example, a soccer player in MAC revealed that once her roommate, who was also a student athlete, “Got into the athletics academic advisor’s office, crying like “I can’t do it anymore!” Interpersonal factor was demonstrated by participants’ relationships with their coaches, teammates, and advisors who played an important role during their adjustment process. In the current research, participants’ expectations regarding the services and resources provided by the
institutions and the athletics departments demonstrated the perceptual factor addressed in the adjustment model (Popp et al., 2010). For example, during the decision-making process, participants considered whether the institutions or the athletic departments would be able to offer scholarships. The cultural distance factor was reflected in the current research by the differences between the culture of participants’ home countries and the American culture, as well as the differences existed in sports cultures and institutional cultures. Participants also developed their cultural competence by experiencing the American culture and the sports culture in the U.S. (Cross, 1991).

Participants found it difficult to adjust to the changes in a new cultural setting as they came to the U.S. from afar, and they also experienced different social awareness when they interacted with domestic student-athletes (Anderson, 1994; Befus, 1988; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004, p. 168; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Searle & Ward, 1990). Regarding the relationship with teammates, international student-athletes who came from similar cultures or experienced similar cultural adjustment were bonded easier (Trendafilova et al., 2010). As stated by Sophia, a tennis player from Japan, “we have this common ground where we are all in the country away from home. And then we all share these feelings.”

**Impressions of institution and athletics.**

**General impression.** Some participants were impressed by the huge campus they got into, and some of them shared that they got lost on campus very often when they first arrived on campus. Some participants emphasized their appreciation to the welcoming atmosphere and the nice people they encountered on campus.
**Impression of athletics.** A large portion of participants expressed that the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. was so much bigger than they expected in different ways. Incredible facilities were provided for both student-athletes and non-athlete students. A Big Ten swimmer who was a national team member in her home country expressed her excitement as she saw the fantastic aquatic center at her current institution for the first time. She said it was even better than the facility for the national team in her home country. On the other hand, because of the large scale of competition, some participants indicated that it was great to have the opportunity to meet many standout student-athletes from different institutions. A Slovenian tennis player in SEC described the feeling as “like living in the dream”.

It was also fascinated to see that the majority of the participants had realized the significant role of sports in the daily life of Americans, and how much passion and attention were devoted to varsity sports. A soccer player from a MAC institution shared that when she first arrived on campus, she already noticed that the institution had invested a lot in athletics, especially in those big programs such as football, basketball and volleyball.

Many participants were immediately welcomed by their friendly teammates, which was very helpful for the international student-athletes to feel like home. A field hockey player shared that she was impressed by how much her teammates wanted to know about her and the place she came from. Good teamwork spirit and hardworking teammates that could get along well with were the main factors that made international student-athletes be willing to stay and play for the team. A soccer player from MAC
shared that when she first got in the team, the team was starting a big change of team culture, which was one of the factors that attracted her the most. The only negative feedback received from participants regarding the team atmosphere was from a tennis player at a Big 12 institution. When she first got in the team, the team atmosphere was bad and teammates could not get along well with each other. At the time, she thought about leaving her current institution because of that.

In summary, most participating international student-athletes were impressed by the resources and support that provided by their institutions, the athletic departments, and their teams to make their transition easier.

**Changes in perceptions.** Around two fifth of the research participants indicated that their previous perceptions about the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. changed after throughout the process. Participants found that intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. was more professional, more challenging and much more competitive than they thought. The team was larger and there was more fun with such a large number of teammates training and playing together. However, on some teams, participants found that the athletic level of domestic student-athletes was lower than they expected. Participants also stated that the advantages of being student-athletes in the U.S. were larger than those of being student-athletes in their home countries, and sometimes they were treated favorably because of their status of international student-athletes.

**Challenges for international student-athletes.**

**Differences in the educational and athletic systems.** Data collected from this research study supported some key points from previous research regarding international
student-athletes’ perceptions towards the intercollegiate athletic system in the U.S. For instance, participants from Italy, China, Germany indicated that the athletic system in the U.S. was very different from those in their home countries. Some participants also stated that there was no organization like the NCAA in their home countries. While in the U.S., the intercollegiate athletic system governed by the NCAA is an education-based sport system, the sports systems in other countries are either professional-athletic-based or club-based, which do not combine higher education and sports together. For example, in China, there is no clear line drawn between amateur sports and professional sports; in this case, professional athletes would not have other choices than doing sports, even when they were at college age. A Japanese tennis player in Sun Belt conference found the training schedule was tough at the beginning. She also felt it was a little bit difficult to adjust to the full-time education, since she was attending school online before she attended college in the U.S. In Germany, the varsity system and educational system are separate and therefore the academics and athletics would not be combined.

**Balance between academics and athletics.** The U.S. intercollegiate athletic system that combines both higher education and sports together attracts international student-athletes by providing them the opportunity to excel in both academics and athletics (Berry, 1999). It is important to address that maintaining the balance of academics and athletics was regarded as a top challenge for participants.

Participants indicated that it was harder than they thought to balance both academics and athletics, and as student-athletes, they needed to take a lot of responsibilities. Some participants expressed that they had no idea how to deal with their
busy schedules at first; some of them did not even have enough sleep in their freshman year due to their busy schedules. For some participants, in order to take care of both academics and athletics, they needed to sacrifice some social life or other things in their daily lives. As described by a field hockey player attending a Big Ten institution, “I was kinda forced into making it a routine, so like, practice, school, do homework.” Some participants shared that they thought they would have more time for sports and then would improve their athletic performance. However, they had not performed well as they expected because academics took so much of time.

