

From Start to Splash: Exploring Retirement Preparation and Career Development for  
Retired College Swimmers

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Ariel C. Hodges

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This dissertation titled  
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by

ARIEL C. HODGES

has been approved for

the Department of Counseling and Higher Education  
and The Gladys W. and David H. Patton College of Education by

Peter Mather

Professor of Counseling and Higher Education

Lisa Harrison

Interim Dean, The Gladys W. and David H. Patton College of Education

## Abstract

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From Start to Splash: Exploring Retirement Preparation and Career Development for Retired College Swimmers

Director of Dissertation: Peter Mather

This study examined the concepts of career preparation and the lives post-sport of retired former collegiate swimmers. Swimming is a sport that has next to no opportunities to compete professionally, meaning that all swimmers must undergo career preparation and transition into full-time careers once their eligibility has expired. This study was guided by Schlossberg's 4S system, which looks at the Situation, Self, Support and Strategies employed throughout the transition process (Anderson et al., 2022). This study was also guided by the life-span life-space career preparation theory of Super, Savickas and Super (Brown & Brooks, 1996). This theory looks at career preparation through a rainbow lens and allows the reader to understand that different roles, phases, and importance may be placed on their careers at different points throughout their lives.

Four main themes arose which answered the two research questions. The first theme identified was the unique journeys each swimmer had when it came to their career preparation. No two individuals had the same preparation, but many utilized resources such as the career center, free tutoring, internships, part-time jobs and more. The second theme that arose was the concept of support. Support was prevalent throughout several of the participants' journeys. In this study, support came from family, friends, peers, coaches, and institutionally.

The third theme addressed the swimmers and how they gained meaningful employment. Their new roles allowed the swimmers to be active in their communities and give back to those around them. Many of the swimmers chose service-oriented jobs, such as nurses, doctors, police officers, military officers, educators, and swim coaches. The final theme identified the strong swimming identities of many of the swimmers and how the sport continues to be a key part of their lives until today.

Implications for practice included the need for more coach support during the transition from competitive swimming, receiving more support and awareness from both the NCAA and the colleges they attended, and the idea to introduce swimmers to more jobs that would allow them to stay in the sport through a different avenue. Implications for future research address the need for more qualitative and quantitative studies done on both the sport of swimming and swimmers and more research on how to better support swimmers during their transitions. This is especially important from a mental health perspective, and determining if policies or procedures would be beneficial to implement at an institutional or NCAA level when it came to career development.

## **Dedication**

*To everyone who supported this journey from the start to the final splash!*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Every year, approximately 10,000 swimmers compete collegiately at the Division I level while earning scholarships and working toward their degrees (Swimming and Diving 2020, 2020). Division II has approximately 4,000 swimmers, while Division III has around 8,000. (NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report. NCAA.org, 2022). 2019 research showed that approximately 22,000 student athletes graduated from Division I institutions (Brutlag Hosick, 2020), with around 2500 of those graduates being swimmers (Swimming and Diving 2020, 2020). There is no formal number of exactly how many collegiate swimmers graduate from Division II and III schools annually. However, Division II swimmers boast a graduation rate of 91% for female swimmers and 79% for male swimmers (Trends in NCAA Division II graduation rates, n.d.). Division III swimmers have similar rates reporting that 96% of female swimmers and 90% of male swimmers graduate after four years (NCAA Research Staff, 2020).

After the final competition, retired athletes are suddenly no longer a swimmer, but a “swammer.” A swammer is slang in the swimming community for a swimmer who has retired from competitive sport, regardless of the level of which you retired (Pruden, 2016). These new swammer graduates joined numerous successful alumni that have used all four years of their athletic eligibility and transitioned into new roles and careers in a variety of fields including Business, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and Healthcare (Division I Diploma Dashboard, 2018). A 2007 campaign from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) highlighted how there have

been over 380,000 student-athletes that have played collegiate sport and most of them will become professionals in something other than athletics (National Collegiate Athletic Association. National Collegiate Athletic Association - Press Release Archive, 2007).

Although the athlete is retiring, swimming is a unique, interconnected sporting community where the connection to the sport does not end when you walk off the pool deck. Friendships built in the pool span over the years and being a part of the swimmer community is something that many hold as a point of pride. Fellow swimmers are friends, colleagues, peers, that form a tight knit, supportive and eternally intertwined family that swimmers can be a part of regardless of age, sex, gender, or location.

Many collegiate swimmers fondly reflect on their glory days, reminiscing on what could have been, their greatest achievements, the fun they had and even their lowest moments. However, some retired college swimmers have been negatively impacted by the sport and unable to move past their college swimming career, even years after their time in the pool has ended. Some of those negative impacts include lack of professional swimming opportunities (ISL season 4 postponed to 2023. ISL 2022, 2022), psychological issues such as feelings of loss and identity crisis, depression, and delays in career development. (Albion & Fogarty, 2005; Martin et al., 2014; Park et al., 2013). In addition, some collegiate athletes reported the need for more and further educational pursuits, as their degrees had little relevance to their desired careers (Navarro, 2015). Swimming is a sport that needs further research, especially their career development and what occurs in their lives post-sport retirement.

**Problem Statement**

There is a lack of research on where collegiate swimmers ended up, how their collegiate swimming career had an impact on their lives after college, as well as what colleges can do to better help collegiate swimmers develop post-retirement career plans. The topic is pressing, as there are many swimmers who retire from swimming annually. The study will allow researchers and the whole collegiate swimming community to understand more about the career development and life post-sport challenges this population has faced. In this study, I interviewed former collegiate swimmers to understand their challenges and develop new strategies and recommendations to support collegiate swimmers during the transitional times and to achieve the best outcome possible. With this scope in mind, this dissertation looked at the influence higher education had in the lives of swimmers.

**Significance of the Study**

Swimming is a sport that has little to no long-term professional outlooks. Unless athletes are Olympic-bound and receive brand sponsorship opportunities or are one of the 360 professional swimmers in the International Swimming League (ISL), swimmers should prepare themselves to obtain employment or to receive further schooling upon their graduation (SL 2019 technical information, 2020). As of 2022, the ISL has postponed their next season until at least 2023 due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, removing the only professional opportunity to swim competitively after collegiate sport (ISL season 4 postpone to 2023. ISL, 2022, 2022). To date, the ISL has not resumed competition and there remains little hope the league will resume its activities.

Since there is little professional sports opportunity, collegiate swimmers must prepare to transition themselves into careers and move on with their lives.

It is important to note that swimming is a non-revenue sport and does not typically receive attention from researchers within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) or from researchers in general (Beard, 2020). For example, when it comes to tracking the success of its former student-athletes, the NCAA typically focuses on its revenue sports of baseball, football, men's, and women's basketball (Division I Diploma Dashboard, 2018). Specific data have not been gathered on all 20 other sports offered at the Division I level, and these sports are lumped into a generic "other sport" category within its Diploma Dashboard tracking system (Division I Diploma Dashboard, 2018). Scholars also tend not to focus on the sport of swimming unless it pertains to eating disorders, shoulder injuries or physiological issues (Anderson & Petrie, 2012; Beals, 2004; Carbuhn et al., 2018; Harrington et al., 2014).

In 2016, Gallup commissioned a study to learn more about the life outcomes of all former student-athletes (Gallup, 2016) The categories they focused on were former football players, or a generic category of all other student-athletes. This study looked at the well-being, the workplace engagement, and the alumni attachment of retired student-athletes. They found elevated levels of well-being, higher levels of employment compared to their non-athlete peers, and high levels of career engagement. It was also found that former student-athletes were slightly more likely to continue their educational careers and reported similar involvement and mentorship during their educational journeys (Gallup, 2016).



Gallup recreated their 2016 study and expanded upon it in 2020. Not only did student-athletes earn more than their non-athlete peers, but they were more likely to earn advanced degrees, and were found to have good jobs waiting for them upon graduation (Gallup, 2020). Other notable outcomes found included that student-athletes were much more likely to have held a leadership position in a job, organization or club on-campus and that only 50% of student-athletes agree that their education was worth the cost. While these studies conducted by Gallup are notable, more research and data on this population is needed. After NCAA eligibility has expired, the outcomes of student-athletes are often ignored and under researched. Few studies look at how career preparation correlates with the post-graduation outcomes of former collegiate swimmers.

### **Purpose of Study**

This dissertation aimed to close some of the gaps identified in career preparation and life post-sport retirement. The purpose of this study is to investigate the career development of former NCAA swimmers for careers while elucidating the life-post sport experiences of former NCAA swimmers who are at least five years post-graduation. The population that I have identified for this study are retired collegiate swimmers who competed in Division I, II, or III, who have used some or all of their four years of NCAA eligibility, and have graduated from college for at least five years (2018).

### **Research Questions**

Q1: How do former swimmers at NCAA Divisions I, II and III institutions describe their career experiences related to career preparation?

Q2: What are the life post-sport career outcomes of former swimmers who competed in NCAA Division I, II and III?

The research questions seek to learn more about the career development process and what occurs post-graduation from a higher education administration perspective.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms will be used throughout the dissertation and as such, I seek to give clarity to the reader. I have given several definitions below that are related back to the study and relevant to the lens of which I approach this dissertation.

- **Career Development of Student-Athletes:** Less than 3% of student-athletes will play sports professionally. Due to this statistic, student affairs professionals are charged to prepare student-athletes for a career that is outside of the sport they play (Navarro & Malvaso, 2016).
- **Athletic Identity:** The degree to which an individual identifies with the role of athlete (Brewer et al., 1993)
- **Swammer:** a person who has retired or quit the sport of swimming (Pruden, 2016.)
- **Transition from Sport:** When an athlete goes through a major transition and leaves, either voluntarily or involuntarily from their sport, and must cope at a social, psychological and physical and personal level (Lavallee, 2000)
- **National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA):** The NCAA is “a member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes” (What is the NCAA? NCAA.org., n.d.).

- **Division I:** “Division 1 programs offers the highest level of competition between the NCAA’s three divisions. Most Division 1 programs are found at large schools with big athletic budgets” (The college divisions explained (D1 vs. D2 vs. D3): NCSA, 2024).
- **Division II:** “The Division II experience not only provides student-athletes the opportunity to earn scholarships based on their academic, athletic and leadership abilities, but it also offers the best championships-participant ratio among the NCAA’s three divisions, and it prioritizes preparation for life beyond graduation” (Division II facts and figures, n.d.)
- **Division III:** “Division III athletics provides a well-rounded collegiate experience that involves a balance of rigorous academics, competitive athletics, and the opportunity to pursue the multitude of other co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities offered on Division III campuses. Division III playing season and eligibility standards minimize conflicts between athletics and academics, allowing student-athletes to focus on their academic programs and the achievement of a degree” (What does division III have to offer?, n.d.)

### **Organization of Study**

This dissertation has been organized into five chapters. Chapter One is the introduction and gives the reader an understanding of the problem. To briefly summarize, this dissertation is seeking to learn more about former collegiate swimmers and their career preparation and life post-sport outcomes. Chapter Two looks at the literature surrounding the topics of student-athletes from a variety of lens and outlines the

theoretical perspectives. Topics covered in the literature include the historical context of swimming, the playing field of collegiate swimming, characteristics gained from athletics, athletic identify of the student-athlete, career development, transition and life outcomes of student-athletes. Chapter Three guides the reader through the methodological steps I used to conduct the dissertation. Chapter Four contains the findings of the study. To conclude, Chapter Five discussed the findings, and ideas for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The world that swimmers come from is an intense and demanding one. Swimmers dedicate their bodies, countless hours, and immense amounts of commitment and perseverance. Everyone has their own unique journeys and has varied amounts of success. But with that success comes unique challenges: these swimmers experience retirement and transition before their non-athlete peers have even started their first full-time jobs. This chapter will first present a literature review to examine the current research and approach on the career development and post-sport experiences of collegiate swimmers.

To begin, the literature discussed will give a historical introduction to the sport and give the reader a better understanding of the sport itself as well as the student-athlete experience at the NCAA level. Once this has been accomplished, the reader will learn more about the athletic identity that has been built throughout the swimmer's lives, and the psychological impact of playing sports. As this review continues, more about the career development of both student-athletes and their non-athletic peers will be discussed.

To conclude, there will be a discussion on the transition itself that student-athletes undergo, as well as the life outcomes of student-athletes, although there is limited research on this topic. It is important to note, most literature discussed will be on the entire student-athlete population, as most literature does not focus on any specific non-revenue sport, especially the sport of swimming. This review will be used as a guide to understand the population of collegiate swimmers, and to gain a picture not only of their

transition, but their career development experiences within higher education. There will also be analysis on the two theories used to guide this dissertation.

To better analyze the transition process of college swimmers to their post-retirement and post college career, Schlossberg's theory of transition and 4S System will be discussed to inform the understanding of the transition process (Anderson et al., 2022). This theory affects various components of swimmers during the retirement transition process. With this framework in mind, this theory will be the guiding factor for many of the interview questions and the literature review.

In addition, Super's Theory of Career Development (1990) discusses how the career path is an ever-changing and evolving process throughout the person's lifespan. Career aspirations must do more with a person's personality and the circumstances at the specific moment in their lives. This theoretical perspective will offer guidance on the to the methodology, specifically when it comes to choosing the type of interviews and the participants.

This literature review provides insight into the collegiate experience of student-athletes, and illuminates their athletic identities, transitions, and other aspects such as the psychological impacts during their retirement from collegiate sport. It is important to note that many studies have been conducted related to issues pertaining to the entire student-athlete population. However, few studies have explicitly looked at the career development and post-life preparations of swimmers. Due to the lack of empirical research on swimmers, relevant literature to this population has been included, but it will generally be skewed toward the general student-athlete population.

## Historical Introduction to the Sport of Swimming

Swimming is a skill and sport that has existed since 2500 BC. The Egyptians have been credited for swimming in the Nile, with the Romans and Greek using swimming to train their soldiers (International Olympic Committee, 2018). The Olympics included swimming in their roster of sports starting in 1896, with it being one of only four sports that has been consistently retained since its inception (International Olympic Committee, 2018). Initially, only men competed in the sport of swimming – with races taking place in open bodies of water until 1908, with women’s swimming events added in 1912 (International Olympic Committee, 2018). Collegiate swimming kicked off right around this time. In January 1897, University of Pennsylvania was the first American college to make a pool available to its students (*Diving into the origins of swimming at Penn: 120 years of intercollegiate swimming*. Almanac, 2018). They also made it mandatory for its students to know how to swim upon graduation and hired the first collegiate swimming instructor in history, George Kistler (*Diving into the origins of swimming at Penn: 120 years of intercollegiate swimming*. Almanac, 2018).

Kistler is also given credit for teaming up with James Sullivan and hosting the first National Collegiate Championships in 1898. Collegiate swim teams were formed at Yale and Harvard in 1900 with numerous other teams following them. Eventually, the first Intercollegiate Swimming Association was formed in 1906, with members such as Cornell, University of Chicago, Princeton, Brown, and Columbia, among others (*Diving into the origins of swimming at Penn: 120 years of intercollegiate swimming*, 2018). Swimming continued to grow. A new governing body, The Federation Internationale de

Natation Amateur (FINA) was founded in 1908. Its purpose was to be a governing body to oversee swimming among other aquatic sports. FINA created rules and regulations for athletes to adhere to (History of swimming. rookieroad.com, n.d.). In 1924, swimming was contested as an official NCAA sport for the first time in history. Over the years, additional growth within the sport continued, such as more strokes being added in 1956, the use of goggles becoming normal in 1976, and women's swimming becoming an official NCAA sport in 1981 (History of swimming. rookieroad.com, n.d.).

Over the years, many superstars have graced the pool and have changed the sport, both collegiately and internationally. Some of the most notable swimmers include Mark Spitz and Michael Phelps, Katie Ledecky, and Katinka Hosszú but many more have pushed the sport of swimming to where it is today. Notably, there is an option to swim professionally for an extremely selective group of swimmers.

### ***Professional Opportunities for the Sport of Swimming***

The International Swimming League (ISL) was founded in 2019 as the first opportunity to swim in a professional sports league for swimmers. It was created with the vision of bringing more media attention to the sport of swimming between Olympic Years, and to create a swimming competition that is commercially successful (International Swimming League, 2019). The ISL hosted swim meets for their professional teams around the globe and hosts them in a media-friendly format. The goal was to generate revenue from sponsorships for the professional swimmers and allow them to receive winnings from ISL competitions (International Swimming League, 2019). The ISL was founded on six distinct pillars, including club competitions, regular



seasons, financial incentives, top elite athletes, gender equality, and no doping tolerance (International Swimming League, 2019).