**Challenges in athletics.**

*Adapt the athletic system.* Participants stated that, under the intercollegiate athletic system in the U.S., their practice schedules and the level of intensity were very different from what they experienced in their home countries. Some international student-athletes did not receive regular conditioning training before they came to the U.S. As shared by participants, under those competitive athletic systems in their home countries, they had relatively higher level of athletic performance and trained harder than domestic student-athletes in the U.S., which was also the major reason that coaches in the U.S. would like to recruit international student-athletes to make the teams more competitive. In addition, International student-athletes are perceived to be more competitive and have higher level of performance. This perception led to higher expectations from coaches and domestic teammates. In this case, some international student-athletes would feel stressful about their athletic performance. Due to the different sports culture in different countries, a soccer player from Colombia shared that her challenge was to adapt to the NCAA rule
regarding limited training hours with soccer balls during offseason that she personally did not agree as a soccer player.

*Differences in athletic life.* Most participants only needed to focus on the training for their specific sports in their home countries, they did not need to do conditioning or weight lifting. There was also a reason why a soccer player from Colombia expressed that she was treated simply as a soccer player only when she was playing in her home country. While in the U.S., a student-athlete would be treated as an athlete in general first, and then a player of a specific sport. In this case, conditioning, weight lifting and other fitness training would be a must for student-athletes, leading to much higher training intensity and larger training volume. A field hockey player shared that she would need to wake up at 5:45am and then go to practice every day; while back at home, she used to practice two or three times a week and had games on the weekends. A tennis player from Malaysia shared that she used to practice four hours everyday back in her home country, but did not play every weekend for a lot of tournaments as now in the U.S.. Playing for a Big 12 institution, she had two hours of tennis practice and one hour of conditioning (either running or lifting) everyday. A fencing athlete from China used to train with the professional team in his home city, At the time, it was difficult for him to receive concentrated training since the coach needed to pay much more attention to the team; so he had to practice by himself or just watched from the sideline which was really difficult for him to improve his fencing skills or enhance his training intensity. Regarding the busy schedule of a student-athlete in the U.S., a tennis player in the Big Ten conference shared that she would have academic courses in the morning, and then spend
the afternoon for three hours of tennis practice and one hour lifting; after practice, she
would go to the athlete academic center for studying. A tennis player in the Sun Belt
conference also had three to four hours of practice plus conditioning per day. A rowing
athlete in Big Ten shared that she would have two practices per day on weekdays, one
practice on Saturdays, and no practice on Sundays. A fencing athlete in ACC shared that
he would have a total of 12.5 hours of practice per week, and there would be additional
four hours of training on weekends during the season; the team would be on the roads for
games on weekends as well.

Some participants pointed out that the education of certain sports and the sports
culture were also very different. Due to the nature of the sports, some participants who
play individual sports only played for themselves in their home countries; while in the
U.S., it is more like playing for the team. Although more pressure would be placed on
international student-athletes due to high expectations from the athletic departments and
the coaches, playing with teammates made it easier for international student-athletes.

Insufficient resources. Resources and support for each sport team varied, and
those programs that generated more revenues received more budget and other supports
from the athletic department and the institution. In this scenario, although both the
institution and the athletic department were excellent, certain programs were not well
funded. Victoria, the interviewee who played soccer for a MAC institution shared that
when she first arrived on campus, she noticed that the athletic department placed more
focuses on volleyball, football, and basketball. Kevin, a fencing athlete from an ACC
institution discussed the comparison between the fencing program and the football
program at his institution, “The complains that I have heard about, for example, from our team, would be like why the football team can have their own gym, and all the other varsity teams share another gym? Or like, the football team has their own medical room, while all the other varsity teams share another smaller one.” Kevin also shared that since the sport of fencing was not well developed in the U.S., the collegiate fencing programs usually did not have enough resources. Kevin played Épée, but the coaches on his team were particularly for Foil and Sabre. In this case, lacking of coaching staff made it harder for student-athletes to improve. Another challenge Kevin mentioned was that due to the budget concern, the fencing equipment provided to the team was limited; therefore, he would need to learn how to repair the broken equipment until the equipment had to be replaced. Kevin also pointed out that similar issues existed not only in fencing program, but also in other small programs that were without sufficient resources. In addition, although people in the U.S. regard sports as an important part in their daily life, and the game day atmosphere on campus is strong, some participants shared that it was noticeable that for some certain sports, there were not enough support from fans.

*Challenges in the Relationships with coaches and teammates.* It was always essential for international student-athletes to maintain good and healthy relationships with their coaches and teammates, since they were usually the individuals that international student-athletes interact with most as being so far away from family and friends at home. Challenges existed as the differences in terms of language, cultures, personalities, values and views, etc. created some distance between international student-athletes and their teammates. A Big 12 tennis player expressed that she was concerned about her
personality being more introverted than other international student-athletes on her team, and she was not so close to some teammates due to the differences in interests and values. A Big East rowing athlete from Norway found it was challenging for him to teach his domestic teammates some athletics skills without being offending, since his athletic level was higher than his domestic teammates. Also, due to the cultural differences, international student-athletes might interpret others’ words or behaviors differently in a team setting (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). It was not surprised that participants indicated that they would like to talk more about their struggles with their international teammates than with their domestic teammates.

**Other challenges in athletics.** Sophia, a tennis player who represented a Sun Belt institution shared her unsuccessful transfer experience to another institution. In the semester before she participated in this research, she tried to transfer to another institution, looking for the best opportunity for her academic development. As she decided not to play professional tennis after graduation, she would like to focus more on her academics. Therefore, when she had the opportunity to go to another institution that has higher academic ranking than her current institution, she applied for transferring. However, the athletic department at her current institution did not approve her transferring, claiming that “oh wish you could do the same thing here.” Although the athletic department did not provide much explanation regarding why the transferring was not approved, Sophia believed that it was because the athletic department wanted her to continually represent her current institution as she was regarded as one of the best players. Sophia also pointed out that it would be a difficult process for good student-
athletes in any sport to transfer, because the institutions and athletic departments had already invested a lot on those student-athletes.

Some interviewees shared that there were not enough events or activities organized by their athletic departments for international student-athletes on different teams to get to know each other. An ACC athlete shared that, although the athletic department at his institution organized dinners for international student-athletes to get together, not many international student-athletes were interested in attending the dinners.