To date, the ISL is the only professional swimming league in the world (International Swimming League, 2019). Each team hosts 12 male and 12 female athletes, and their meets are both fun, fast, and innovative with bright lights, smoke shows and other theatrical enhancements. Unfortunately, while the ISL hosted three seasons, their fourth season has been postponed indefinitely due to the war in Ukraine (ISL season 4 postponed to 2023. ISL 2022, 2022). While swimmers still have opportunities to earn sponsorships from top swimming brands such as FINIS, TYR, Speedo, and earn menial prize money from events such as the TYR Pro Series, there are no longer any opportunities for swimmers to compete professionally (Keith, 2022). We have now looked at the sport of swimming from a historical perspective and can now turn toward what swimming looks like in the current day.

### **Current Swimming Participation**

Today, the sport of swimming is still governed by FINA, now called World Aquatics, at an international level. Across the globe there are different National Governing Bodies (NGBs) that oversee the day-to-day operations within the sport of swimming. Swimming is a sport that requires you to rise through the ranks while achieving different time standards to qualify to swim at elite meets. You simply cannot just compete and then be able to swim at the NCAA level. Swimming is a sport that requires years-long dedication, and the swimmer will move through a variety of organizations before transitioning into collegiate sport. Here in the United States, USA

Swimming is the main governing body within the sport of swimming and primarily applies to 18 and Under Swimmers.

USA Swimming was created in 1978 due to the Amateur Sports Act, which ruled that all amateur Olympic sports would be run independently (USA swimming, n.d.). This governing entity oversees all rules, regulations, and administration of the sport within the US. USA Swimming falls under FINA and is a member of Group A in United States Olympic Committee (USA swimming, n.d.). They have divided the country into four zones – Central, Eastern, Southern and Western (USA swimming, n.d.). Underneath those zones are fifty-nine Local Swimming Committees (LSCs), which operate in their own area and have bylaws, and unique geographical areas (USA swimming, n.d.).

USA Swimming is not the only governing body within the United States for Swimming. Entities such as US Masters Swimming, YMCA Swimming, Summer League Swimming, High School Swimming, and many more exist – each with their own rules, regulations, and membership requirements. While there is no typical path to getting to compete in the NCAA, swimmers often participate within USA Swimming, and potentially some of the other governing bodies such as Summer League and High School Swimming. This participation varies from athlete to athlete and depends on the team, the swimmer's geographical location, and other individualized factors.

To put some of these national governing bodies into perspective, USA Swimming boasts over 400,000 members and caters mostly to swimmers 18 and under (USA Swimming Member Services, 2018). USA Swimming does not directly oversee the high school swimming federations, which are an alternative pipeline that can lead directly to

NCAA competition. While swimmers can be members of both federations, the National Federation of State High School associations boasts around 300,000 participants (High School Athletics Participation Survey - nfhs.org. National Federation of State High School Associations, n.d.). While there is no annual report for Summer League Swimming, this entity reports that over the years, it has serviced over 4 million swimmers (*Summer league swimming: Quality resources for teams & leagues*, 2022). The YMCA also boasts over 650 competitive teams, which houses many competitive swimmers (Wise, 2021). To compete in the NCAA, you do not have to belong and compete under one governing body or the other. What matters in the eyes of collegiate swimming coaches is becoming NCAA eligible.

### **NCAA Eligibility**

Becoming NCAA eligible occurs by going through the NCAA Eligibility Center. There you need to earn your academic and amateurism certification. This proves you have met the bare minimum NCAA standards for both academics and amateurism, which allows you to compete in your chosen sport. Just because the swimmer is eligible through the NCAA Portal does not mean you are guaranteed a spot on the team but does allow you to be recruited to compete for schools at Division I, II and III levels. To have the most chances of being recruited collegiately, athletes should start early, take official and unofficial visits, communicate and be selective with your school choices, and look to see where they will fit both academically and athletically (Sheridan, 2022).

As seen by the above statistics, hundreds of thousands of athletes compete in swimming. However, for women who compete in the sport of swimming, only 21,000

athletes compete at the NCAA Divisions I, II, and III every year, with Division I having the most athletes (NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report. NCAA.org, 2022). Men's swimming reports approximately 10,000 athletes who compete across all three divisions, with Division III reporting the most athletes (NCAA Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report. NCAA.org, 2022). Each NCAA division is different in commitment, speed, scholarships, and many other criteria.

### **Gender Difference in NCAA Sports**

Gender plays a role in the demographics of the NCAA. To date, there are approximately 31,000 female student-athletes, which represents 44% of the athletes that compete within NCAA (McGuire, 2023). This compares to the general student body, which women comprise 54% of (Weissman, 2022). While the number of females who compete at the NCAA level continues to climb, there are discrepancies when compared to their male counterparts. Female student-athletes report feeling more conflict with the various roles they balance, when compared to their male student-athlete counterparts (Lance, 2004). This means females struggle to balance their different roles while in college, including athlete, student, daughter, and many more.

Gender also plays a role in the availability and funding of collegiate sports. Female athletes make up 44% of the student-athletes on college campuses (Hattery, 2012). Yet men's programs received double the amount of resources when compared to men's revenue-generating sports and exist under a 3:1 ratio when looking at coaching compensation and recruiting efforts (The Associated Press, 2022). Other reports found that men's programs receive 23% more funding compared to their female counterparts in

Division I (Weissman, 2022.). Division II still reports a funding discrepancy, although much smaller at an 8% difference between male and female counterparts (Weissman, 2022).

### **Difference Between NCAA Divisions I, II, And III**

When it comes to finding a place to compete in swimming collegiately, it is possible for everyone to find a school to compete at, if they put in the time and effort. There are many different options and opportunities in each of the three NCAA divisions. For Division I swimming, there are over 300 institutions that offer the sport and are typically larger schools and public institutions (Lombana, 2019). According to Lombana, (2019) Division I routinely have the largest budgets, the largest student populations, and the highest levels of talent. At Division I institutions, both academic and athletic scholarships are available. However, when it comes to sport scholarships, Division I institutions can only offer 9.9 swimming scholarships for men and 14 scholarships for women (Lombana, 2019). Roster sizes may vary but no matter how large or small the team is, the number of scholarships stays stagnant.

Division II has 150 institutions, and typically offers much more of an academic and athletic balance (Lombana, 2019). While Division II schools often have excellent swimmers, this population is typically more focused on being a well-rounded student and involved in academics and athletics but having a presence on campus. Division II is still able to offer both academic and athletic scholarships; however, they only have 8.1 scholarships for both men and women.

Division III is the most academically focused of the three NCAA divisions. There are over 200 Division III institutions, but academics are the driving force in this division (Complete list of Division 3 colleges with men's swim teams. NCSA College Recruiting, 2023). Seasons are shorter, on-campus involvement and study abroad is encouraged and overall, the focus is on being a student, not an athlete (Lombana, 2019). At the Division III level, there are no athletic scholarships available, however there are merit and academic scholarships available (Lombana, 2019).

According to the NCAA, there is around \$3.6 Billion available in scholarships every year given to athletes at both the Division I and II levels (Scholarships, n.d.). Full rides are available and cover costs such as tuition, institutional fees, books, room and board. Scholarships may be given at different levels, to cover partial tuition or books only. One benefit available is these scholarships may cover either bachelor's or master's degrees (Scholarships, n.d.). In total, only about 2% of athletes earn a scholarship to compete annually (Scholarships, n.d.). The NCAA (n.d.) views the most beneficial part of being a student-athlete is the ability to receive a college education.

There are many different options and opportunities for swimmers to choose to compete at the collegiate level. Swimmers can be contacted as early as their sophomore year in college, and collegiate programs can attract swimmers from a variety of levels, locations, and backgrounds. Making the transition to a student-athlete comes with many rewards – including top-notch facilities, access to some of the top coaches in the sport and opportunities to compete at the highest levels possible. Being a collegiate swimmer is not for the weak. Not only is being in top physical shape a priority, but being mentally

tough, having excellent time management skills and having the ability to balance separate roles and responsibilities. But the rewards can be significant, both on an academic level and an athletic level. The literature will now turn to the collegiate experience of student-athletes, so that the reader can understand the expectations and pressures placed on the collegiate swimmer. The literature reviewed will focus on all-student athletes and pertains to the collegiate swimmer population.

### **Expectations of Collegiate Athletes**

Competing at the collegiate level is not an easy feat. There are many demands placed on the student-athlete population from the second they walk on campus (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Comeaux, 2015). Challenges and pressure to perform come from parents, coaches, faculty, peers, non-athletes, and the academic support system (Bell, 2009). While the NCAA bylaws state that only 4 hours per day and 20 hours per week may be spent on sport, it much often far more (Ayers et al., 2012). NCAA Research (2016) reported that football players spent over 40 hours per week on sport.

A lawsuit from student-athletes filed in 2015 reported that most student-athletes spend between 30-40 hours per week on sport (Jacobs, 2015). Loopholes are easy to be had with the 20-hour rule and often lead to time abuse. Jacobs (2015) reports that “voluntary” workouts do not count toward the 20-hour total. Competitions only count as 3 hours, although many competitions include days of several days of travel and long hours of competition. Sessions with the trainers, rehab, lifts, and many other activities do not count toward that 20-hour total as well (Jacobs, 2015). Time spent on athletics is not the only challenge that student-athletes face.

It can be tricky to navigate academics as student-athletes as well. Classes are missed and exams are rescheduled due to away competitions, and student-athletes are forced to be away from campus and activities that contribute to their success in academics (O'Neil et al., 2021). To help student-athletes perform academically, services are offered to assist. Since 1991, colleges have been required to offer academic support services to all their student-athletes (Bernhard et al., 2015). But time can also be difficult with these services. Increased expectations are had, including study hall, weekly academic check-ins and more – none of which counts toward the 20-hour limit.

Miller and Kerr (2002) reported that student-athletes often struggle to feel success in any of their collegiate roles, as there is constant competition as to what the most important aspect is. While success is possible in all aspects, Monda et al. (2015) found that student-athletes who had strong support systems, and clear academic goals were the most likely to be successful. Nichols et al. (2019) report finding a high number of student athletes who demonstrated a growth mindset toward academics and consistently report high GPAs (Grade Point Average). When comparing to non-athletic peers, Georgakis et al. (2015) found that student-athletes outperformed their non-athletic counterparts. Considering gender, females' student-athletes often outperform their male counterparts academically, especially if they are on an academic scholarship (Dilley- Knolles et al., 2010; Milton et al., 2012).

Every year, the administration of DI institutions is required to complete a variety of requirements to ensure that the institution remains compliant by NCAA bylaws and regulations (NCAA Division I Annual List of Required Forms and Actions, 2020). These



include financial reports, health and safety surveys, demographics, and academic progress reports and graduation rates. This ensures that each institution is compliant and is adhering to the same guidelines as all other DI institutions. There are also many other regulations that student-athletes need to adhere to ensure that they are academically eligible prior to competing for the first time.

There are varieties of core classes that the NCAA requires, such as a minimum number of years of Math, Science and English to be completed in high school prior to enrolling into an institution (Core Courses, 2017). This is to ensure that rigorous academic standards have already been met and the student-athlete is prepared for the challenges of collegiate academics. The NCAA also requires a 2.3 GPA (Grade Point Average) and a minimum SAT/ACT score, based on a sliding scale. These requirements are typically higher than what is required for the actual institution. However, these standards must be met if the individual aspires to compete at the collegiate level.

Upon enrolling in a DI institution, further academic requirements must be met to maintain eligibility to compete. The most important aspect of this eligibility is the progress-toward-degree requirements (Division I Progress-Toward-Degree Requirements, 2016). These requirements ensure that a student-athlete is making reasonable progress toward completing a degree.

According to the progress-toward-degree guidelines, there are four benchmarks an athlete must meet (Division I Progress-Toward-Degree Requirements, 2016). First, the student-athlete must have taken at least 27 credits before the second year of collegiate enrollment. Prior to the third year, the requirement is a minimum of 27 credits toward a

specific degree and 40% of the chosen degree completed. Prior to beginning the fourth year, another 27 credits must have been completed, and 60% of a degree must be completed. Finally, prior to the fifth year, 80% of a degree must be completed and an additional 27 credit hours must be completed. Throughout all NCAA competitions, a minimum of a 2.0 GPA is required. This minimum GPA is just for the NCAA, with each institution and sport having the ability to set their own criteria for minimum GPA for participation.

Division II has similar standards (Trends in NCAA Division II graduation rates, n.d.). 27 credits must be completed, 9 credits per semester at a minimum, 24 semester hours and a 2.0 GPA must be met by the time the student-athlete enters their second year. The third year is similar, with another 9-credit semester minimum, 27 credits earned during the entire year, 72 hours of total time completed, a 2.0 GPA and the designation of a degree program all completed. When the student-athlete is entering their fourth year and fifth year (if eligibility allows), the same standards must be met as the second and third year. All these standards were effective as of the 2016 academic year.

Unlike the other two divisions, Division III athletics has no national standards that must be met. The NCAA stipulates that student-athletes at the Division III level simply must be in good academic standing and make progress that is satisfactory toward their degree, per their institution (*Staying on track to graduate, n.d.*). At a minimum, DIII athletes must be enrolled in at least 12 hours per semester, but this is the only official standard that is offered that must be met (*Staying on track to graduate, n.d.*). Although these standards to stay athletically are rigorous, there are often preconceived notions of

what student-athletes on campus look like. The realities of being a student-athletes often differ from perceptions, but it can make the journey as a collegiate athlete more difficult.

### **Perceptions versus Reality of Student-Athletes**

When the phrase student-athlete is heard, there are often mixed reactions from faculty and staff to this population. In some cases, faculty are detached and uninformed when it comes to athletics and student-athletes (Lawrence et al., 2009; Tovar, 2011). Other faculty have a more negative perception of student-athletes. Engstrand (1995) discovered that faculty at a Division I institution felt that their athletes were disconnected from the university and its academic mission.

Multiple studies have shown that faculty behave differently toward student-athletes, which can hinder their engagement with educational activities (Comeaux, 2011; Steele, 1997). Simons et al. (2007) reported that student-athletes felt they were negatively perceived by their faculty, received negative comments, and reported earning lower than deserved grades. This sort of negative behavior has been found to have been perpetuated by faculty toward both Division I and II student-athletes (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom et al., 1995). Negative stereotypes have been consistently found to occur against student-athletes in revenue generating sports and male student-athletes as well (Spitzer, 2014; Tovar, 2011). The behavior displayed by faculty can lead to feelings and perpetuations of stereotypes, such as being known as “dumb jocks.”

When the phrase dumb jock is used, it typically implies that the student-athlete is not motivated academically, is less intelligent and is not prepared for the rigors of university academics (Stone, 2012). By using this phrase and identifying student-athletes

as such, it often causes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Student-athletes have expressed that they felt they were not as smart as the traditional college students, with some reporting they did live up to the expectations of being a dumb jock (Aries et al., 2004; Sailes, 1993). It was also reported that student-athletes felt their academic expectations were often lowered because they were athletes (Wininger & White, 2008). They also faced criticism due to conflicts from athletics, being singled out in class, and comments about being a poor student (Parsons, 2013).

Although these negative stereotypes exist, the College Swimming and Diving Coaches Association of America (CSCAA) reports that swimmers report some of the highest graduation rates when compared to other sports (n.d.). Swimmers also overachieve academically. The CSCAA also reports that over 40% of collegiate swimmers major in STEM, with business majors representing another 20% of the population (n.d.). Based on these statistics, it is easy to see that swimmers succeed in their sport and academics. Being an athlete does also have additional benefits, such as giving transferable traits to help the athlete succeed not only on the college campus, but later in life as well.

### **Characteristics Gained as a Student-Athlete**

Being a student-athlete can be difficult, but there are many skills that go beyond the classroom that stay with this population for life. Some of the top highlighted skills that student-athlete possess include: being results oriented, coachable, and willing to learn, time management, can perform under pressure, values teamwork, self-motivated, ability to multitask, among many other desirable traits (*Marketing Your Athletic Skills:*

*How Playing Collegiate Sports Can Help You Land a Job, n.d.*). There are other highly anticipated skills that student-athletes hone over the years. Some traits include discipline, sacrifice, ambition, dedication, integrity, leadership abilities, perseverance, teamwork, a strong work ethic and drive to succeed (Duderstadt, 2009; Henderson et al., 2006; Long & Caudill, 1991; Ryan, 1989; Soshnick, 2013; Williams, 2013)

Student-athletes are often targeted by recruiters as they possess the background and skillset needed to excel in corporate America (Maxey, 2019). Forbes reported that student-athletes are often identified as go-getters and are loyal, hardworking and can adapt to the workplace with little guidance (Vidal, 2022). A simple Google search shows dozens of articles, anecdotes, and support for hiring the student-athlete population into the company due to their past accolades. These traits are intertwined with their athletic identity. The athletic identity has been built over the long years that the swimmer has competed and is deeply entrenched and a part of their entire being.

### **Athletic Identity**

Harrison Jr et al. (2013) argue that student-athletes represent a non-traditional and unique group that play a complex part in the collegiate ecosystem. Their athletic identity can play an influential role in the lives of student-athletes and can shape the experiences they have throughout their athletic careers. Brewer et al. (1993) defined athletic identity as how deeply an individual identifies with the role of athlete. This identity is not just how an individual identifies. Chen et al. (2010) said that identity is also an indicator of how their athletic experience will psychologically and cognitively affect a person.

Athletic identity is something that can be in the foreground of an individual's personality beginning at an early age. Baillie and Danish (1992) wrote that the role and identity of athlete typically begins forming at an early age. This role can take precedence since young athletes often view professional and collegiate student-athletes as role models. Additionally, Baillie and Danish (1992) found that being a successful athlete can signify a high social standing, which can be inspiring to young aspiring athletes. Social standing and glory are not the only factors that assist in athletic identity formation. Family can also influence athletic identity.

Gerber (2018) conducted a study pertaining to athletic identity in collegiate student-athletes. He found that all his participants came from a background heavily influenced by athletics. Families were involved in many sports, parents attended sporting events and siblings were athletically inclined. He wrote how the identity of an athlete was something that could be passed on. The participants in his study were surrounded by athletics beginning at a young age. Not only were they surrounded, but they were shown various positive experiences that came from participation in sport. Although there are positive outcomes from sport, if a student-athlete becomes too deeply ingrained with their athletic identity, role conflicts and other issues may arise.

### ***Strong Athletic Identity***

Adler and Adler (1987) are leading experts on the social identity of student-athletes. They discussed how athletic identity can take more precedence over academic roles and expectations, especially in a revenue sport. The student-athletes in their 1987 study shared that they played their sport for fun while in high school. However, as they

continued in their collegiate athletic careers, their sport became more of a job, with heavy expectations for winning athletic performances. This study also highlighted how other roles, such as being a student, were pushed off. Partners, coaches, and academic advisors took a huge role in keeping the student-athlete eligible to play and enrolled in courses.

Other authors echo the sentiment of a strong athletic identity being present in student-athletes. Sparkes (1998) conducted a study that included a former collegiate swimmer. Despite a career-ending injury, the athletic identity was still prominent, although the individual could no longer compete. This concept was viewed as an Achilles's heel, since it was exceedingly difficult for the individual to let go of their former self. Lally and Kerr (2005) also found that the student-athlete identity can be strong as well. They argued that the athletic identity had the potential to be more salient than other identities. This did not hold true for all participants in their study, with some student-athletes viewing their primary identity as a student first.

Lu et al. (2018) also found that athletic identity was prominent in the athletes they studied. They found that this identity was salient due to how student-athletes physically looked, how they dressed and how they were separated from the rest of the student body. The student-athletes in this study also reported feelings of role conflict when it came to student and athlete identities with the athletic identity often pushed onto them by athletic staff and coaches. However, not all athletes struggled with this athletic identity salience, with numerous participants in the study prioritizing their student identity.

Harrison Jr et al. (2013) also found evidence of strong athletic identities in his study. Athletic endeavors and identity are often prioritized until athletic prowess and

achievements have been fulfilled. He argued there is often there is a daily battle of priorities since the schedule student-athletes are required to maintain is strict and can be cumbersome even for the most talented time managers.

Chen et al. (2013) found that on average student-athletes spend four hours daily doing activities for their sport. Only sleep had more dedicated time spent, with seven hours, while academics, both combined class time and studying combined made up five hours of the day. With sport being their highest amount of time spent per day, it is no surprise how deeply entrenched the student-athlete identity was. Further isolation can promote a strong athletic identity as well. Often student-athletes eat, sleep, socialize, have similar majors and study together. This can result in social isolation as well as academic isolation from the rest of campus, encouraging a stronger athletic identity (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2011; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Although athletic identity can be salient as these studies have shown, not all student-athletes have such a strong sense of athletic identity, with other factors playing a role in identity formation.

### **Factors Playing A Role In Athletic Identity**

A difference in genders was shown when it came to athletic identity. Sturm et al. (2011) found that females typically held a much weaker athletic identity when compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, their lives were much more balanced, although the authors attributed this fact to the limited opportunities for females to play professionally. It is important to note that according to NCAA data, female student-athletes tend to outperform and graduate at higher rates when compared their male counterparts as well as the general student body (Nagel, 2018).



Meyer (1990) found that female student-athletes also had a much more optimistic perspective on education, and a much higher academic identity. She found that academic attitudes shifted as the athletic career progressed. Female student-athletes were more motivated to do well in their courses and were actively thinking about achieving their degrees upon completing their NCAA eligibility. This weak athletic identity could also be due to the low level of opportunities that are traditionally available to female student-athletes post-graduation.

Race also affects how strong athletic identities are. Harrison Jr et al. (2013) argued that not only being an athlete but having an athletic identity can help to shield an African American individual from discrimination post-sport. Cooper and Cooper (2015) wrote that African American athletes felt that they were being exploited by Division I institutions, which resulted in a stronger athletic identity. This strong identity was formed due to a chain of events. Coaches expect winning results and by producing them, student-athletes receive the promised educational benefits and additional benefits.

Prejudice can play a role in increasing athletic identity as well. Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991) found that college students were suspicious when student-athletes received good grades. They were also worried that when a student-athlete was assigned to work with them on a project. Behavior as such only encourages a stronger athletic identity. Professors showed this suspicion as well. Engstrom et al. (1995) expressed surprise and suspicion when athletes did well in their courses and automatically held negative attitudes toward student-athletes.

Athletic identity plays an integral role in the lives of student-athletes as demonstrated in the literature so far. Although these identities are deeply engrained, all athletic careers must end, and the student-athlete must be prepared to shift from the athletic identity. To assist in this transition, career development is integral. However, this population can have trouble gaining professional experience, as they are unable to form alternate identities outside of sport (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). Grove et al. (1997) found that those with higher athletic identities were more vulnerable to difficulties with career transitions. Additionally, those student-athletes with high levels of athletic identity felt they had lost their support systems upon graduation and had difficulty transitioning to life post-sport (Lavalley et al., 1997). To learn more about the career development of student-athletes, I now turn to literature on the career development of student-athletes and their non-athletic peers.

### **Psychological Impacts of Playing Sport**

Participation in sports often has a positive impact not only for social mobility (Hawkins, 2013), but for both physical and mental health. Physical activity has positive attributes, including improved brain health, better cognitive function, better sleep, improved quality of life and a lower risk of anxiety and depression (Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2018). Additionally, physical activity has been proven to enhance mental health and well-being, and can reduce stress, increase self-esteem and can have a part in preventing other mental health issues from arising (The Role of Physical Activity and Sport in Mental Health. The Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine, 2018). When it comes to taking care of mental health, reports show that

females often take a more proactive approach in taking care of their mental health, and overall collegiate athletes were more understanding and accepting if their peers did struggle with their mental health (Moreland et al., 2018). Although physical activity and sports can have a positive effect on the mental health and well-being of student-athletes, there are often more issues that come with the pressures of being an elite athlete.

Sport does not always have a positive impact on the mental health of student-athletes. Ryan et al., (2018) reported that student-athletes are twice as likely to have mental health issues than their non-athlete peers. Student-athletes also report high levels of stress and the sport feeling like a burden (Van Raalte & Posteher, 2019). Other risks student-athletes face include injury, physical and emotional burn out and the inevitable retirement from sport upon graduation (Sudano et al., 2017). A new emerging issue for student-athlete mental health is the stress arising from name, image, and likeness deals (Jessop & Sabin, 2021). Student-athletes are now eligible to earn income from using their own name, image, and likeness, and this is a new hurdle that this population must navigate.

If a student-athlete decides to seek help for their mental health, there are barriers they must work through. It has also been reported that not only do student-athletes not recognize when they need mental health support, but if they do decide to get help, they face social stigma for seeking help (Armstrong & Early, 2009; Morgan, 1999). College counseling centers are not rising to the needs of students as many are understaffed and have long wait times for appointments. The average counselor is also not trained in sports psychology, often leading to generic care that does not meet the specialized needs of

collegiate athletes (Moreland et al., 2018). Further, psychological service centers on campus often are not available at odd hour's student-athletes are available (Brown, 2014). This is alarming as student-athletes often report high levels of anxiety and depression and suicidal tendencies (Cox et al., 2017; Davoren & Hwang, 2019; Wolanin et al., 2016).

Further, it was found that those who retired involuntarily are at a higher risk of having mental health issues. Esopenko et al., (2020) found that involuntary retirement is associated with negative mental health, including depression, distress, lower quality of life, sleep disturbances, nutritional issues, among other issues. Issues that swimmers who retired voluntarily could experience include reduced access to social networks, increased risk of weight gain and cardiovascular disease (Esopenko et al., 2020).

Overall, sports do have a positive impact on the mental health of student-athletes, but sport participation can often cause more stress and anxiety. Another cause of stress and anxiety is what happens once retirement from sport has happened. To mitigate some of the stress that is on this population during their transition, they often participate in career development, which I will delve into more in the coming literature.

### **Career Development for Student-Athletes**

There are many support services that exist to assist student-athletes in a variety of ways during their time in college (Etzel et al., 1996; Gaston-Gayles, 2003). These services are sorely needed as Tekavc et al. (2015) highlight how many elite athletes felt they have no useful knowledge outside their sport. The participants in their study obtained employment in the sport they once played due to lack of outside knowledge. Some basic options have been identified to assist student-athletes. These efforts include

finding ways to use free time appropriately, creating to-do lists related to careers and dream jobs, research dream job companies and making an achievement list (Burton et al., 2018).

To extend beyond identifying basic support, many athletic programs offer career development, such as the Life Skills Program, which is sponsored by the NCAA. This program promotes diversity and equity, identifying and applying transferable skills, and fosters an environment for student-athletes to access and utilize on-campus resources, among other skills (NCAA CHAMPS/ Life Skills, 2018).

Other institutions, such as Oregon State, Vanderbilt, and the University of Central Florida all have their own institutionally specific programs to support student-athletes' career development process (Bukstein, 2016). Rowan University focuses on their career development through its in-house programming by having their junior and senior student-athletes attend the PROF Academy. This academy focuses on mental health and well-being, networking, career preparedness, internships, interviewing skills, among other skills to help them prepare for life after graduation (Bullard et al., 2020).

Although many programs specifically catered toward student-athlete career development exist, it can still be a daunting challenge. Wendling and Sagas (2020) found that those who have higher levels of self-efficacy and outgoing, ambitious traits were more likely to engage in career planning and take advantage of the resources offered to them. Buzzetta et al. (2017) asserted that student-athletes who take part in a career-planning course had less goal instability for career planning and were willing to explore a variety of career options before making a final decision.

Further career development resources are available to assist student-athletes through student-athlete centers, which provide a variety of services separate from the general student population (Rifenburg, 2016). Some of the benefits of visiting the student-athlete center include a sense of belonging, structure, assistance with major selection, tutoring, leadership development, life-skills training, and assistance with obtaining internships, volunteering, and promotion opportunities (Botelho, 2019). Providing student-athletes access to academic counseling and support services is mandated by NCAA bylaws (NCAA Bylaws. Legislative Services Database - LSDBi, n.d.). Although those who play revenue sports typically use the student-athlete centers more, they are accessible to the entire student-athlete population (Ridpath, 2010).

Another important aspect of the career development process is mentoring. Ragins and Scandura (1994) identified the importance of mentoring as critical to career paths, success, and advancement for all employees, managers, and executives. Career mentoring usually comes from advice on advancement, promotions, salary, and other important advancement information (Kram, 1985). While mentoring does occur, female student-athletes reported taking part in informal mentoring and relying on advice as well as psychological support from their mentor (Park et al., 2017). While all these pieces of career development are critical, student-athletes report many constraints to career development.

Gender plays a role in the career preparation of student-athletes as well. When looking at the general population, studies have differing reports of career preparedness. Some studies report males having higher career preparedness, while others report females

having higher career preparedness (Fogarty & McGregor-Bayne; 2008; Inda et al., 2013; Luzzo, 1995; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001; Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010; Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007; Wright et al., 2012). More recent studies show that females come out on top for career preparedness, with more maturity, confidence, and higher academic skills (Houle & Kluck, 2015; Stringer & Kerpleman, 2010; Wright et al. 2012).

Looking at this from the angle of student-athletes, Tyrance et al. (2013) report how female student-athletes often have lower levels of career preparedness and felt that they would not reach their full potential in their future careers. Regardless of gender, it is important to note that student-athletes across the board reported the need for more exposure to career preparation (Parietti et al. 2016).

### ***Constraints of Career Development***

One of the biggest issues is that the student-athlete population is at a continual risk of being inadequately prepared for their future careers (Burns et al., 2013). Research has shown that many of these services have not assisted in the personal development of the student-athlete, and some might not be aware they exist (Comeaux, 2007; Danish et al., 1993). Further research has shown that student-athletes tend to underutilize their on-campus resources and can lack maturity when planning for their future career (Martens & Cox, 2000; McQuown et al., 2010; Watson, 2005). However, Murdock et al. (2016) wrote that the perceptions of student-athletes related to career development have nothing to do with their access. Rather, their career development is more related to their career prospects and if they felt they could obtain a viable career post-graduation (Murdock et al., 2016).

Time is a consistent theme and limiting factor when it comes to career development (Park et al., 2013). Student-athletes reported they already struggled to fit in the required elements of sports and academics, with little time left to devote toward this development piece. Brown and Hartley (1998) found evidence to support the idea that student-athletes do not explore other options, such as careers and lifestyle options due to the amount of time spent on their sport. If the student-athlete has a strong athletic identity, it can have a negative impact on the major pursued as the athletic career becomes the priority, rather than one's long-term success (Foster & Huml, 2017). Bell (2009) found that due to eligibility requirements beginning after sophomore year, career exploration and major choice can be sacrificed for student-athletes to stay eligible to play. There was an increase in time spent on other sport-related activities, so that the athlete could continue to produce a winning record.

Clustering is also an issue that some student-athletes report facing when it comes to career development. Case et al. (2017) defines clustering as when over 25% of student-athletes on a single team end up in the same academic major at a disproportionate rate compared to the general student body. These student-athletes often end up in a major due to the ease of maintaining their academic eligibility. Long-term career goals are often not considered when being clustered in a major. The focus is to keep student-athletes eligible to play both NCAA sports, and to play professionally one day.

Schneider et al. (2010) report that within the Big 12 Division I conference, certain teams had over 50% of their players in one major. While this could be due to positive academic program experiences, clustering is also possible due to simplicity of classes and



faculty willing to work with student-athletes schedules. One important finding related to clustering is removing coaches from having substantial input in the academic process (Case et al., 2017). This ensures that student-athletes can choose a major and classes that will help them achieve their academic and career goals.

### ***The Gap in Career Development***

Based on the literature thus far, there appears to be a gap in the career development process for student-athletes. To help close the gaps in career development for its student-athletes, the NCAA has developed several leadership programs, a leadership and career forum, and internship programs to its student-athletes (Preparing for your career. NCAA.org, n.d.). However, despite these changes, the NCAA does not have specific benchmarks, policies, or outcome goals for any career development program for student-athletes (Navarro & Malvaso, 2016). Sandstedt et al. (2004) call for more tools to help design and guide career development programs. The authors felt that student-athletes in their study had a unique life and required a tool specifically related to transferring sport skills into career related talents. Finding this tool is imperative, otherwise, many student-athletes could miss alternative careers.

Navarro and Malvaso (2016) are leaders in studying the student-athlete career development experience. She studied what influenced student-athletes and their career identity for life post-sport. She noted that career development was a complex process, and that some career influences come from their K-12 experience, while others were influenced by familiar figures, while others chased after dreams they had as children. Navarro and Malvaso (2016) further found that athletes often selected majors and career

preparation based on maintaining athletic and academic eligibility, pressure from peers, coaches and a firm guiding hand from an athletic-academic advisor. Finally, Navarro and Malvaso (2016) also reported that completing a career development course, practicing interviewing skills, and attending a resume workshop were influential to the career preparation process.

Student-athletes in Navarro and Malvaso's study impressed that having a course that focuses on career development skills that was mandatory within their athletic department was beneficial (2016). They also reported how important networking was and getting real world practical experience through internships and other opportunities on campus. Career development for student-athletes is not a neat and linear path, which really came into focus during the final year of competition. Navarro and Malvaso (2016) call for policy makers to work together with university officials to produce clear learning objectives and outcomes for student-athletes to achieve during their career preparation process, but to date, that is still a recommendation and not a reality.