**Challenges in academics.** The U.S. intercollegiate athletic system requires international student-athletes maintain good balance between academics and athletics so as to stay being eligible to compete in athletics, creating some challenges in the academic area for international student-athletes, especially those who did not receive full-time education before they came to the U.S. In general, it took time for international student-athletes to adapt to the educational system and the educational culture in the U.S. For example, some participants shared that taking classes in college in the U.S. was different from what they imagined. As indicated in the research data, most participants were previously under the education systems that were very different from the education system in the U.S. Some participants did not have full-time education before they came to the U.S. One of the interviewees, Sophia, was attending online school before she was enrolled in her current institution as a full-time student. As international student athletes are required to have full-time education and they need to maintain their NCAA eligibility, participants shared that they would need to spend extra time to make up the classes or assignments they missed due to traveling for away games or tournaments.
Language barrier. Previous literatures indicated that language barrier was regarded as a most important factor that affected their adjustment in the U.S. Some participants expressed their struggles with not being able to understand others or fully express themselves, while some participants were made fun of by others because of their accents. Language barrier not only affected international student-athletes in their daily life, but also specifically affected their academic performance. Some participants shared that at first they could barely understand what instructors were talking about in class, and they did not know a lot of vocabularies. International student-athletes would also need to spend extra time on readings and papers due to language barrier, which affected their time management and made it harder for them to efficiently maintain the balance between academics and athletics.

Challenges in a classroom setting. Perceptions and assumptions of other non-athlete students would affect how student-athletes are treated in a classroom setting. In the classroom, other students’ assumptions would affect how the student-athletes be treated. Vivian, a Big Ten field hockey player shared that when she was in group projects, other non-athlete students would assume that she either was not good at academics because she was a student-athlete, or she was too busy with athletics to focus on academics. In this case, she was usually given the easiest tasks in class.

Challenges in life in general. As shared by a tennis player competing in the Sun Belt conference, being an international student-athlete in the U.S., “there’s a lot of uncertainty while a lot of possibilities.”
**Cultural differences.** Regardless of their status as athletes, international student-athletes would need to deal with various challenges in different aspects in life simply because they came from a different country and had been growing up in a culture that is different from the American culture. It took time for international student-athletes to adapt the American culture and some participants emphasized their struggles in adapting the American food. Coming from different cultural backgrounds, participants shared that, as international student-athletes, they found it challenging to not only adapt to the American culture and the American food, but also to get along with other people who had different perceptions and views because of cultural differences or own experiences. When international student-athletes first arrived on campus, in addition to the difficulties of figuring out banking, housing, transportation, and etc., they did not know much about the new place or any people around. Being away from their families, some participants expressed that they experienced homesick or felt lonely. An interviewee noted that it was difficult to join in the conversations among Americans due to the cultural barrier. It was common for international student-athletes to feel that they did not have people to social with during the early stage of their adjustment process, which also enhanced the feeling of being homesick. A tennis player in Big 12 conference said that she was even feeling depressed at the time. Some participants also shared that as they did not have many people to hang out with at first, their coaches became the only individuals they knew.

International student-athletes would also be affected by the stereotypes that closely associated with their races and cultural backgrounds, making it harder for them to adjust to campus life (Lee & Opio, 2011). As noted by a Chinese fencing athlete in his
interview, “People from all over the world carry different stereotypes, and as they come
to the U.S., they’re put on different stereotypes by the Americans.” A Japanese tennis
player also shared that “I still feel like there’s some segregation down the south,
especially between black people and white people, even Asians.” She also shared that
people were surprised by her English proficiency as they assumed her English was not
good at all.

In summary, as demonstrated in Table 12, by the time participants completed the
online questionnaire, most participants stated they were either probably or definitely
adjusted to the life of being a student-athlete in the U.S. completely.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fully Adjusted to Be A Student-Athlete in the U.S.</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Not</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Not</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors that ease the integration. As indicated in Table 13, the majority of
participants had relatively smooth transition of being international student-athletes in the
U.S. The participants who responded that they definitely did not have smooth transition
to campus life in the U.S. were attending the institutions in the Big 12 Conference, the Ivy League, the ACC, and the Big Ten Conference.

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Had Smooth Transition</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Not</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Not</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Supportive team environment.* As shown in the research data, during the adjustment process, coaches and teammates were those important individuals that international student-athletes spent most of the time with. The direct support from domestic teammates was significantly helpful for international student-athletes to have better adjustment to the new environment in both athletics and academics. Fortunately, the research findings of this study also indicated that coaches and the other athletics personnel had been paying increasing attention to the overall well-being and development of international student-athletes.

As the international members on the team, participants shared that getting to know their teammates and their different cultures quickly was helpful for them to fit in the team. A Big Ten field hockey player mentioned the 3-week preseason training camp
her team organized, in which she got to know all her teammates very well in a short period of time. Participants also found it was easier for them to bond with other international team members especially those from the nearby areas than with their domestic teammates.

Generally speaking, participants indicated that their teammates were very supportive. Teammates helped international student-athletes figure out how to open bank accounts, set up phones and so on. They also showed around international student-athletes around campus and even took the freshman athletes to classes and practice. Domestic teammates often invited international student-athletes to hang out with them. Some families of the domestic teammates were also very welcoming; they invited international student-athletes for dinner so that international student-athletes would not need to stay home alone. Some participants also found speaking English with their teammates on the daily basis was very helpful for overcoming the language barrier. A fencing athlete in ACC shared that it was very pleasant that his teammates were all very kind and friendly, and he had not heard about any team bullying or hazing issues happen around him.

**Constructive campus environment and sufficient resources.** Participants appreciated the welcoming environment on campus that made them feel like home. People were very friendly; the athletic personnel were very helpful and made their best effort to assist international student-athletes. The majority of participants shared that the resources and services provided to student-athletes in the U.S. were much better than those in their home countries. Specifically, a participant from a MAC institution stated
that the way that the athletic department took care of everything was very helpful for every athlete, and international student-athletes regarded the institution as their second home.