Comeaux and Harrison (2007) support offering career preparation programs specifically for student-athletes. These programs can allow student-athletes to engage in careers, majors and activities that appeal to them, rather than being surrounded by others who are pushed into common majors. To further close the gap in career development, Comeaux and Grummert (2020) produced a tool called the Career Transition Scorecard for student-athletes undergoing career preparation. They used this scorecard as a tool so they could identify bias and improve the quality of academic experiences not only of student-athletes but with a special emphasis on Black athletes as well. This tool is being

consistently updated to further find ways to engage athletes and enhance their academic experiences.

One thing during the career development process for student-athletes that should not happen is further isolation of this population. Huml et al. (2014) asserts that those student-athletes that only utilized the athletic academic center for support left them with less opportunities to connect with faculty and inhibited their development. Scholars call for the integration of student-athletes into the general career preparation population and for campus-wide career development collaboration (Navarro, 2015; Navarro & Malvaso, 2016). This contrasts with relying solely on those professionals internal to the athletic department. The authors further call for faculty and staff at institutions to strengthen their relationships with student-athletes and to assist them in the career development process.

It can be helpful to have influences that exist outside the athletic department. Huml et al. (2014) support having academic advisors and faculty advisors outside of the athletic department helped student-athletes more than their athletic advisors when it came to achieving their academic goals. Navarro and Malvaso (2016) also support campus wide collaboration among professionals to help student-athletes with career development. Umbach et al. (2006) and Broughton and Neyer (2001) suggest that isolation from peers at colleges is elevated for student-athletes. These authors call for the integration of student-athletes into the general career preparation population. However, the professionals that assist with the career preparation process should be aware of how best to help student-athletes in this process.

Benefits of this campus-wide collaboration include exposure to various careers (Navarro, 2015), and more academically and career-focused perspectives from non-athletic advisors (Huml et al., 2014). Student-athletes that did engage in a variety of career-building reported being able to choose majors that enhanced their academic skillset (Navarro & Malvaso, 2016).

Specifically, female athletes and those who were in less prominent sports discussed how they were able to be exposed to various subjects, and excelling in different classes enabled them to choose majors which enhanced this skillset. They also felt that their major was a vehicle that helped them to prepare for their future. To be adequately prepared for their lives post-sport, it is crucial that student-athletes begin to focus on their personal career development early in their athletic career (Tyrance et al., 2013). Student-athletes are not the only population that undergoes the career development process. Students on campus could prepare for their careers after graduation and the literature now turns to that experience.

### ***Career Development of Students on Campus***

It does not matter if a student is an athlete or an average student on campus, career preparation causes students to struggle with anxiety and fear (Kim & Ra, 2022; Park et al., 2017). The average student can also face time constraints, and inflexible course scheduling as barriers to seeking out career preparation services (Huerta et al., 2022). Other constraints to career preparation include having bad experiences at the career services center (Bodnar, 2022). While there might still be anxiety and fear, career preparation for college students has changed over time to give the students different

experiences. Not only has career preparation evolved over the years, but so have students' needs. Some students only need an associate degree to succeed in their chosen fields, while others need a master's degree or more to achieve their career goals (Cahill, 2016).

Back in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, career prep took place in high schools in the shape of vocational classes and hands on instruction (Cahill, 2016). Dey and Cruzvergara (2014) have been tracking the shift in career preparation. Starting in the 1990s, career preparation was focused on professional networking. In the 2010s, career preparation again shifted to the connected communities we have become accustomed to today.

Generation Z is at the point where they are attending college. This new generation is changing how they view their future careers. Many Gen Z students want to freelance and want to work for themselves post-college (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). This new generation views having a healthy and happy career as a priority, as well as having a passion for the work they do. Career development is going to shift again as this is different than the Millennial generation of students. Millennials career goals were to get a job regardless of if they liked or enjoyed it, with the goal to grow over the years into the role/ industry.

Some of the experience's college students are privy to today during their career preparation include a customized experience, alumni connections, individualized experiences within career centers, mentoring, gaining internships and experiential learning, and more (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Certain institutions also offered their own specialized ways to assist with career preparation. At Ohio University, services include access to an online platform where alumni target current students for jobs post-

graduation, personalized career coaching, events on campus offered to enhance the career preparation experience, a career closet so students can grab clothes for interviews, and much more (Career Network. Career Network | Ohio University, n.d.).

The University of Denver offers something similar. This institution boasts a 3-story center for career achievement, that includes places to hang out, a career closet, and a conference lounge for employee/ student meetings (Rubin, 2021). Rubin (2021) also found that other institutions offer credits for internships, career preparation courses to develop growth mindsets, and encourage their faculty to add assignments that assist in career planning. This could be something as simple as searching for careers in a specific field, writing actual cover letters and resumes for roles.

Bodnar (2022) describes how career services evolved at the University of Montana due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. To ensure students still had networking and internship experience, remote micro-internships were developed. These short-project-specific internships gave students real-world issues to solve while in a remote environment. Despite the challenges, these students were still able to gain experience, gain credit and expand their professional portfolios. Career services are continually developing, but the main goal is to prepare students for jobs post-graduation.

The main purpose of attending college is to find your way in the world and to be trained for the workforce (Arum et al., 2016; Levine & Dean, 2012). Research from Mayorga (2019) has shown that one of the best ways to train college students for their future careers is in-person training and immersion. While students initially struggled with the thought process and application of skills, they were able to be a part of real-world

situations and had the ability to apply their knowledge in a safe setting (Mayorga, 2019). College used to be a guarantee for a job, but this is no longer a guarantee (Cavanaugh & Huelskamp, 2019). As of 2021, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that 86% of recent graduates do hold a full-time job.

While career preparation is continually evolving within higher education, critics warn that American Colleges have not prepared their students to succeed in the workforce (Jimenez, 2020). Combined with the COVID-19 Pandemic, students lack critical skills, such as technical or academic skills. These critics call for early exposure during the collegiate experience to different industries, professionals, and occupations (Jimenez, 2020). Kim and Ra (2022) argue that career preparation in a collegiate setting only exists to boost employment rates and that there are not sufficient opportunities to explore what career would be best for the student overall. Budget concerns can also be problematic, along with a lack of personnel, especially among Division II and III schools can face when it comes to career development (Nite, 2012).

Gender also plays a role when it comes to career preparation. Arguments remain that women in general continue to be disadvantaged when it comes to their career preparation (Evans, 2002; Fortin and Huberman, 2002). This holds true in specific fields, such as STEM, as women remain vastly underrepresented (Beede et al., 2011). Leading the way to these under representations are negative stereotypes are often internalized during childhood. These stereotypes often negatively influence girl's academic abilities, their motivations and career choices (Olsson & Martiny, 2018).

The issues women face does not stop with career preparation. Women experience discrepancies in the workforce exist, including wage gaps, fewer promotions, and smaller wage increases (Beach, Finnie, and Gray, 2003; Fortin and Huberman, 2002; Yap and Konrad, 2009). Career choice is also an issue when looking at the wage gaps. When it comes into selecting a career, women who hold views that are more conservative often gravitate towards roles that are more traditional and more gender-stereotypical roles (Nadeem & Khalim, 2018). Fields that typically have higher wages are often harder to attain for females as stereotypes pushed by family and friends can have such a powerful perception on girls, resulting in an unawareness of opportunities in male sectors, specifically STEM (Eccles, 1994).

Regardless of gender, the time student-athletes take for career preparation is important. This is especially true as the decisions student-athletes make in college critically affects their career development (Huang et al., 2014). One key component to the success of career development is support. Social support during the career development process is critical, as it has an influence on career behaviors, outcomes, and career self-efficacy (Lent et al., 2003).

One of the key players in career development is family. Parents, especially when they are optimistic and positive have an influence on the career's student-athletes choose (Kenny et al., 2003). Similarly, Jackson et al (2006) report that peers and family both have an influence on the career development of college students. Coaches also play a role in support. When coaches and families support their student-athletes on the career development front, it helps the student-athletes to shift from their sport to their careers,



and to make better plans for their lives post-sport (Vilanova & Puig, 2016; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). Support is also key in the transition phase of career development. Chan et al., (2018) asserted that information and experiences that come from parents and coaches can help to formulate career values, expectations, and more. This is critical for the student-athletes, especially as they transition to full-time careers and enter their career development processes.

As demonstrated, both the college student and the student-athlete undergo career preparation in their own ways. Each of these populations encounters different barriers but moves on from the college setting and into the real world and workforce. Discrepancies exist, especially when it comes to gender. It is also true that support is important during the career preparation process. Not only is a future career being selected, but a transition is taking place. The literature ahead looks at the transition of the student-athlete and how it can be a difficult or easy process as they move through it.

### **The Student-Athlete Transition**

The transition from sport is inevitable for all student-athletes and can occur because of retirement or injury (Smith & Hardin, 2018). Out of all student-athletes who retire at the end of their academic career this year, approximately 98% will be completely retiring from their respective sport (Miller & Buttell, 2018). Research shows most student-athletes are ill-prepared to make this transition (Houle & Kluck, 2015). To date, there is no best practice on when to begin to address the transition from sport of collegiate student-athletes (Leonard & Schimmel, 2016). However, there is a consensus that losing the athletic identity can be easy or difficult and that each individual handles

this transition period in their own way (Brown & Hartley, 1998; Hodges, 2018).

Although there is much data on the transitions of those who are injured or professionals, collegiate student-athlete transition that is easy or anticipated is not as studied.

### ***Easy Transitions***

For some student-athletes, the transition can be a challenging time, but for others it is a welcome relief to finish the athletic chapter in their lives. Some athletes can experience easier transitions from sport, especially when it is voluntary (Martin et al., 2014). Often, those who are retiring are happy to pass on the knowledge from their transitions, as it makes their experiences worthwhile. This is true especially if the former student-athletes can help someone soon in the same situation (Saxe et al., 2017). Support systems also played an important part in the transition itself.

Coakley (1983) wrote that those who have numerous social ties and other organizations or activities to fall back on often have easier transitions. This process is easier because the student-athlete has a new group or activities to join and be a part of. Woods (2017) reported that during the transition phase, many student-athletes were aware of their transferable skills and leaned on the support of their family and athletic department personnel for help during their transition. Martin et al. (2014) found that those who had a lower athletic identity had an easier transition. This loss of identity resulted in an easy transition since student-athletes were looking forward to more free time, freedom from becoming injured while playing, and no longer having to worry about competitions.

Overall, those who also had strong support systems reported having less transition difficulties during the period after sport retirement (Alfermann, 1995; Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Young et al., 2006). Additionally, those who had supportive coaches and trainers distribute materials helpful to retirement also reported less difficulties (Fernandez et al., 2006; Wippert & Wippert, 2008). The transition period is often difficult for the student-athlete population, solely due to the loss of identity and the change in their day-to-day lives.

### ***Difficult Transitions***

Difficult transitions are much more likely for student-athletes (Baillie, 1993). During this period, psychological issues can arise. These issues include feeling a loss of control, helplessness, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Lally, 2007; Miller & Buttell, 2018). Retirement from sport also feels like a loss and creates a void in the day-to-day lives of student-athletes (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). In the case of some Division I athletes, they were found to avoid transitioning out of athletics at all costs and needed additional support due to their fear and unwillingness to navigate this experience (Smith & Hardin, 2018). Not only do student-athletes struggle psychologically, but they may also struggle physically with their nutrition and changing body types as well (Lavalley & Robinson, 2007). Crook and Robertson (1991) echo this sentiment as well. They wrote that self-esteem and identity can be too intertwined with sport, which can result in a negative transition experience.

The difficulties during transition expand beyond mental and physical issues. Leonard and Schimmel (2016) found that student-athletes can have trouble gaining

professional experience and are unable to form alternate identities outside of sport. This can make the transition more difficult since the individual does not want a new group or team to be included in. Coakley (1983) also found that transitions can be difficult if the individual is coming from a lower socioeconomic status. This transition is difficult because the student-athlete is already coming from a disadvantaged background and did not have resources to assist them for life post-sport.

Athletic identity also adds a layer of difficulty to the transition process. Multiple researchers report that those with a high athletic identity had a harder time adjusting to their transition out of sport (Grove et al., 1997; Lavalley et al., 1997). This may be due to the loss of the supportive athletic environment which the student-athlete is transitioning from. Leonard and Schimmel (2016) report that a strong athletic identity can also hinder professional experience and make it more difficult to form relationships outside of sports. Similarly, Saxe et al. (2017) report that some student-athletes might have more difficulty moving to the next stage of their lives when their athletic identity is lost.

Losing support systems is another concern student-athletes face during this transition period too. Lavalley et al. (1997) argue the transition for student-athletes was more difficult when they felt they were losing a key support system or individual they could turn to during the transition period. This is especially detrimental to the student-athlete transition, as Rubin and Moses (2017) wrote that student-athletes are already isolated from the general population, their professors, advisors, and other athletic groups due to their athletic status. Taking the time to foster support systems and build other friend and social groups is imperative, as it gives student-athletes an opportunity to not

only build new support systems, but to strengthen their non-athlete identities (Carter-Francique et al., 2013). Support can come in many forms and stem from many diverse sources, including parents, friends, professors, academic advisors, counselors, and others (Jackman, 2022).

Swimmers undergo transition and whether it is difficult or easy, they eventually work through. The next question is what happens to these student-athletes post-graduation. There have been four intense years of focus on honing their swimming talents, but now that their suits are hung up, the question is what happens next? The literature discussed is the extremely limited findings of collegiate athletes and what they accomplish post-graduation.

### **Life Outcomes**

Student-athletes are often said to be successful upon their graduations, but few studies provide empirical data to support those claims. Gallup (2016) investigated former student-athletes, asking questions related to their well-being in five different areas: purpose, social, financial, community and physical. Not only did they find that 71% of former student-athletes had a full-time job and considered themselves to be thriving, but student-athletes reported higher levels of well-being in four of those five areas compared to their non-athletic counterparts (Gallup, 2016).

Gallup (2020) conducted another study in 2020 that asked similar questions and expanded upon their 2016 study. Again, student-athletes reported higher levels of well-being compared to their non-athlete counterparts, but they found that those who were

farther away from graduation had higher levels of happiness and well-being, compared to their recently graduated counterparts.

There were several new categories in Gallup's 2020 study. It was found that student-athletes were significantly more likely to earn advanced degrees, as well as have good jobs waiting for them upon graduation. A good job implied that the mission and vision of the company was good, the pay was adequate, and there was opportunity for learning new skills and growth. An overwhelming number of student-athletes also reported having a professor that cared about them, helped them to pursue their goals and dreams and made them excited about learning (Gallup, 2020).

One final important outcome from Gallup's 2020 study is the educational experience student-athletes reported. Student-athletes felt more academically challenged compared to their non-athlete peers, as well as holding a leadership position in a club or organization. One important note about both Gallup studies is that they were quantitative data that was collected from 2014-2019. While these are the first two studies of its kind, there is still plenty of room to explore the post-life outcomes of student-athletes.

Gallup (2016, 2020) was not the only study to point out some of the positive life outcomes of student-athletes post-graduation. Gayles and Hu (2009) report that student-athletes engaged receive significant long-term impacts. When compared to the average student, student-athletes report having higher levels of self-confidence and self-perfectionism (Hicks, 2018).

Other positive outcomes from collegiate athletics include learning how to consistently work hard, pay attention to details, and being a positive team player

(Machida et al., 2012). Chalfin et al. (2015) also reported finding student-athletes were able to handle pressure, had strong work ethic, were competitive and were mentally tough. Employers strive to hire student-athletes to their companies, often valuing athletic participation over membership in clubs, or part-time jobs (Chalfin et al., 2015). Despite all these positive attributes, student-athletes often do not think about what they are going to do with their careers and what they are passionate about until their senior's year or enter their post-graduate years (Hruby, 2021).

The long-term value of athletics has been studied and produced mixed findings. Long and Caudill (1991) found that compared to non-athletes, male student-athletes earned 4% more; the female student-athletes did not have a similar finding. Bastie (2015) and Henderson et al., (2006) report that student-athletes are often prized during the hiring process, however they often go into lower-paying careers like teaching. Over 50% of student-athlete graduates do not earn more than college graduates at large (Henderson et al., 2006).

Based on the literature review above, there appears to be a gap in data regarding what student-athletes are accomplishing upon graduation. There was no data on schooling received post-graduation and if student-athletes got jobs in their preferred fields or majors. Further, it appears that once their time in the pool is over, swimmers and all collegiate student-athletes drop off the radar of their institutions. With this gap in mind, Gayles and Hu (2009) call for more Division I institutions to engage with their student-athletes so that they can achieve their desired outcomes post-graduation.

The NCAA has also recognized the importance of learning more about the long-term benefits of playing Division I collegiate athletics. In 2020, the NCAA hosted a summit and led discussions about learning more about students who participate in deep learning activities and what benefits they could experience later in life. One of the main goals was to find ways that both academics and athletics could support student-athletes and help to prepare them for life post-sport.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

To guide this dissertation, two different theories have been identified. First is the transition model, as developed by Anderson et al. (2022). Over the years, this theory has evolved to not only look at the specific transitions of adults. It has also been used to understand different types of transitions. It identified and analyzed both the nature and the process of transitioning. It also pointed out different components of the transition and how people can cope with the transition. Within this theoretical framework are three distinct steps: the approach to the transition itself, coming up with coping resources using the 4S system, and taking charge of the situation. With the perspective from this theory of transition, this dissertation seeks to understand the transition collegiate swimmers go through at the end of their swimming careers. It could inform and guide this population to have a smoother and more successful transition, which will allow them to grow and thrive in their professional lives.

Schlossberg described a transition as “any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Anderson et al., 2022, p. 41). For collegiate swimmers, their transition out of the sport could happen in three ways



when 1) their 4 years of NCAA eligibility expires; 2) an unexpected injury/illness/medical disqualification forces the swimmer to quit the sport; or 3) an anticipated/ planned exodus from the sport (*NCAA extra year of eligibility* 2022; Parsons, 2013). There were several ways identified for those undergoing a transition to cope. These include making lifestyle changes, letting a part of their identity go, and finding new roles to transition into. It is important to understand the perspective, context, and impact of the transition that an individual or a population are undergoing (Anderson et al., 2022). From a college swimmer's perspective, some athletes might be excited and relieved to leave the sport, while others may feel devastated and had their swimming career taken away unexpectedly from them.

Looking at the context of the transition is another vital component. This takes external factors into place, such as location, gender, socioeconomic status, among others. Considering this, some items mentioned might have a different or indirect effect on the transition itself. Throughout this dissertation, there will be consideration as to how the retirement context influenced the collegiate swimmers and will shape many of the interview questions. The final part of the transition is the impact of the event. The impact considers how the transitioning event has changed the daily aspects of one's life. It is typically expected that if it is a massive change, more support and coping will need to take place for the transitioning individual. The impact also considers the change in roles, routines, relationships, and how the individual reacts to those changes.

An example of retirement transition is discussed by Anderson et al., (2022) and is pivotal to this dissertation. First, the person in transition is consumed by the changing

role. Eventually, they move past the role change and move into a new life. Based on this study, transitions can take anywhere from 6 months to 2 years. In the example of retirement, it was highlighted that there will be many trials and errors to find a new life and new activities, with the first few months being filled with both confusion and disruption.

Within this study, it was found that retirees had transitioned in a variety of different ways (Anderson et al., 2022). Some continued what they were doing in a modified form, others adventured out and tried something completely new and different. Others searched and found something completely strange and different, while some retreated and could never get past their transition. Some retirees forged ahead and formed their own path that combined each of the others but built a portfolio that bridged the gap from past to future. That portfolio consists of identity, relationships, and meaningful involvements.

Within the transition process, the individual must craft themselves a new identity. In the case of this dissertation, the swimmer must craft a new way to identify themselves. They also need to work on their relationships – this can be with their current/former teammates, or anyone who has immediate proximity to their lives. Finally, those who are transitioning need to find something meaningful to be involved in. This could be volunteering or picking up a part-time job. Regardless of what the involvement is, relationships can be built. It is good for one's mental health and allows the person to feel they are valuable or useless in some new context. This is only the first part of the transition itself. A 4S System was also identified, which describes factors influencing

how an individual copes with the transition. Understanding these factors through the 4S System can make a difference to help an individual during their transition.

The 4S System stands for situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2022). These factors can be assets or liabilities, depending on their interrelationships with one another and the context of which the transition is taking place. For some individuals, their appraisals of the situation are shaped by factors such as their worldview, their socioeconomic status, their gender, and their race. Each person undergoing the transition is going to have a range of factors impacting them in a variety of separate ways. The 4S System is a way to look at the liabilities versus appraisals within the transition itself.

The first S is the situation (Anderson et al., 2022). To consider the situation looks at the trigger and timing of the transition, what aspects of the transition is the person capable of controlling, how the role is changing, the previous experience with a transition that is similar, how long the transition takes, and the amount of stress it brings. This S allows the person undergoing the transition to realize that every individual going through the transition process is going to have a different reaction to each of the previously mentioned factors. No two transitions are identical, and each person undergoing a transition will have a different situation to work through. How those individuals work through this transition involves the Self, the second S in this framework.

The Self looks at the various characteristics that the person undergoing the transition has (Anderson et al., 2022). These characteristics help the person to undergo the transition itself and can impact how the person moves through the transition. Factors include socioeconomic status, gender and sexual orientation, age, and what stage of life

they are in, ethnicity, life outlook, ego development, commitment, values, spirituality, and resilience. Each person is a unique individual with extremely different characteristics, personal history, and life trajectory. How these characteristics affect the transition will vary from individual to individual.

Each of these factors can play into the transition in a variety of ways. For example, college swimmers with a more positive outlook on life might be looking forward to the transition into a new life, while others might be more pessimistic and dreading the impending role change. Considering how different characteristics of a person's Self play a role in the transition could help the individual better locate corresponding support systems to cope with the transition. The third S therefore stands for the Support which can be built in anticipation of what the Self needs during the transition process (Anderson et al., 2022).

Support can come in a variety of ways for the individual in transition. While some support can come from a counseling aspect, it is more likely that most support is from proximate relationships, such as family, friends, community organizations, and institutions (Anderson et al., 2022). These relationships can be strengthened during that time – such as getting closer to family or a different group of friends outside of the sport of swimming. Alternatively, relationships might be lost, such as no longer seeing teammates during practice sessions. Support usually comes in three different ways according to Kahn and Antonucci (1980): these are affect, aid and affirmation. Affect is the expressions of feelings, affirmation is the confirmation of something one has done, while aid is the exchange of items—money, information, and what the person transitioning

might need. To conclude, the final aspect of the 4S system comes into play to help the collegiate swimmer complete the transition.

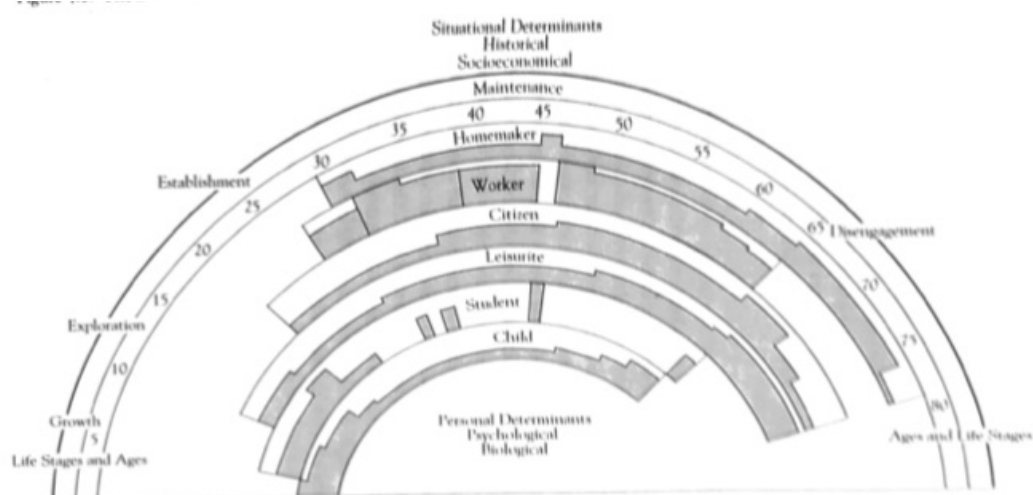
The final element to the 4S system is Strategies. Anderson et al. (2022) defined the strategy as being based on the unique individual and using all the aspects of the self, the situation, and their support systems to find ways to cope. Strategies for coping can vary. Some examples identified are stress-relieving activities, humor, mindfulness, therapy, networking within the community, and becoming more involved in religion. In the case of collegiate swimmers, they must find ways to cope with their transition, become more integrated in non-sport networks and complete their exit from collegiate swimming.

While this theory of transition can help us gain a perspective to understand the factors influencing a college swimmer's transition to post-retirement life, this dissertation is also interested in understanding how to help college swimmer develop a career outside of the sport post-retirement. This dissertation also looked at the process of career development from Super's theory of career development.

The second theory to guide this dissertation is the life-span life-space approach to career theory as introduced by Super, Savickas, and Super (Brown & Brooks, 1996). This theory takes a two-fold approach to career development and looks at psychology and social theory to build the life-career rainbow. This rainbow takes both times, meaning the different stages of life and space, the actual life the person is living into consideration. The rainbow is used as a coordinate base to predict and project what a person's career might look like. These concepts will both be expanded upon below.

**Figure 1**

*The Life-Career Rainbow: Six Life Roles in Schematic Life Space*



*Note:* Taken from *The Life-Span, Life-Space Approach to Careers* p.127

When the life space is taken into consideration, it looks at the entire life a person is living (Brown & Brooks, 1996). All their roles are considered. Work is just one role in an individual's life, and a career is going to hold different meanings to each person. Some might hold their career identity at the forefront of their lives, while others will only consider their career as a small fraction of their lives, with their focus being on other roles. This concept is called the life structure, with the core roles at the forefront of an individual's personality. These different roles also interact throughout a person's life. Careers are affected by different roles and different transitions throughout their lives. Some of these transitions come about as life redesigns, where a person's life might undergo extensive change. This is especially true for young adults, as they undergo transitions to prepare them to enter the adult world.

Life-span is looking at the choices an individual can make and how the career adapts over the individual's life (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Over time, people overcome challenges, change, grow and move through different phases in their lives. Those phases are represented in the lifespan rainbow as Growth during childhood, Exploration during the teen years, Establishment as a young adult, and Disengagement during old age. Tasks related to the career happen during these phases to ensure that the individual is going to be engaging in a productive work life. Each of the phases will be explained more below.

The Growth phase, which occurs from age 4-14, sees four major tasks accomplished (Brown & Brooks, 1996). First is becoming concerned and conscious of the future, followed by taking more control over one's life. The final two tasks are convincing themselves to achieve in school and forming positive work habits. During this phase, confidence blossoms and the child learns to work more with others in the environment and slowly begins to turn their attention toward caring about their future endeavors. This phase leads into the Exploration Phase.

The Exploration phase takes place from ages 14-24. It is during this period that an actual career is solidified and chosen (Brown & Brooks, 1996). As its name suggests, this phase is where different career choices and dreams come into play, with the individual exploring many different options and getting the necessary training and skills. It is during this phase that career adaptability arises and the focus on work and societal expectations really becomes apparent. Following this phase is establishment.

The Establishment phase is most of adulthood and involves the person becoming secure and growing their career (Brown & Brooks, 1996). The person assimilates to the

career and does whatever it takes to maintain their job, while still advancing their careers and having positive work habits. Maintenance ties in closely to this phase, as the individual decides to stay in their career or go in a different direction. This phase focuses on the person just maintaining their career and keeping their skills up to par.

The final phase is the Disengagement phase, which involves retirement and the changing of the guard within the career itself (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Duties are passed on and the individual is heading toward retirement. There are many transitions that happen throughout the various phases, and they are all very fluid. There is no correct way to move through each of them, and different phases can be restarted due to career changes, and other life events. The life-span looks at the process which the individual moves through. Many choices must be made, and the person's life, traits, characteristics, and a variety of other factors all play in the career choices that are made.

There is a final piece to this theoretical framework, which looks at the model through the lens of the self (Brown & Brooks, 1996). This self considers the vocational identity and the occupational self-concepts. Vocational identity refers to how the person understands themselves. It considers the goals, dreams, interests, and talents. With this in mind, a person can make a conscious decision to pursue specific careers, based on their values, goals and dreams. This goes together with the occupational self-concept. This is where people have a subjective idea of themselves and come to terms with their ideas and experiences. This portion of the theory is when the person understands their uniqueness, their strengths, and the options they have when it comes to their career.



Finally, there is the idea of the systems (Brown & Brooks, 1996). The systems are all the different roles, situations, and relationships, and how they affect the career decision and the individual itself. Everyone is going to have different systems, and those are all going to play various levels of importance on career choices. This final piece drives home the importance of all the variables involved. There is not going to be a direct and easy path to a career and life will cause the career path to veer and be fluid. Overall, this theory considers all the different pieces in one's life and how it plays into the career choice. It is truly a chaotic path and while one will find their way and have a career, there is no telling what the end path will look like.

Both theories look at two distinct aspects that collegiate swimmers are undergoing. First, collegiate swimmers must consider preparing themselves for future careers, as it is highly improbable to have a professional swimming career. The framework of transition (Anderson et al., 2022) demonstrated that swimmers need to understand that they will be facing a massive period of change. They need to realize that they will be leaving behind a life and a lifestyle that they have known and lived for many years. With the end of their swimming career, they are now expected to evolve from their collegiate swimmer identities and to find new paths while coping through their transition.

Finally, the life-span life-space theory (Brown & Brooks, 1996) considers how unpredictable life can be and how many different components influence the swimmer's career choice. Obtaining a career is not a linear process, but it is fluid and can lead to many different options. Swimmers undergoing their retirement process are in the exploration phase of their career, where they are considering their hopes, dreams, and

moving toward getting the necessary training for success. While the swimmer's priorities can change, as well as their interests, so can their roles and priorities. Careers are an ever-evolving process and until the person has gone through all the phases, who knows where they will end up.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Two introduced the literature surrounding student-athletes. It gave a historical look into the sport of swimming and outlined the growth from the start of sport to the current world of NCAA collegiate sports. Expectations of collegiate athletes were outlined, as well as characteristics and traits gained from playing collegiate sport.

Athletic identity was then addressed along with the psychological impacts of playing collegiate sports. Attention was then turned to the career development of both college student and student-athletes, before turning to the transition process that all student-athletes must undergo. To conclude data on the life outcomes of student-athletes was discussed followed by the theoretical frameworks which drove this dissertation.

Ultimately, this literature review was a general overview of countless studies done on all aspects of student-athletes, not just collegiate swimmers.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the career development of former NCAA swimmers for careers while elucidating the life-post sport experiences of former NCAA swimmers who are at least five years post-graduation. The population of collegiate swimmers is underrepresented among current research on college sports. It seeks to close the gap not only on the career preparation for athletes in swimming but also enrich the literature on the post-sports careers for collegiate athletes that competed in non-revenue sports. To guide this dissertation, a basic qualitative study has been chosen, as I seek to understand the life trajectory of each individual collegiate swimmer's post-graduation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) wrote that qualitative research allows the “individual to construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (p. 24). I gained more in-depth knowledge by conducting individual interviews. I gained a better understanding of the unique experiences collegiate swimmers have during their transition from sport through their post-retirement and post-lives.

The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the phenomenon that is occurring and allow the researcher to understand how those experiencing the phenomenon make sense of both their lives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Simply put, data is collected and analyzed to understand how people make sense of the different meanings throughout their lives. For this dissertation, the basic qualitative research approach was used to understand the career preparation of former NCAA swimmers and what the career experiences of these individuals are post-graduation.

## **Participants**

In a qualitative study, non-representative samples are often used. In qualitative research, using a purposeful sample is often utilized. This method is used when a researcher selects a small sample size and looks for specific cases to study in-depth (Patton, 1990). Several types of purposeful sampling exist, and for this dissertation, I employed criterion sampling. This type of sampling entails interviewing participants that have met a pre-determined set of criteria (Patton, 1990). Having set a strict criteria, this allowed me to focus on interviewing a select group of former collegiate swimmers, while still getting an in-depth perspective of their experiences.

The swimming community is small and tight-knit. Everyone within the swimming community is connected and takes pride in their participation in the sport. Bonds are formed and strong swimming identities are created over extended periods, from childhood participation in local swim clubs through high school to collegiate sports. Many of these bonds and identities transcend time, location, and age. It is extremely common to step onto a pool deck, and somehow have a connection with a coach or swimmer although the connection might not be direct.

The criteria for selection are retired collegiate swimmers who have graduated college for five years (2018). Weick (1995) suggested that retrospective sensemaking is important when it comes to the reflection and recollection of past events. The individual must have time to reflect back on a specific moment, which will allow them to make the past clear, while gaining insight, clarity and rationality. With this in mind, the minimum selected time from graduation was five years so that the swimmers have had time to

reflect on their experiences, while still keeping a short period of time so the memory is somewhat fresh and rich with detail.

To participate in this study, individuals were student-athletes that used any of their four years of their eligibility and are currently retired from their NCAA swimming career for a minimum of five years. In total, there were 17 participants who were Men or Women that competed at Divisions I, II or III. Six individuals from Division I were represented, with three males, two females and one non-binary individual. Division II was represented by three women and two men. Division III was represented by four females and two males. Both male and female former student-athletes were considered for this study. The goal was to solicit retired student-athletes who have retired for a variety of years and have competed in the NCAA Divisions I, II, and III. This was accomplished as the participants ranged from 24-60+ and were evenly distributed across divisions.