Scholarships. A total of 37 international student-athletes who participated in this research study responded that they were receiving athletic scholarships, and 15 participants claimed academic scholarships. Most participants appreciated the scholarships that made it affordable for them to receive education while playing the sports they were good at.

Table 14
The Support and Services – Scholarships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athletic Scholarship</th>
<th>Academic Scholarship</th>
<th>Financial Support if No Scholarship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Money</td>
<td>Reduction of tuition fee</td>
<td>From family/parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% Reduction of tuition fee</td>
<td>Full scholarship</td>
<td>From government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td>Full scholarship</td>
<td>Financial aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition and living</td>
<td>Free tutoring sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board, tuition, books</td>
<td>Free books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board, tuition, books, food, sport equipment</td>
<td>Close to $10000/year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board and food</td>
<td>Except books and school supplies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board, tuition, books, food, training, traveling with the team</td>
<td>Covers tuition, room and board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal swipes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board and tuition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly tuition and books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both full athletic scholarship and the above-75% partial athletic scholarship covered tuition, housing expense, and food expense on campus (for example, dining hall). Some institutions provided the full athletic scholarship that also covered books and some extra cost of living such as grocery. In addition to the athletic scholarship, some extra money was provided by certain athletic departments. A Big 12 tennis player shared that during their freshman year, student-athletes had some money provided by the athletic department to buy new clothes, and the freshman athletes also had housing provided by the athletic department. Sophia, a tennis player who represented a Sun Belt institution shared that, to her knowledge, athletic scholarships usually depended on whether the coaches really wanted to recruit the athletes to improve their team performance. Student-athletes would need to meet the academic requirement and the coaches would need to ask their athletic departments for funding so as to offer the scholarships.

A small amount of participating international student-athletes indicated that they had both athletic scholarship and academic scholarship. According to the information provided by the participants, some institutions only allowed student-athletes to have athletics scholarships, some institutions allowed student-athletes to take both athletics scholarships and academic scholarships. Some participants were not sure about whether they could apply for academic scholarships as they already had athletic scholarships. For the very few participants who received no athletic scholarship or academic scholarship, they had financial support from their parents, the government of their home country, or other formats of financial aids.
Other athletic resources and services. A participant from Finland was amazed that both the athletic facilities and services provided in a college campus in the U.S. were much better than those in Finland: In addition to the pool, weight room and other facilities provided for student-athletes to practice and compete, strength and conditioning trainers, physiologists and massages services were provided to student-athletes for free. Free food was supplied after training and student-athletes could meet with their athletic nutritionists on weekly basis. Free apparels and gears were provided, and the expense for team travels were covered. A rowing athlete from Big Ten conference mentioned that free equipment was provided to their program. For the fencing program in an ACC institution that could not provide all the equipment for free, some money were provided to student-athletes for equipment maintenance or replacement.

Some athletic departments took the initiatives to organize several social events for student-athletes: Kevin, an ACC fencing athlete shared that the athletic department at his current institution sometimes would set up dinners for international student-athletes. Lorena, a Big 12 tennis player shared that the entire athletic department at her institution would have dinners together twice a week. Besides the group dinners, the athletic department at her institution also set up a competition among all the varsity teams, encouraging student-athletes to go to support other teams and to collect points by watching other teams play.

Supports from coaches. Research data showed that coaches played a significant role in helping participants adjust to campus life and the athletic life as quickly as possible. Coaches were also those individuals that the international student-athletes
always talked to when they first came to campus. Some coaches picked up international student-athletes at the airport, and helped the athletes moving into dormitories and get started. Those coaches who had previous experience of being international student-athletes knew how to better assist international student-athletes, as they had similar experience. For instance, the coaches would help international student-athletes set up bank accounts, set up phones and get food.

**Academic supports.** In some participants’ home countries, although academics is combined with athletics, professors usually do not really care about how student-athletes are doing. While in the U.S., in most participants’ cases, their advisors and professors understood the struggles of international student-athletes. Professors would explain academic information in detail to international student-athletes and make adjustment for the athletes, especially when the student-athletes needed to travel for athletic competitions.

In the U.S., so much resources were provided to international student-athletes to ease the difficulties of being international student-athletes in the U.S. Participants were fascinated about the many choices of major as well as the very broad spectrum of classes provided in college in the U.S. Academic centers for student-athletes only were provided; student-athletes could study together and catch up with each other. Both academic counselors and athletics academic advisors were assigned to student-athletes to help them with class scheduling, assignments, and time management. In those universities where student-athletes had the same advisors as non-athlete students, student-athletes had the priority for class registration. In addition, academic counsellors played a significant role
of supporting international student-athletes to adjust to the educational system in the U.S. As indicated by some participants, their academic counsellors provided detailed explanation of how things worked in the educational system, and made sure the athletes stick with their schedules so that they didn't miss any class or practice. For example, in the Big Ten conference, each varsity team had a particular athletic advisor, who would keep tracking student-athletes' GPA and homework. Regarding tutoring services, participants in Big Ten conference mentioned that freshman student-athletes were required to have a tutor for each class, and they could schedule with tutors around practices and classes. Regarding the career development services for student-athletes, participants mentioned resume workshop and job interview preparation the most. Kevin, an ACC fencing athlete shared that at his institution, student-athletes were required to meet with the Career Development Director. The director would sit down with student-athletes and help them with their resumes, and then the student-athletes would be asked to use those resumes to apply for jobs or internships.

Participants indicated that sufficient support were offered so that they could have education and play sports at the same time. An interviewee from the Big Ten Conference pointed out that although there were sufficient resources for student-athletes, it also depended on whether the athletes would ask for those resources. Athletic departments would provide general information of all the available resources and support, but if the athletes had some specific questions or concerns, they would need to ask for the resources themselves.
As shown in Table 15, in addition to the services and support offered by institutions and athletic departments, some participants indicated in the online questionnaire that they were treated favorably because of their status of international student-athletes.