To solicit participants, a social media post and a solicitation video were posted on the social media pages of the American Swimming Coaches Association (ASCA) which include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. Additionally, an email containing the social media artwork with the study information was sent (Appendix B). The solicitation to participate was sent to over 26,000 individuals on the ASCA mailing list and reached approximately 50,000 followers on social media. To ensure that the responses included former collegiate swimmers in all professions, it was determined that no more than one-third of the respondents can be currently employed full-time as swim coaches. During the

selection process, among the 17 respondents, only 5 swim coaches applied to be a part of the study.

For compensation, if a participant completed the interview process entirely, they chose to either receive a coupon for one ASCA certification course of their choice or to be entered for a \$100 Amazon gift card. To be selected for the study, all 17 participants filled out the pre-requisite questionnaire. The pre-requisite questionnaire gathered basic demographic information, allowed the participant to select a pseudonym, and ensured that the individual competed at a Division I, II or III institution and graduated in or before 2018. (Appendix D). Only one individual was turned away from the study. After checking his pre-questionnaire, I determined his year of graduation was fewer than five years (2020), thus making him ineligible.

### **Data Collection**

A pilot study kicked off the data collection process. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted using the questionnaire to ensure questions collected the necessary data. The first interview took one hour and the second took forty minutes. No changes or additions were made to the questionnaires; therefore, the interviews were included in the final data collection.

After the completion of the pre-screening, a one-hour semi-structured interview was scheduled and conducted. The final questionnaire was composed of nine questions. All participants were asked the same questions from the questionnaire, with appropriate follow ups, prompts and other conversation based on the direction of the interview (Appendix E).

These interview questions delved into what the former collegiate swimmer is currently doing professionally and asked about their career journey after graduation. The questions then turned toward their swimming identity to understand how deeply entrenched swimming was part of their lives. Then, the questions asked about the career preparation process, including their interaction with on-campus resources and support they received during their career preparation journey. Questions were then asked about policies and procedures the NCAA should implement. I then asked if there was anything these swimmers would have done differently and what advice they had to readers of this study. The final question was completely open-ended to allow the participant to address anything they felt relevant and gave them the opportunity to discuss anything I might not have thought to address.

The semi-structured interview format allowed me the flexibility to address any newly presented ideas or themes with follow-up questions, and in any order necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This flexibility was useful during the interviews, as I was able to ask participants more about their experiences and get them to expand on some of their stories, trials, and tribulations. It is important to note that with semi-structured interviews, I had the flexibility to adapt the conversation according to the participants' responses and was able to follow up on different themes or ideas that presented themselves.

Each interview lasted on average around 40 minutes. The longest interview lasted just over an hour, while the shortest lasted around 20 minutes. To ensure I could reach swimmers across the nation, I conducted the interviews synchronously over Teams. Each

interview was recorded, and I took field notes both during and after the interviews were completed. I used the recordings during the transcription process and was able to add additional notes when applicable. By conducting the interviews in an online format, this allowed me to increase the geographic locations covered and allowed easy recording and transcription (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) suggested, it is important to understand and keep in mind that the confidentiality of interview data could be at risk. To minimize the risk of breaching confidentiality, all interviews are kept on a password-protected MacBook Pro that only the researcher has access to and stored in a OneDrive folder as per Ohio University guidelines. Some of the interviewees have pseudonyms. Of those who participated in the study, only six individuals chose to use pseudonyms. As per Ohio University regulations, the data will be stored for two years after the data collection before it is destroyed.

During and after each interview, I took time to immediately sit down, and complete field notes written in a narrative format. These notes were based on the observations I made during each interview. When it came to note taking, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend that they be completed as soon as possible after each interview. This step allowed me to remember and record specific pieces from the interview that stood out, such as keywords, their first and last remarks, and any mental playbacks that were relevant.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also recommended that when creating field notes it is imperative that the researcher sits down immediately and completes highly descriptive



and detailed notes without being distracted. Reflection is also a key piece to the field notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Within the notes, I wrote down feelings I saw, reactions to questions, and how people interpreted some of the questions in much different manners than others. The original goal of the field notes was to take note of my feelings, hunches, reactions, and interpretations. Each of the field notes contained descriptions of the person, any quotes that stood out during the interview, and any detailed comments I needed to take extra note of.

When it came to the construction of the interview questions, I first looked at my interview questions through the lens of the transition theory (Anderson et al., 2022). I made sure to ask questions that were rooted back to the theory's 4S System – the situation, the self, support, and the strategies. There are questions focused on these concepts in the life-post sport and career exploration sections. With the 4S system in mind, I was also able to develop probes, which helped me to understand the entire situation a participant was detailing.

The secondary theory which guided the interview was the life-span life-space theory as introduced by Super, Savickas and Super (1996). This theory looked at career development through the lens of the many distinct aspects in a person's life that lend a hand in the career development process. Different roles, identities, and parts of one's life will have various impacts on the career development process. Questions were formulated to learn more about how the collegiate swimming identity impacted the former swimmers and about how different priorities influenced them.

## **Data Analysis**

Following the lead of Saldaña (2021), a combination of process coding and in vivo coding was used during the first cycle coding process. Process coding was when I identified gerunds, which are -ing action words. There were eight overarching categories of gerunds that were identified. Those categories were explaining jobs, impacting others, receiving support, swimming identity, swimming impact, transitioning to career, transitioning to life-post sport and varying perceptions of support. Once those codes were identified, multiple other sub-codes were identified as the different actions they represented.

Process coding is useful for understanding routines, rituals, rhythms, and changing actions throughout the data (Saldaña, 2021). For this study, the retired swimmers discussed the actions that were taken during their career preparation throughout the collegiate swimming experiences, and the actions taken upon their graduations for their careers. For this coding process, process coding was used, but, in some cases, the in vivo coding process was used.

In vivo coding, as introduced by Saldaña (2021), the literal wording is analyzed, and a word or a short phrase from the actual language from the transcript is identified. Each line is analyzed, and the literal meaning is taken. Saldaña (2021) iterated that in vivo coding is used in studies that make the voice of the participant a priority and allows the meanings to be captured during the coding process. There is much emphasis on capturing the participants' meanings and experiences. This coding suits the purpose of this dissertation as I was trying to capture the lived experiences of an under-researched

population. The study sought to give the former collegiate swimming community a voice and allowed the reader to understand their lived experiences.

Each of the codes identified can be linked back to either one of the two theoretical lenses or both. Explaining jobs, swimming identity, transitioning to careers and transitioning to life-post related back to the career building process as represented in the life-span, life-space theory (Brown & Brooks, 1996). These codes helped guide me to understand more of the Establishment, Growth, and Maintenance phases the swimmers were undergoing with their career development processes. These also shed light on the different roles and responsibilities they were navigating during their career preparation and transitioning process.

From the perspective of Schlossberg's 4S System, the codes of receiving support, transitioning to careers, transitioning to life post-sport, receiving support, varying perceptions of support all tied into the 4S system. The codes allowed me to understand the transition process from a holistic perspective and understand how the Situation shaped the transition, more about the Self and their traits, the Support they received and the Strategies they employed throughout their transitions.

After completing first cycle coding, I turned to second cycle coding. In this process, second cycle coding allowed for synthesizing of the data I had collected from the process coding and in vivo coding in the first cycle. For this step, pattern coding was used. Pattern coding is a way to group the data into themes that are condensed (Saldaña, 2021). Specifically, pattern coding is used to condense large amounts of data into smaller groups, to look for causes and explanations that are present in the data, and to examine

social networks and relationships. This secondary process was used to identify the most important themes that have presented themselves throughout the data. Pattern coding was the last step in the analysis process and allowed me to report the overarching themes collected during the interview process.

In the pattern coding process, I found four main patterns. The first pattern was the concept of forging a unique path towards career development. Many codes fell under this umbrella, but this self-reliance was a major concept that emerged in many of the participants. The second theme was the concept of support, which many of the participants received in different ways. The third pattern that presented itself during analysis was the concept of active and meaningful roles. These roles were a key part helping the swimmers to find a new identity while having a positive contribution on others around them. Finally, the last pattern that emerged was the concept of a strong swimming identity. Swimming is a sport these participants retired from, but it was still an integral part of their lives. I now turn to discuss how I tackled trustworthiness during the analysis process.

### **Trustworthiness**

As a researcher, it is critical to produce data that is valid, reliable, and knowledgeable. Having trustworthy data is imperative as the data collected can have a far-reaching and long-lasting impact (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, member-checks, institutional checking, and reflexivity were employed. Member-checking is the process where respondents have the chance to review the data and ensure that interpretations are accurate and truthful (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). I had multiple participants read over some of their selected quotes. This practice ensured I captured their statements accurately and that I accurately represented them. By completing this step, I gave myself time to complete edits and corrected any misunderstandings. It was paramount to this study to ensure that the data collected was representative of the participants' experience.

The second strategy I used to ensure trustworthiness is the concept of institutional checking on research (Stahl & King, 2020). This was when someone in a supervisory role oversaw the entire data collection process and helped me to better shape my researching skills to allow a better understanding of the interpretations from the data. For this dissertation, I had my chair, Pete Mather, review the data multiple times during the analysis process. To ensure proper oversight, I met with him every two weeks to discuss this dissertation to ensure I captured the accurate themes and elements. Throughout this process, Dr. Mather was able to share his wisdom and insight, while guiding me throughout this process.

The final method to ensure trustworthiness is the concept of reflexivity. The researcher would reflect on one's own potential bias, assumptions, and experiences related to the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A reflexive statement was written so that the readers can understand how I interpreted the data, and how the process may have influenced the researcher to conduct this dissertation.

### **Reflexive Statement**

As a former division I swimmer employed in the swim coaching education field, I have been involved in the swimming community for over 20 years. I have been a

swimmer, a coach, and an administrator for the sport of swimming, and swimming has played a significant role in my life. Personally, I had the experience of a collegiate swimmer who struggled with career preparation and finding a full-time job after graduation. The post sports transition took a long time for me. I spent six additional years after my retirement from swimming going to school to find where my passions truly lie and for more career preparation. I personally did not feel that I was adequately prepared for life post-sport in college, as my focus was on staying academically and athletically eligible to compete as a division I collegiate swimmer. I also have first-hand experiences witnessing teammates, friends, and others in collegiate swimming communities struggle to navigate their lives post-sport.

This study addressed the experience of those collegiate swimmers who have struggled to find a post-sports professional pursuit, as well as those who have balanced college sports and career training and preparation during the college years. My own personal experience might also be more limited to Division I swimmers who are expected to be highly committed to the competition and would spend college years more focused on training and practices than Division II and III swimmers. There have always been college swimmers who rely on college swimming scholarships to obtain the college education for their future career. Knowing that I have been in the position, I made sure to keep an open mind during interviews to actively listen to each participants' experience.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations when it comes to the construction of this study. One of the criteria for the study was to seek former collegiate swimmers from Divisions I, II

and III who have been graduated for a minimum of five years. The call to participants was sent to swim coaches around the world, and therefore could account for a higher number of respondents. To combat this limitation, only one-third of respondents can be employed in the swim coaching profession to ensure that a large scope of experience is captured.

Another limitation is that COVID-19 has completely changed the scope of what former collegiate athletes would look like in the future. Many swimmers chose to retire early due to COVID. Additionally, COVID changed the number of years student-athletes were eligible to complete their sport. All student athletes from the 2020-2021 cohort received an extra season to complete their four years, meaning they had six years to exhaust their four years of competition (NCAA extra year of eligibility, NCSA College Recruiting, 2022). Normally, the clock is five years to complete four seasons. With this change, student-athletes in the affected cohort now have more time to get additional degrees, education, internships, and experiences.

The final limitation identified is the introduction of the NCAA's Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) policy. As of 2022, athletes can receive compensation for their NIL (What is nil? NCAA rule explained. NCSA College Recruiting, 2023). This allows athletes to profit during their collegiate years. Since this policy was only introduced in 2022, it is impossible to tell what long-lasting effects this policy will have, especially on career development and post-sport life outcomes. This is especially true when it comes to career development, the athletic identity and the transition that these athletes must undergo at the end of the collegiate swimming careers. While swimmers are unlikely to

have the same success with NIL as their peers in revenue sports, this could change the scope for future careers, and future studies on student-athletes.

### **Delimitations**

There was one delimitation that have been identified for this study. This dissertation was only seeking the experiences of former collegiate swimmers who have been graduated for a minimum of five years. Other sports have been excluded as swimming is an already under-researched sport. To bind this study, the decision was made to focus on only one sport, swimming, to narrow the focus and to capture the experience of this population adequately. Further, I swam and competed collegiately as a swimmer and have firsthand experience of career development and the life post-sport process, therefore my choice to focus on this sport.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three discussed the methods to be used to conduct this study. A basic qualitative method was chosen, with the intention to collect data via semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed in the first cycle via process coding and in vivo coding, while the second cycle coding will be pattern coding. To ensure that the study is both credible and trustworthy, I conducted member-checks, institutional checking, and reflexivity. To conclude this chapter, both the limitations and delimitations were discussed. Chapter Four will discuss the findings of this study, with chapter five concluding with discussion and ideas for future research.



## Chapter 4: Findings

In Chapter 4, I present the findings from the seventeen semi-structured interviews that were conducted. To begin this chapter, I give a brief overview of the participants. I briefly discuss the participants' demographics and cover basic information that is relevant to this study. Some of this information was collected in the pre-questionnaire surveys, which helped to determine if each individual was eligible for the study. In the summary below, I use the chosen pseudonym of each participant. To enable the reader to understand the participants, a summary of their profile is laid out below.

After describing the individual participants, I turn to a cross-case analysis. Quotes and insights from each of the participants have been laid out in four different themes that emerged during the analysis process. In the interview process, I asked participants a variety of questions about their career preparation, their collegiate swimming experiences, and their post-sport life endeavors. The interviews were constructed around the following research questions:

Q1: How do former swimmers at NCAA Divisions I, II and III institutions describe their career experiences related to career preparation?

Q2: What are the life post-sport career outcomes of former swimmers who competed in NCAA Division I, II and III?

### Participants

Seventeen individuals completed both the pre-questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The average length of time was 40 minutes per interview, with the longest lasting just under an hour and the shortest lasting 20 minutes. In order to

participate in this interview, the individual had to compete for a Division I, II or III institution, had to have used some of the four years of NCAA eligibility and must have graduated at least five years prior to the interview (2018). Only one person who expressed interest and completed the pre-questionnaire was declined from participating in this study, as he had graduated in 2020.

The call for participants went out to over 50,000 individuals. To ensure diversity of careers and to not focus solely on swim coaches and the sport of swimming, only five of the participants were full-time swim coaches. This was a limitation of the study, so that as many different careers and experiences could be analyzed. Many other careers were represented including doctors, nurses, military officers and administrators.

### **Meet the Participants**

The seventeen participants came from different backgrounds, and all of them swam at the collegiate level. The interviewees ranged from 24-60+ in age, and their average length of involvement in the sport of swimming was 30 years. Of the seventeen participants, all were white men and women, except one male who was Asian, and one male who was Hispanic.

Despite not being a full-time swim coach, many of the participants were still involved with the sport of swimming. This was through their professional careers, part-time coaching jobs or even still competing in the sport of swimming. In total, there were six Division I athletes represented, with three men, two women, and one non-binary individual. Division II athletes were represented by three women and two men, while Division III was represented by four women and two men.

A variety of experiences was recorded, with a diverse number of graduation dates being represented. The oldest participant had graduated in 1981, while the newest graduate was from 2018. There was a range of participants who graduated in the 1980s, 2000s, and 2010s, giving a wide scope of experiences. Of the 17 participants, only two individuals did not complete all four years of their NCAA eligibility, with both of those participants competing at the Division I level. Seven of the participants did pursue further degrees after they graduated from college, while the other ten did not.

It is important to note the privilege this group of participants had. All of them were extremely fortunate to not only swim collegiately, but to enjoy the benefits of being a student-athlete. Some of the opportunities that they could have access to include scholarships, athletic and medical facilities strictly for student-athletes, travelling experiences, networking, academic support, priority class registration, and many others. A full introduction of participants is included below along with participants in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1**

*Participant Distribution by NCAA Division*

Number	Division I	Division II	Division III
Men	3	2	2
Women	2	3	4
Non-binary	1		
Total	6	5	6

**Table 2***Participant Distribution by Continued Swimming Involvement*

Professional Swim	Still Involved in	Not Involved in
Coach/Aquatics Profession	Swimming Part-Time	Swimming
5	9	3

***Coach Mike***

Coach Mike is a white male in the 55-59 age group. He swam at Oakland University, a Division II school and both graduated and exhausted his eligibility in 1989. He graduated with a bachelor's in marketing and is currently a business owner/ swim coach. Coach Mike did not obtain further education after graduation and has been involved in the sport of swimming for 45 years.