Table 15

*Experience in General – Be Treated Favorably as International Student-athletes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably Not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely Not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those participants who thought they were treated favorably were attending the following institutions: The Ohio State University in the Big Ten Conference, Bowling Green State University in the Mid-American Conference, Boston College in the Atlantic Coast Conference, and University of Arkansas in the Southeastern Conference.

**Development of International Student-athletes**

It was pleasant to find that the majority of participating international student-athletes stated that playing college sports in the U.S. was their best decision. They regarded it as a fun experience that had helped them develop in many ways. Receiving higher education and playing college sports in the U.S. gave international student-athletes
the opportunities to gain different life experiences, to know different cultures, and to explore different places. Some interviewees emphasized that simply being an international student-athlete in the U.S. was already an accomplishment.

**Athletic development.** Some participants expressed that the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. was on such a large scale and was so competitive. Competing in the college sports in the U.S. enhanced their athletic skills by competing in a more challenging and more professional environment than those in their home countries. Some participants shared that playing team sports provided them the opportunities to learn from their teammates, and to adapt effective play styles. Some participants earned athletics awards recognized by their conferences, and then advanced to NCAA tournaments. Some of them won individual titles on the national level, while some of them became team national champions. Some participants still represented their countries for international sports events. Some participants were moving towards their goals of playing professional leagues after graduation, either in the U.S. or back in their home countries.

Being student-athletes in the U.S. receive a lot of recognition, which also reflects the sports culture in the U.S. A Japanese tennis player shared that student-athletes in Japan did not receive much recognition, and due to the strong hierarchy in Japanese tradition, teammates would not have the peer-to-peer relationships in Japan. In this aspect, playing college sports in the U.S. had so much more fun with the team spirit.

**Improvement in academic performance.** Regarding the improvement in academics, some participants shared that the dual responsibilities of student-athletes motivated them to study well to maintain their scholarships. Some participants stated that
they placed more focus on academics, broke the language barrier to speak English better and managed to get higher GPA. Some participants emphasized that graduating with a college degree in addition to performing well in athletics became a must for them. The higher education system in the U.S. offered a broad spectrum of classes to international student-athletes to study the majors that they were really interested in, which was quite different from most higher education systems in the world. The international student-athletes who participated in this research study stated that they appreciated the resources and support they have received to enhance their academic development. None of the participants in this research study indicated that they chose the relatively easy major because of their athletics responsibility.

**Personal development.** Participants cherished the opportunities brought by the experience of being student-athletes in the U.S., embracing different cultures, being more independent, learning how to manage time well, and making friends in sports. A soccer player who pursued a Business Management degree specifically stated that he had grown not only as a soccer player, but also as a person. Victoria, the interviewee who played soccer for a MAC institution said in the interview that, “I think it’s a great experience as an athlete, as a person, getting to know a new culture.” Kevin, a fencing athlete from ACC pointed out that, “Being a student-athlete sometimes could actually build up the confidence or even have the feeling of privilege.” As Lydia, a Big Ten swimmer described in interview, “Having education and athletic training together would make me feel like I’m a superwoman. It feels like no matter what I do, I do it with huge self-confidence, like I can do anything.” Michelle, a Big Ten tennis player also shared that, “I
feel like my personality changed a lot. I was like really really shy before I came here. I
couldn’t even like talk with people much, I couldn’t raise my hands in the class. But now
I feel like I’m confident, more confident, being a student athlete, and being an
international student.” Also, interpersonal competence (Chickering, 1969) of
international student-athletes has been established and enhanced during the
communications and interactions with their coaches and teammates. Sophia, who used to
play tennis individually, appreciated the experience of playing tennis with her teammates
in the U.S., saying “it’s like you learn not only more about yourself, and then you learn
the team thing”. On the other hand, international student-athletes are also helpful for the
personal development of their American teammates by introducing different cultures and
perspectives to their American teammates.

**Career development.** As indicated in the online questionnaire responses,
participants believed that playing college sports in the U.S. would prepare them to
achieve their career goals. Some participants planned to pursue their careers as
professional athletes after earning their college degrees. For example, a PAC-12
volleyball player planned to play professionally after getting her bachelor degree in
chemical engineering. A fencing athlete from Big Ten conference aimed to become an
Olympian as well as to get in medicine school for graduate studies. A soccer player from
Switzerland would like to be drafted to Major League Soccer, the men’s professional
soccer league in the U.S.
Areas of Improvement from Research Participants’ Perspectives

Regarding the specific arrangement for international student-athletes, some participants called for informational orientations that are particularly for international student-athletes. Immigration information should also be provided during orientations or other similar informational sessions throughout the years. It would be better for the freshmen international athletes to live near to other teammates than living in the dormitories that are far away from the rest of the team. Some participating international student-athletes emphasized the needs of having some psychologists or mentors who could also help them in daily life, especially during the adjustment process.

Participants shared that there should be more ways of knowing other international student-athletes on other teams at the same institution. As shared in the interviews, international student-athletes on different teams usually got to know each other from taking classes together. In addition to the annual banquets, some athletic meetings, athletic departments should organize more events, especially for international student-athletes to know each other. Some participants said that they missed the official meeting that all the athletes from all the teams got together. A fencing athlete from an ACC institution reflected that although the international athletes’ dinner had been organized and promoted once in awhile, not many international student-athletes were interested in.

More support should be provided to certain programs that are not as popular as football, basketball, or baseball. A tennis player from Sun Belt Conference shared in her interview that although collegiate tennis received less attention than college football, people have paid much more attention to collegiate tennis than to collegiate swimming or
other small programs. A Big Ten swimmer pointed out that although people paid more attention to swimming because of the Olympics and the extraordinary performance of Michael Phelps, collegiate swimming have not received that much of attention and there were relatively small amount of international student-athletes doing collegiate swimming. The interviewee who played fencing for an ACC institution provided some great insights regarding the resource distribution among different intercollegiate athletic programs, “The problem is more about distributing the resources equally than whether there are sufficient resources”; ”why the football team can have their own gym and medical room, while the other varsity teams share another gym and another smaller medical room?” An interviewee who played soccer for a MAC institution expected more marketing initiatives could be developed and implemented to promote the soccer program, and more budget could be provided to fund the program as well. Some participants also expressed their needs of having adequate coaching staff for the technique training or one-on-one training sessions. In academics, some participants suggested that for student-athletes in challenging majors, academic support could also include possible deadline extension.

**Athletic Websites Analysis**

Among the NCAA Division I institutions that research participants represented, one institution from ACC, one institution from MAC, one institution from the Big 12 Conference, and two institutions from the Big Ten Conference were randomly selected to conduct the website analysis for their athletics departments. Participating international student-athletes from MAC were attending Miami University (Ohio), Bowling Green State University, Eastern Michigan University, and Northern Illinois University. The
athletic websites of these MAC institutions were compared with the athletic website of Ohio University, the institution that I am currently attending.

Each of the selected institutions has particular offices or particular services to support student-athletes, to assist student-athletes to fulfill their commitment to academic and athletic excellence, personal and career development, and community services. Each of the selected athletic departments has the compliance section on their websites. Each selected institution has student-athlete advisory committee to provide guidance to student-athletes. Different student-athlete development programs are created for student-athletes to excel in academics, athletics, career development, and community involvement.

As indicated on the webpages, academic services are either directly provided by the athletic departments or provided by general academic services on campus. Those academic services include tutoring, academic counseling, and advising. Some institutions provided student-athletes only academic center. Athletic support for student-athletes mainly focuses on sports medicine/athletic training and sports nutrition.

Regarding personal development, the athletic department of a selected ACC institution offers student-athletes mental toughness training, social media training, financial planning and mentoring program. Miami University (Ohio) Athletics provides student-athletes the following programs: stress management, interpersonal communications, manners and etiquette, dealing with authority, fiscal responsibility, as well as violence prevention. Services for student-athletes in career development include:
resume workshops, job interview preparations, internship programs, and alumni networks.

The athletic departments of selected ACC institutions have prospect questionnaire particularly for new recruits and the first-year orientation for freshmen athletes. The athletic department of a selected Big Ten institution checks on student-athletes’ first-year experience and provides merit scholarships to first-year student-athletes. Bowling Green State University Athletics has the student-athlete affairs/life skills program particularly for first-year student-athletes.

Regarding the services and support that are particularly for international student-athletes, the athletic department of a selected Big Ten institution provides information about SAT and TOEFL, while the athletic department of another Big Ten institution and Miami University (Ohio) Athletics offer diversity programs.

The data above is a cross-case analysis of participants’ responses from both the online questionnaire and interviews, and the information from the websites of selected athletic departments. These data will also be discussed with recommendations for future implementations in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6: Recommendations and Conclusion

To analyze and have in-depth understanding of the integration and experience of international student-athletes in the U.S., this research surveyed 48 international student-athletes from randomly selected institutions in NCAA Division I. This research identified that international student-athletes must overcome many challenges during the campus life in the U.S., including adapting the educational and athletic systems in the U.S., balancing academics and athletics, and maintaining good relationships with coaches and teammates. Coaches and teammates played a significant role in supporting international student-athletes to successfully integrate to the campus life in the U.S. In addition to the suggestions provided to institutions, athletic departments, athletic personnel and perspective international student-athletes, this research has implications for future practice as well as future research, as discussed in the recommendation section.

Recommendations for Institutions and Athletic Departments

For recruiting international student-athletes. Higher education institutions in the U.S. should continue to promote the opportunity for international student-athletes to come to the U.S. for the educational system that embraces collegiate athletics. Meanwhile, the institutions, the athletics departments, and the teams need to know what international student-athletes will take into consideration when they choose which institution to commit. According to the information shared by participants in this research, international student-athletes would consider institutional reputation, campus environment, academic program ranking, institutional culture, interaction with coaching staff, and financial support, etc. It is also important to know that limited information
about the institution or the team would limit the choice options for international student-athletes. It would be necessary for athletics personnel, especially the coaches, to know how to inform prospective international recruits about the team, the institution, as well as the recruiting process (Meadows et al., 2011).

In order to better recruit outstanding international student-athletes, athletics personnel, especially coaches, need to understand how to adjust the recruiting methods to meet international student-athletes’ needs. Although there are geographic limitations when it comes to recruit international student-athletes, more face-to-face meeting opportunities should be provided if possible for coaches and international student-athletes to have more sufficient interactions. It would be beneficial for international student-athletes to have affordable visits to campus before they commit. For those international student-athletes who could not make the actual visits to campus, visual technology could be applied for international student-athletes to have more vivid views of the campus, the athletics departments and the teams. Also, it will be more convenient for international student-athletes if their recruitment process could give more time for them to finish the immigration paperwork and other additional process that domestic student-athletes do not need to worry about.

Participants shared that their core support system, such as their families and close friends whose opinions greatly influenced their institutional choices. Therefore, coaches need to establish constructive connections with those key individuals in the support systems to recruit international student-athletes successfully (Meadows et al., 2011). In addition, approachable coaches are more likely to conduct successful recruitment of
international student-athletes by establishing reliable relationship with international athletes (Popp et al., 2011; Zonder, 2013).

**Helping international student-athletes’ integration.** During the adjustment process where international student-athletes need to overcome various types of challenges, it is very important for them to receive sufficient and effective support from their teams, the athletic departments, and the institutions. It will be significantly helpful if the academic personnel, the athletic administrators, the coaches, as well as the domestic student-athletes understand the struggles that international student-athletes experience.