***SwimForeverFast***

SwimForeverFast is a white non-binary individual in the 30-35 age group. SwimForeverFast swam at University of Georgia, a Division I institution, and did not exhaust all of their NCAA eligibility, but retired from swimming in 2014. They graduated with a bachelor's in exercise science and continued to get a master's in exercise science. Currently SwimForeverFast is a swim coach/ business owner. They have been involved in the sport of swimming for approximately 30 years.

***Swim Coach***

Swim Coach is a white female in the 30-35 age group. She attended Ohio University, a Division I institution and both graduated and exhausted her eligibility in 2016. She graduated with a degree in exercise science and did not obtain further

schooling. Her current role is a swim coach. Swim Coach has been involved in the sport of swimming for 23 years.

***Russell***

Russell is an Asian male in the 41-45 age group. He attended the University of Virginia, a Division I institution. He both graduated and retired from swimming in 2001, but did not exhaust all of his swimming eligibility. Russell graduated with an aerospace engineering major and did not get further education. He currently works in coaching education and evaluating sport performance. Russell has been involved in the sport of swimming for around 35 years.

***Colleen***

Colleen is a white female in the 30-35 age group. She graduated from the Division III College of Wooster in 2015 and retired from swimming the same year. She graduated with a major in neuroscience and went on to pursue a Doctorate of Chiropractic. She is currently a practicing Chiropractor. Colleen was involved in the sport of swimming for 15 years.

***Dan***

Dan is a male in the 41-45 age group. He attended the University of Rhode Island and graduated in 2000 with a degree in communication/theater. He exhausted his eligibility at this Division I institution and did not obtain any further schooling. He currently is the Director of a non-profit organization and has been involved in the sport of

swimming for 38 years.

***Veronica***

Veronica is a white female in the 24-29 age group. She attended Wayne State University, a Division II institution and retired from swimming in 2016 after exhausting her eligibility. She graduated in 2017 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. She is currently an apprenticeship coordinator and did not obtain additional schooling after graduation. Veronica was involved in the sport of swimming for 17 years.

***Sarah***

Sarah is a white female in the 24-29 age group. She attended Luther College, a Division III institution and graduated and retired from swimming in 2018. She graduated with a degree in accounting and mathematics and is currently an accounts payable manager. She did not obtain further education upon graduation. At this point, Sarah has been involved with the sport of swimming for 20 years.

***Hans***

Hans is a white male in the 30-35 age group. He attended George Mason University, a Division I institution. He graduated in 2012 and retired from swimming in 2011, after exhausting all his NCAA eligibility. Hans is currently a site coordinator for a swim team and did not obtain any additional schooling after graduation. Hans has been involved in the sport of swimming for 29 years.

***Anne***

Anne is a white female in the 24-29 age group. She graduated from Hiram College with a degree in nursing with a minor in biomedical humanities. Upon graduation and retirement from this Division III institution in 2016, she went on to obtain further schooling, graduating with a master's in nursing education. She is currently a nursing faculty member. Anne has been involved in the sport of swimming for 23 years.

***Donna***

Donna is a white female in the 55-59 age group. She attended Sweet Briar College a Division III institution. She graduated with a degree in international studies and Spanish and retired from swimming in 1989 after exhausting all of her eligibility. She went on to get a teacher certification and started working toward a masters in sports administration. Currently, Donna works as an Aquatics Director and has been involved in the sport of swimming for 45 years.

***Susan***

Susan is a white female in the 60+ age group. She attended San Francisco State University, where she graduated in 1981 with a degree in physical education with a teaching credential. She retired from swimming in 1980, exhausting all of her eligibility at this Division II institution. Susan did obtain further schooling, getting both a MA in Kinesiology and a Ph.D. in Education. She is currently a retired professor and a master's swim coach. Susan has been involved in the sport of swimming for over 50 years and hopes to stay involved even longer.

***Sydney***

Sydney is a white female in the 24-29 age group, who graduated from Adams State University in 2018. She obtained a degree in nursing and retired from this Division II institution after exhausting all of her eligibility. Sydney is currently a registered nurse and did not obtain further schooling after her graduation. She has been involved in the sport of swimming for 23 years.

***Andie***

Andie is a white female in the 41-45 age group. She attended Villanova University and graduated and retired from this Division I institution in 2004. She exhausted all of her eligibility and graduated with a liberal art degree with a concentration in elementary education. She is currently a first-grade teacher. Andie has been involved in the sport of swimming for 20 years and currently is competing as a master's swimmer.

***Eduardo***

Eduardo is a Hispanic male in the 24-29 age group. He attended Limestone College, a Division II institution, and graduated in 2017 with degrees in business management, marketing and sport management. He retired from swimming in 2018 while he worked on obtaining a master's degree in business administration. Eduardo is currently a police officer. He was involved with the sport of swimming for 22 years.

***Chris***

Chris is a white male in the 30-35 age group. He attended the US Coast Guard Academy and both graduated and retired from swimming in 2010. The Coast Guard



Academy is a Division III institution, and he graduated with a degree in government.

Chris is currently a military officer and obtained a master's degree in healthcare. Chris is still involved with swimming and has been around the sport for 25 years.

### ***Thomas***

Thomas is a white male in the 36-40 age group. He attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, which is a Division III institution. He retired from swimming after exhausting all his eligibility and graduated with degrees in electronic media, arts and communications and business management in 2009. Thomas is currently the Director of Membership for a non-profit organization and did not pursue further education. He has been involved with the sport for 30 years.

### **Cross-Case Analysis and Findings**

When it came to answering the research questions, I used process coding and pattern coding to go through each of the participants interviews. The first two themes are related to Research Question 1: How do former swimmers at NCAA Divisions I, II and III institutions describe their career experiences related to career preparation? During the analysis process, two main themes arose. The first theme was how each unique participant had their own career preparation journey. I coded this theme as Trailblazing/ Forging Their Own Path. No two interviewees had the same career preparation process, and each person had to figure out their own path to a career. It became apparent that many used on-campus resources to assist in this process. In addition, many obtained a part-time job, internship or shadowing, and everyone had to navigate the perils of career preparation in their own way.

The second theme that arose was the various support systems that the swimmers leaned on during both their transition and career preparation process. This support came from a variety of different avenues, including family, friends, coaches and the swimming community as a whole. Again, no two interviewees had the same support systems, but those who did discuss them felt extremely fortunate and grateful for them.

Again, the initial two themes that were identified relate back to Research Question I. The theme of finding their own path in terms of career development answered how the former collegiate swimmers tackled their career development. This process was extensive, and continued not only during their collegiate years, but throughout the time in post-graduation. This theme can also relate back to the life-span life-space theory and how careers are constantly changing based on what point in life an individual finds themselves.

The second theme then identifies the support that the swimmers received, not only during the career preparation process, but throughout their entire transition. Support was critical for those who reported it, both during their career preparation and lives post-sport. This theme of support can also be tied back to Schlossberg's theory of transition, which identifies different components that those undergoing transition must navigate. The second two themes identified tie back to the second research question, which looks more into the lives of the swimmers in their post-collegiate swimming days.

The second research question is: What are the life post-sport career outcomes of former swimmers who competed in NCAA Division I, II and III? Another two themes were identified to answer this question. The third theme that arose during analysis was

the concept of active jobs, and how those jobs affected the people around them. Of the seventeen participants, fourteen reported they held an active job either now or at some point in their career path that allowed them to have a measurable daily impact on those around them. Many of the participants spoke passionately about their careers and talked at length about how much they loved their roles. Data shows many of the swimmers were passionate about their careers, and many of them wanted a whole new identity or community post-college swimming.

To conclude answering research question 2, the final theme that arose was how deeply entrenched the swimming identity was for many of the swimmers' and how swimming still was an integral part of their lives today. Many report how they struggled through the transition process as they moved on to their full-time careers. Many found ways to stay involved in the sport continuing to do so even today.

Each theme and the data will be further reported below. See Table 3 for all reported themes. To begin, I now turn to further analysis of the first theme, where participants discussed their trailblazing efforts and how they shaped their own unique paths to career preparation.

**Table 3**

*Themes Identified*

Research Q1	Research Q2
Trailblazing/ Forging Own Path	Active and Meaningful Jobs
Support	Swimming Identity

### **Trailblazing/ Forging Unique Career Paths**

As discussed, the first theme to arise during the analysis process was the concept of the swimmers' forging their own path/ trailblazing their own careers. During the career preparation process, there were many ways that the swimmers' prepared for their life post-sport. Many viewed their career preparation as a journey that continued beyond their school years and as something that is constantly changing, growing, evolving and still in process even to today.

Many participants mentioned that they navigated their career preparation on their own initiatives. Colleen, a Division III swimmer, discusses how she knew she wanted to be in the medical field early on. Her path to getting a career was very direct, as she knew exactly what she wanted to do. She shared, "Well, I always knew that I wanted to help people, I wanted to be somewhere in the medical field." She continued how she elected to skip her career center, saying, "They had the Career Center at our school. But I honestly did a lot more of just like, on my own, like, I've always been really kind of just like, I go do it myself kind of thing."

SwimForeverFast echoed Colleen's independent nature. Currently, SwimForeverFast owns a successful coaching business in the swimming industry. They discussed with pride how they made their own unique career path as there are very few businesses that serve in the same realm of providing coaching services and educational opportunities. They said:

I think something for me that's unique is personality wise, I definitely go against the grind. So to be doing what I'm doing, in the space that I'm doing it in is not

normal. But trying to trailblaze a path, I think you're going to be a little bit more out of alignment of others.

Dan also discussed how he found a unique job thanks to his previous experiences. He was previously a swim coach but now works in educating swim coaches around the world in an administrative role. He discussed how it took him some time to initially establish his career saying “I bounced around more early in my career. Prior to coming to this role, I'd been with two teams in the last 18 years. So, I jumped around a little bit to find a good home, early on in my career.”

Susan also had to find her own path, as she was a first-generation student who came from a rough family life. She reported “My mom did not graduate from high school. My dad didn't graduate from elementary school. I didn't really have the family resources for that.” Later in the interview, she discussed how she knew for a very long time that she wanted to obtain a PhD. However, she didn't know how or what to obtain it in. Speaking on her path to discovery, she said “So I think you already, like me, had to have the idea. I want a Ph.D.. Now I need to find out what could that Ph.D. be in.”

Finding the road to a career wasn't easy for Andie. She reflected on her rough childhood growing up. One of her biggest challenges was going to school and figuring out her own career path with limited support. She remembered:

I had a rough childhood. So going to college, like I knew at 10 years old, was your goal, I'm getting a full ride to school so I can get away and get out. So once I got there, I was just kind of happy. Like, I got my scholarship, I'm away, I kind of started going down a bad path there too. And I really wanted to go to grad school.

But there was no, I mean, my dad said, There's no way I'll help you, you know, you're on your own. And so I just kind of gave up that dream. And that's when I kind of switched more to teaching.

One of the participants had a very distinct journey when compared to others.

Eduardo was an international student who came to the United States from Brazil. As someone who was learning to navigate the language, he also had to find his own unique career path. Due to the time it took to obtain citizenship, Eduardo maneuvered his way through several jobs before getting to his current career of police officer. He recalled: "I was born and raised in Brazil. I moved to the US for college to swim in college. And I went to Limestone, which is a D2 school. I did my four years there." Eduardo continued to pursue additional education while he completed his fifth year of eligibility, using it to obtain his master's degree.

Eduardo discussed how while he was getting his master's degree, he started coaching again to support himself saying, "I started coaching summer league. Then I had the opportunity to start working for a YMCA in South Carolina. I stayed there for one year." Once he accomplished his master's degree Eduardo bounced around, including a stint in the freight industry. He stayed in this field until he obtained his United States citizenship. He remembered his interest in becoming a police officer saying "Law enforcement was something that I always had an interest. So I decided to give it a shot. See if I liked it or I didn't like it. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I do like it."

Compared to the other participants in this study, Chris reported how he had a totally unique path, as he was enrolled in the Coast Guard Academy. One of the unique

parts of his journey is that if he maintained good grades, and stayed on track academically, he was guaranteed a job upon graduation. This role allowed him to fulfill his minimum five-year commitment to the Coast Guard. Chris talked about giving himself less options when it came to picking a major and how it helped his overall performance, saying “When you have less options, it's easier to pick one and stick with it and just do it. The Coast Guard Academy only had eight majors. You had less choices.”

In order to make things less complicated for Chris to choose his major, there was much more structure required in order to graduate. He discussed this saying, “You had to graduate in four years, there was much less flexibility to stay an extra semester next year. I liked that structure.” One perk of being in the Coast Guard was performance and grades were more important than the actual major completed. Chris explained, “What mattered was your performance. Your grades, if you were good on grades, you could get higher up on your choice. But you didn't need to hit a certain major to hit a certain career path.”

Structure and a set path was not the case for others in the study. As a swimmer, one of the traits you learn is flexibility and adaptability. Swim Coach talked about how her career path changed while she was working through the process of going to graduate school. Originally, she had plans to become a physical therapist but due to missing graduate school deadlines, she went on to become a graduate assistant/swim coach at a small university. She reflected on this saying “I was getting ready to graduate in 2016. I was young, dumb and naive, and thought, I went to school exercise science. I thought to get into grad school/physical therapy school, I could just apply at any time.”

Much to her horror, Swim Coach learned this wasn't the case. She remembered her fear when a professor approached her about graduate school and she explained how she thought the admissions process worked. She recalled, "My professor was like, Oh, where'd you get in? What are you doing? Where did you apply? I told him my plan. And he was like, um. That's not how grad school works. There's deadlines."

She continued that as a result of missing her deadlines, she was going to stay at home to get more clinical hours. Rather than staying on this path, she adapted to the situation and took the opportunity to become a graduate assistant. Over the years, many things changed, which resulted in her being offered a full-time job at the institution she loved.

Forging a unique path was nothing new for some of the participants. Coach Mike talked about how after graduation, he had been working in an office job, but wasn't enjoying it. He recalled a memory where he finally had a chance to get outside of the office, "I got chance to look out the windows. And I could see what was outside. And I saw that there were trees and grass and blue sky and wood chips and landscaping. I was getting envious of landscapers." He recalled this memory with jealousy saying "They weren't chained to a desk. They also could see that they made a difference every day. They could see what they did at the end of the day." Ultimately Coach Mike ended up starting his own swim team and business. He reported that he is very happy in his role and that he is able to see what he and his team accomplishes on a daily basis.

Some participants came to the study and discussed how they knew what they wanted to do with their careers. It was up to them to find a college that would support



both their academic and athletic dreams. Sydney knew after doing a paper on nurses that she wanted to be a nurse. She discussed how she made sure to pick a college that supported her academic goals saying:

It was something where even in high school and college I knew what I wanted to do, so I worked towards it. And actually, the reason I went to the college I did go to and it's why I swam D2 versus swimming anything else. You see D1 swimmers or swimmers that go to like bigger D2 schools, you can't always choose what degree you want.

Finding a school that allowed her to do both swimming and nursing was a non-negotiable. At Adams State University, she found the opportunity to accomplish that: "I knew what I wanted in college. And so I found a school who is willing to let me do both which was really nice. And yes, it worked out perfect."

Among the participants, 12 landed careers outside of swimming. Others stayed professionally in the swimming world, with five working in swimming as coaches or in the aquatics industry professionally. In total, 13 participants discussed how they forged their own path to career preparation. These participants represented all Divisions and all genders, with no specific trend reported across any division or gender. Career preparation is something that was addressed while these swimmers were in college, but also continued once they retired from swimming and left college. It is safe to report that many of the participants are still in the growth and exploration phases of career development. This demonstrates that career preparation is something that is life-long and constantly changing and evolving, even to the present point in time.

As evidenced by the statements above, many of these swimmers were extremely proud of how they trailblazed their way to a career. However, this journey wasn't always easy. While many of the participants forged their own path, it came with its own stress and pressures. Some of that stress came from the unknowns surrounding the future, while others came from the pressure of external sources, such as family.

### ***Stress and Pressure***

Stress and pressure are inevitable when trying to navigate the career preparation process. Despite the best laid plans, many of the swimmers reported how they felt. For some, they reported the pressure was self-induced. In other cases, families and friends added to these feelings.

Self-pressure is nothing new for collegiate athletes. They are expected to perform and produce results. In a similar vein, Veronica discussed how she put pressure on herself when it came to choosing her major: "I laugh, because I just remember at the time feeling so stressed out about it." It was not an easy process to pick her major, as she struggled with the courses. Rather than giving up, she continued to fight to pass. She reflected on this saying "I cannot pass these science classes. And these math classes, like, I struggled so hard."