Some participants were slightly frustrated that they missed their orientation due to the paperwork delay or other admission issues because of their international status. It is essential to make sure all new international student-athletes attend orientations, and some orientation information could be provided before international student-athletes arrive on campus. As a special group of international students, international student-athletes expect to receive support from administrative staff in the international student office so that they could quickly adjust to the new environment when they first arrive in the U.S. The athletic department should also work with the international student office for immigration paperwork and other needed documents.

For international student-athletes, their coaches tend to be the individuals that they reach out to and rely on most on the team, not only in the area of athletics, but also in other aspects of campus life. Therefore, it is essential to realize the significant impact of the relationship with coaches on international student-athletes’ personal development. Athletic personnel who have international background or coaches who were international
student-athletes before could help international student-athletes in many aspects of campus life. As participants shared in the current research, it would be beneficial to have counseling services and support for international student-athletes’ overall development and in their daily life. To be specific, the counseling services need to embrace cultural elements as well as to include the multicultural resources (Meadows et al., 2011). It is important to realize that adjustment also exists in personal emotions (Meadows et al., 2011; Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Advising or counseling services should not only be limited to solely academic or athletic area, and successful advising would make the adjustment process of international student-athletes easier and more successful.

Within the team, coaches should help to create an embracing and supportive environment for international student-athletes to fit in the new culture while maintaining their original ones (Trendafilova et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2001). Coaches should take initiatives to know more about the cultures of where the international student-athletes come from, and not to put the American culture onto international student-athletes. Coaches should also be involved in providing services to international student-athletes, especially to help them fit in the new team culture.

In academics, as shared by participants in the current research, international student-athletes would appreciate some reasonable flexibility regarding deadline extension for assignments or some adjustment when they need to travel to fulfill their athletic responsibilities.

Some participants mentioned that there were not many events or activities organized by the athletics departments for international student-athletes from different
varsity teams to socialize with each other, or to socialize with the domestic student-athletes from other teams. It would be helpful for international student-athletes to have easier adjustment to the campus life in the U.S. by involving them in various aspects of campus life and have some student organizations that are particularly for international student-athletes. In addition, in order to enhance the interpersonal development of international student-athletes and enrich their social life on campus, international student-athletes could be paired up with the domestic students or domestic student-athletes, and the interactions should be cross-team as well (Meadows et al., 2011).

Last but not the least, as discussed with one of the interviewee regarding the funding for smaller programs than football and basketball, the issue is more about the equal distribution of resources than lacking of sufficient resources. Small programs deserve more budget and support as well. At least, enough coaching staff should be guaranteed. More marketing efforts and promotion should also be invested in smaller programs.

**Recommendations for International Student-Athletes**

Playing college sports in the U.S. is a great opportunity for international student-athletes in many aspects of life, and it should also be treated seriously as a huge commitment. International student athletes should acquire sufficient information about the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. and the institutions and athletic programs that they would like to commit to. International student-athletes could also work with recruiting agencies that have experience of serving international student-athletes.
After deciding to come to the U.S. for both further education and collegiate sports, international student-athletes should be mentally prepared for the challenges that domestic student-athletes do not need to face, and should be prepared to manage time well so as to do well in both academics and athletics. It certainly would take such some time to be fully adjusted to the campus life in the U.S. Getting adjust to a new culture and the campus life in the U.S. is not always easy, but international student-athletes should be open-minded to embrace the new environment, to adapt to the new culture, as well as to make new friends.

International student-athletes should interact with teammates as much as possible, as their teammates would be the key individuals that provide direct support to international student-athletes. It would also be helpful for international student-athletes to overcome their language barrier by communicating with American teammates.

Regarding the resources provided to international student athletes, if there are any particular questions or concerns, international student athletes should take the initiatives to ask for available resources.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The number of interviewees was relatively small in this research and the interviewees did not represent large sports programs such as football and basketball; this might affect the generalization of research data. Therefore, if applicable in the future, more interviewees from large sports programs could be recruited to enhance the diversity of research data. I would also like to conduct a comparative research to look at the differences between the experience of international student-athletes at Division I
institutions in a certain state and the experience of international student-athletes at Division I institutions out of the state. In this case, more Division I institutions would be involved and more international student-athletes could be recruited as research participants.

The current research could be considered as the start of a long journey of developing a deeper understanding of the experience of international student-athletes in the U.S., which could lead to a thoroughly comparative research on the year-by-year development of international student-athletes. Future comparative studies could reach out to the potential participants at more NCAA Division I institutions, to look at the differences between the in-state and out of state experiences of international student-athletes. Comparisons could also be conducted within the top five sports that have the largest number of international student-athletes. Broader research could be conducted to look at the experience of international student-athletes in Division II and Division III as well. It would be interesting and meaningful to see if there are any major differences among the three divisions regarding the services and support provided to help international student-athletes integrate to campus life. It is also beneficial to compare the similarities and differences of the services that different international student-athletes have received, and relate the comparisons with their actual performances in both academics and athletics.

In addition to collecting research data from international student-athletes, future research could interview coaches and conduct focus group with some domestic student-
athletes to collect additional research data regarding international student-athletes’ experience on and off the field as additional approach for data collection.

This research revealed that constructive campus environment, supportive team environment, and sufficient resources in both athletics and academics smoothen the integration of international student-athletes and enhanced international student-athletes’ belonging of team and institution. Given that most participants of this research appreciated the services and support provided by institutions and athletic departments, future research could be conducted with further analysis that would lead to the retention of international student-athletes.

**Conclusion**

As demonstrated in the research data collected from both the online questionnaire and interviews, the experience being an international student-athlete in the U.S. had various impacts on participants’ lives and development. Although there were challenges and difficulties that international student-athletes must overcome, with the resources and support provided by institutions, athletic departments, and teams, international student-athletes managed to excel and have further development in athletics, academics and personal life.

Differences between the athletic and educational systems in the U.S. and those in the home countries of international student-athletes brought challenges to international student-athletes in both academics and athletics, especially as overcoming the language barrier and maintaining the balance between academics and athletics. In the interpersonal aspect, sometimes international student-athletes found it challenging to have in-depth
discussions with their teammates about the sport they played. This type of challenges might be caused by the differences in languages, cultures, personalities, and values. International student-athletes would also need to deal with the pressure brought by the high expectations from their coaches and teammates. Challenges also existed in terms of training efficiency, skills improvement and equipment maintenance due to the lack of resources for certain sports programs. In addition, for those sport programs that are not as popular as football or basketball, there was not a strong sports culture and had limited fans support in terms of game day attendance and revenue generation.

Thanks to scholarships awarded by institutions, especially athletic scholarships, international student-athletes were able to attend an institution of higher education and participate in college sports in the U.S., given that tuition, housing and food expense on campus were mostly covered by the institution they attended. In addition, as free team apparel and gear were also provided to student-athletes, international student-athletes would not need to spend extra money to purchase training apparel or gear. In academics, advisors and professor were very supportive and understood the struggles of international student-athletes. And with the help from the athletic academic advisors and the tutoring services, international student-athletes were able to stick to their busy schedules, and keep up with their assignments. Career development services were also very helpful for preparing student-athletes to pursue their career goals after graduation. Within the sports program, as coaches and teammates were the individuals that international student-athletes interacted most in the athletic setting, supports from coaches and teammates played significant role in bettering the integration of international student-athletes.
Due to the different athletic and educational systems in their home countries, some international student-athletes did not have the chance to receive full-time education. For example, a Big Ten swimmer from China who started full-time swimming training at early age and had being representing the country as a National Top 1 Category athlete, spent very few time in academics and was not enrolled as a full-time student as other students in general before she came to the U.S. for college. A Japanese tennis player shared that before she attended her current institution, she was playing tennis as a semi-professional athlete, she could only attend online institution as she had to travel all around the world for tennis tournaments. While in the U.S., same as domestic student athletes, international student-athletes are required to take 16 core courses and maintain a GPA no lower than 2.30 in order to meet the NCAA eligibility, which turned out to be a motivation for international student-athletes to perform well in academics. Being able to pursue higher education as a full-time student by playing college sports in the U.S. tremendously enhanced the academic development of international student-athletes, as they had the opportunity to receive higher education as much as non-athlete students. For other international student-athletes who received full-time education before they came to the U.S., the resources and support such as tutoring and athletic academic advising benefited their academic development as well. In the athletic setting, international student-athletes improved their sports skills and some of them prepared themselves for being professional athletes after graduation. According to the person-environment theory, international student-athletes would be more adjusted to the campus life in which they could perform well in athletics, and be with the teammates who shared the similar
values (Holland, 1997). This theory also explained the reason why most participants expressed that they valued team environment. The constructive relationship with coaches had significant impact on international student-athletes’ personal development, such as interpersonal competence (Chickering, 1969). During the years spent in the U.S., international student-athletes learned how to adjust to a new environment and dealt with the challenges, which developed their life skills and mentality. The experience in the U.S. changed the thought processes of some international student-athletes as well as helped them know more about themselves and others. Characters and personalities of international student-athletes were shaped and enhanced by their experience of playing college sports in the U.S. (Chickering, 1969; Denhart et al., 2009; Simmons & Childers, 2013). In summary, international student-athletes had constructive development in athletics, academics, and personal dimensions with sufficient resources and support provided by the institutions and the athletics departments.


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http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/3096


http://www.oregonlaws.org/glossary/definition/intercollegiate_sport


Appendix: Online Questionnaire

Part I. Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?

2. What is your class?
   ____Freshman   ____Sophomore   ____Junior   ____Senior   ____Just graduated in
   Spring/Summer 2016

3. What is your nationality?

4. What is your native language?

5. When did you come to the U.S. for higher education?

6. Have you ever traveled to the U.S. before coming to study?

7. What level of education did you have before coming to the U.S.?

8. What college sport do you play at the current institution?

9. Are you on an athletic scholarship?
   ____Yes   ____No;   If Yes, what benefit is provided by the scholarship?

10. Are you on an academic scholarship?
    ____Yes   ____No;   If yes, what benefit is provided by the scholarship?

11. If you do not have any scholarship, what financial support do you receive?

12. Before you came to the U.S., can you describe your athletic status in your home country?

13. What are the goals you set for yourself to accomplish during the time you pursue higher education and play college sports in the U.S.? (Please be specific.)
Part II.

a) About the Recruitment:

1. How does your family support your idea to come to the U.S.?

2. How did you get the information of the institution you are in and the athletic team you play for?

3. Do you think your recruitment process was the same or different as someone who is not an international student?

4. Do you think your coach considered your international student status during your recruitment process?

5. Do you think there is a recruiting advantage of one’s status over the other?

6. Was this institution your first choice?

7. What were the top 3 reasons that you accepted the admission offer from your current institution?

8. Do you find any differences between what you heard about the institution and the athletic program before you came to the campus and what you actually experience?

9. Was there anything happened after your arrival on campus would make you think about revoking your decision to attend your current institution?

10. Do you think your status as an international student affected the choice options of the institutions you planned to attend?

11. Do you think the scholarship opportunities at your institution are provided to all student-athletes regardless of their nationalities?
12. Were your scholarship opportunities affected by your status as an international student?

13. Do you think the status of international student-athletes have any effect on team’s game plans?

14. Including yourself, how many international student-athletes are on your team?

15. Do you know any other international student-athletes on the other teams in your university?

16. Do you perceive your sports as having a high number of international student-athletes at the NCAA level?

b). About the Adjustment:

1. What’s your impression about the institution, the athletics department, and your team when you first arrived?

2. What’s your first challenge or problem that you faced when you first arrived on campus?

3. Do you have a smooth transition from your country to the U.S.?

4. Are you fully adjusted to the campus life and/or athletics life now?

c). About the Overall Experiences:

1. Do you get treated favorably due to your status as an international student athlete?

2. Has your perception about the intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. changed since you arrived?

3. Do you think it still is a right decision to come to the U.S.?