As a result, Veronica was very miserable. She felt that not only was she not getting the results that she needed, but that she was wasting resources such as time and money. She remembered, "I was like, I'm miserable. I am wasting money. Like taking these classes and retaking these classes. I'm wasting time and like, at the end of the day, like am I even gonna really like being a physical therapist?" Due to the stress and

pressure that she placed upon herself, Veronica did end up switching majors to business administration. She went on to have a successful career in the human resources field, although she has now switched careers completely, moving to the realm of higher education.

The pressure was also on Swim Coach, but it came from a different place. She talked about not wanting to disappoint her family and wanted to earn enough to support herself financially. One of the memories she had related to how hard her mother worked to support her family on a teacher salary, which was very difficult. She remembered “I wanted to either be a physical therapist or teacher. I guess there would have been a little pressure because my mom was a teacher, and the pay that they get and how hard it was.” As a result of the pressure she felt, Swim Coach did not end up pursuing teaching. Instead, she pursued her passion of swim coaching, which was also an entirely different field from what she majored in.

Pressure didn’t always come from an internal source. For Sarah, not only did she feel the pressure from her family, but from society as well. When considering her career, she wanted something that would be stable and guaranteed her an income. She discussed the feelings of pressure saying, “Yes. I felt like I was pressured. Not only by myself, but like, my parents and society to have a job, or like to have a major that will give you a job easily and make money and be sustainable.”

Having a job to support and sustain Sarah was incredibly important. During her search for a major, she recalls how people advised her to stay away from certain majors. The advice she received varied; however she has distinct memories of the warnings:

“People are like, ‘Oh, don't go into teaching because it's not gonna make any money or don't be an artist’.”

When it came to choosing a career, Russell also reported his experience of feeling pressure. He majored in Aerospace Engineering and was fortunate to land an engineering job straight out of college. He recalled “Yeah, there was major pressure. I felt the pressure by myself to just make money, live this life, being an engineer. And that's what I did. But then I hated engineering.” Russell worked as an engineer for a short period of time, but it came at a high price. His mental health suffered, and the stress continued to build. Ultimately, Russell did leave the engineering field, completely transitioning to a job in the swimming industry that required his engineering skills. He reported how much he loves his role in swimming and no longer feels that same pressure.

Stress is something that affects everyone, especially when it comes to a transition and a new career. While many of the swimmers reported their experiences with stress and pressure, they navigated it. To help during the process of career preparation, many of the swimmers reported there were many tools at their disposal to help alleviate their struggles. A recurring resource that many participants discussed was the Career Centers on campus. These centers aim to provide resources and support to those who visited it.

### ***Career Centers on Campus***

After speaking with the seventeen interviewees, only six reported having used the career center to assist in their career preparation. While everyone had a different experience in the career center, the swimmers gave mixed reviews. Of those who

reported using the career center, four of the interviewees were Division III swimmers, while the other two participants were Division I swimmers.

Of the participants who used the career center, Donna had a very positive experience saying “Yeah, I definitely used the Career Services Center, we had a great the woman who ran the center was great about helping with resumes, cover letters, and all that stuff. So I did visit them quite a bit.” Russell also used the career center on his campus to help him prepare. He said “There was some career counseling, and I definitely hit them up a couple of times. I, to be honest, I can't remember any of those experiences or any of those meetings, but I know I hit them up.”

One of the barriers to using the career center was the lack of knowledge surrounding it. One swimmer reported they did not use the career center until their graduate school years but expressed regret in not knowing about it sooner. Swim Forever Fast lamented:

I realized I was like, oh my god, they have a career center. Have you ever heard of this, like, they help you with your resume, and they do mock interviews, and there's like money management and like all these very applicable things that I was also more open to accepting help on that I took advantage of all of those. And I was like, wishing I was in school for two more years, just because like, I could do a lot more with all the help that they actually have.

Surprisingly, many of the participants did not use the on-campus resources to help with their career preparation. In total, eight brought attention to why they didn't use this on-campus resource. Of those eight who did not use the career center, four were Division

I athletes (3 Females, 1 Male) and three were Division II athletes (2 Females) and one was a Division III athlete (female). The reasons for not using the career center varied. Some of the swammers chose options that were more suited to them and their career pursuits, while others did not realize this resource existed until it was too late.

Networking was one reason Coach Mike elected to not use the career center saying “No, I did not use the career center however, when it was time for companies to come to interview on campus, I signed up for a bunch.” Throughout his career preparation process, Coach Mike leaned heavily on his network and support systems.

Not everyone knew that the career center even existed on campus. SwimCoach acknowledged that she had no idea. She said “But as far as like a Career Service Center, I didn't even know we had it. There's just so many things that I didn't know about. I wish I would have known more about it, to use it.” Swim Coach later went on to be a swim coach at a college and highly encouraged all her athletes to use this resource. She felt that since she had been unaware of the resources, she did not want other college swimmers to miss out on that experience as well.

In a similar vein, Susan found it much more difficult to find the resources of the career center. She acknowledged “I probably was unaware if there were services. Because they're hard to find. Sometimes they make it very difficult.” In this swimmer’s case, it is important to note that Susan attended college during the 1980s. She recalled career centers were just starting to open on campus, and not nearly as much attention was given to these resources at that point in time.

Lack of knowledge was not the only barrier to using the career center. Two of the interviewees talked about how they did the bare minimum and chose not to use the career center in their undergraduate careers. SwimForeverFast said “Um, I did not I had a goal to graduate college with never going to our library. So I did probably like the bare minimum.” Andie, another Division I swimmer, also echoed this sentiment saying “I mean, I really didn't do much except for go to the classes for student teachers. And do like the bare minimum of what I needed to do.”

There were many other resources at the disposal of the swammers on-campus. Many reported taking advantage of the free tutoring and free academic support services. At many universities, these services are provided as part of the student-athlete experience. In many cases, using the services, such as tutoring or meeting with academic advisors can be mandatory.

### ***Tutoring and Academic Support on Campus***

Since the swammers were expected to be both students and athletes, tutoring and academic support is provided for student-athletes free of charge. Four swammers discussed how they took advantage of this free tutoring to help them in classes related to their majors. Veronica was a big proponent for the tutoring services offered at her university. She discussed her critical the tutoring was to her success saying “The tutoring was huge. I use tutoring for a lot of stuff. I would always talk to my professors if I was struggling in that class. And either I would get help from a TA or a former student.”

The free tutoring that was offered was an imperative part of success for other swimmer's. Swim Coach and Anne both reported how much they used these services.

Swim Coach recalled “I guess I did use the tutoring center when I had hard classes.”

Anne was much more vocal on her usage of these services. She recalled how easy it was to get a tutor and how helpful having the services was. She remarked, “We did have free tutoring. So if you ever needed a tutor, you could contact students services, and they kind of hook you up with a tutor.” This came in handy when she had to tackle difficult courses. She remembered, “I did get a tutor my freshman year for anatomy, which I did find to be very helpful. I would just meet with her like two nights a week and it was free. It was covered by school tuition.”

While this section of data focuses on the academic success of the swammers, it is important to remember that doing well in courses is a crucial part of preparing for future careers. When it came to further career preparation and development, many swammers made sure to pick up a part-time job, internship or completing shadowing. These part-time jobs and internships played a role in shaping the participants careers through both positive and negative experiences.

### ***Internships and Part-Time Jobs***

Out of the seventeen interviewees, 14 swammers report having had a part-time job, internship, or shadowing during their collegiate swimming careers. For some of the swammers, the experiences they participated in helped to decide they were going toward a career path to embark on upon graduation.

Dan interned in a field related to his major and enjoyed his role and enjoyed the experience he had. At the same time, he picked up a part-time coaching job. He did end up moving into the swim coaching realm for his long-term career. While he is no longer



in coaching, this was his first step in his career journey. He reflected fondly on his experience saying “Originally, I went to college for radio and television, and wanted to pursue sports broadcasting. And in some respect was kind of where I was leaning. Either that or to be a DJ on like, FM DJ type thing.”

In Dan’s situation, while he enjoyed his internship, he ended up pursuing another career path. He reflected on his first coaching job saying, “And while I was working, unpaid internships in that realm, I’d started coaching for my future mother-in-law, as a way to make some money, and found out very quickly that I both enjoyed and was better at coaching than I was in media.”

Internships can also lead to different avenues and career paths like they did for Dan. Thomas ended up disliking his internship in politics. Thomas recalled his internship experience saying: “I had an internship over the summer and it really taught me that I didn't want to do. It just taught me, I did not want to be in politics.” For his first career, Thomas ended up going into career path that was not related to his major. He did a short time in swim coaching before turning to administrative roles. Not everyone had an experience that moved them into new areas and careers.

Two swimmers, Sarah and Veronica, both had internships in their respective majors. Their positive experiences at their internships resulted in them pursuing their respective fields upon graduation. Sarah, a Division III swimmer, did her internship in accounting. She said “I had an internship at an insurance company doing accounting work. It led to me being like, hey, I have experience to you know, continue my accounting career.”

Veronica, a Division II swimmer, also completed an internship, which led her into her first full-time job. She said “And I started taking internships, I worked as a recruiting intern at Quicken Loans. Did that for a hot minute, thought I really loved recruiting.” Veronica did stay in this field for several years after her graduation, but has since pursued other opportunities within higher education. While internships typically take place during college, not all of the interviewees completed their internships during their undergraduate swimming careers.

Hans is a swimmer who is currently establishing a new career. He is in the process of doing an internship/volunteer job for his local fire department. Firefighting is something Hans is very excited and passionate about. This future career goal is going to not only support his family but give them much-needed stability. He shared his experience saying, “Right now I volunteer with one of the local fire departments around here. And I think I don't want to count my chickens before they hatch, but I think I have a good opportunity to turn that volunteer/part-time position into a more full-time position.”

Some of the swimmers were required to complete an internship, shadowing or practicum as part of their degree. Sydney, a Division II swimmer, had to complete clinicals as part of her nursing degree. While she knew what kind of nurse she wanted to be, her experiences helped to shape the kind of nurse she would later become. She recalled with certainty her dream of becoming a NICU nurse, “I've always wanted to be a NICU nurse and they really didn't have any PEDs clinicals. I've always had my heart set on where he wanted to go.” While her clinicals were valuable, she did not feel they

helped to shape her career path. She said, “I don't think my clinicals shaped anything. I think it showed different ways I wanted to be a nurse, not where I wanted to work.”

Anne, a Division III swimmer, also completed clinicals as part of her nursing degree. She said “We did clinicals throughout our whole program, which obviously helped you learn how to be a nurse and what you were doing.” She later on explained “Our internship is called a practicum. And you're partnered with a nurse, and you follow their schedule for 120 hours. So I did do that my senior year. But that was a requirement to graduate.”

Colleen performed shadowing, which is similar to practicums. She knew she always wanted to help people, but was unsure of which medical field to pursue. Her shadowing was one of the factors to help decide which medical route to take:

Well, I always knew that I wanted to help people, I wanted to be somewhere in the medical field, so I started shadowing different types of doctors. And I kind of felt like the best relationship that I had with one of my doctors was my chiropractors, so I got to spend a long time with him. I felt like this was just my calling. And I got I shadowed in clinics as well when I was in undergrad, and got to see these people and their transformation that they made in such a short period of time in terms of their quality of life.

Many of the swimmers also worked part time jobs that involved the sport of swimming. Of the seventeen swimmers interviewed, seven of them either coached or worked as a lifeguard for money while they were in school. SwimForeverFast discussed their part time jobs saying “I was a personal trainer for a while, I coached spin classes. I

was also coaching swimming, doing swim lessons. I was a lifeguard, so I had all these random side hustles going on.” While many of the interviewees took advantage of internships, shadowing and part time jobs, many formed their career through steps they took outside of campus settings.

### *Networking*

One of the more common ways that the swimmers prepared for their careers was through networking. 12 different swimmers discussed how networking helped them with their careers. Veronica discussed how she landed work thanks to her network saying, “I talked to people that I knew worked there. And I was like, Hey, can you give me a job? That's how I got a lot of my first jobs too. I've been referred in by somebody who knew someone.”

Swim Coach had a similar experience when it came to networking. She was fortunate enough to have a network that passed along job opportunities. This networking opportunity led to her first part-time job after graduation, which then resulted in her landing a full-time job at the same institution. She discussed her networking experience saying:

One of my teammates reached out right at the end of the school year, and said, ‘Hey, one of our former teammates is graduating, she reached out to me about being the graduate assistant. I already have a plan, you don't. Would you be interested in going?’ I was like, you know, what, if that gets me out of the house, then sure.

Networking was a critical skill that many swimmers took advantage of. Russell landed his then dream job through networking. Although he credits luck and his swimming career, it was ultimately his network that helped him to land an amazing role. He reported, “My coach put in a good word. And, you know, and I think I killed my interview. Then they hired me. So basically, I got lucky.” More than luck was involved in Russell landing his role. He credited his networking skills, “Because of networking, and being in the right place at the right time, I got the job. My official degree of Aerospace Engineering, and my unofficial degree of swimming turned into a career path I’m super thankful and grateful for.”

Networks were also imperative to Donna and her successful career. She is a huge proponent of taking advantage of any opportunity that comes her way. Donna discussed how she is still working on growing her network to this day. She discussed her tactics, saying “When I see an opportunity where I can meet people in the sport or just expand my horizons, I do.” In her situation, she said that every job she landed was because of someone in her network. She acknowledged “Every single job I’ve ever had, I got it because I knew, you know, somebody was connected to the job or something. Networking is just so important.”

Hans used his network to secure his current role, which has led him to a new career path. Initially, he started out as a site coordinator for a small swim team and is now transitioning to firefighting. He recalled how his network is something he relied on strongly saying “I was actually out with the head coach of Spokane Waves. He hired me

as his head age group coach out in Bellingham. And then he came out to take the head coach job here.”

Hans took a leap of faith, moving across the country to move toward a new career. His network came in handy again, as he recalled calling the same coach from Spokane again. He discussed his adventure saying “I had moved to Washington from Virginia, back in 2014 to do firefighting. I was going to have better opportunity out here on the east to get a fire job. So I moved out here.” While Hans’ ultimate goal was to get into firefighting, he was able to rely on his network to secure him a job while he found his footing. He called the conversation with this coach saying, “I gave him a call and said, Hey, I’m out here. You need someone helping out five hours a week while I find my footing? He said, Yeah, I’ve got the second site that I need someone to run.”

Networking was an integral part of success for many of the swimmers’ careers. And because of this networking, many ended up in careers and places that they had never imagined they could have been. Networking also goes hand-in-hand with support, which was discussed at length and is the second theme that was identified during the analysis process.

### **Support**

During the challenging journey of collegiate swimming, many of the swimmers discussed how important it was to receive support during this challenging time. Support was given to the participants in many different ways and from different people in their lives. Some discussed how their families were their rock during their career preparation, while others found support from their friends. Still others reported that their coaches

supported their career and academic endeavors, while others reported that they leaned on the swimming community for their support. Together, these support systems created a foundation for the swimmers to lean on at any point throughout their journey whether it be career preparation or beyond.

### ***Family Support***

Family support was the reason many of the participants kept moving forward when things got tough. Coach Mike discussed how he owes everything to his parents, to his wife and family. He said people would come on deck and mistake him for his father, which was a huge compliment. People would say: “Oh my gosh, that's Don. No, that's his son, Mike. I take that as a big compliment. But I owe I owe everything to my mom and dad.”

Coach Mike’s wife also played a huge role in supporting him in his current career. She handles the not-so-glamorous part of their business, such as the accounting and business side of things while Coach Mike provides more of the hands-on coaching and managing of his staff. He talked about how his wife is his rock in his current role saying, “And my wife, handles all the behind the scenes, not as glorious type of work of insurance and bills and mortgages and taxes and payroll, and all that stuff that makes this machine run.” One of the biggest challenges was having to step up and provide for her and their kids, especially as he was still establishing his career as a swim team owner, saying “And that whole time I told my wife we're gonna build a swim center and we had to secure water.”

Another swimmer reported how her father was her source of support when it came to changing her major and finding her career path. Veronica credits her father for saying something so profound and calming that it stuck with her for years. Her panic was evident as she remembered saying “I remember sitting down with my dad, being like, I can't keep doing pre-physical therapy anymore. Like I just can't.” Her father gave her some of the best advice he could have at the moment. She recalled “My dad said the simplest but the most profound thing in my head. He was like, you know, there are other ways that you can help people, right?”

Support also came from family on the swimming front. Thomas discussed how critical his family was during his swimming career. He now looks back fondly on the time they spent at swim meets and how they are his fondest memories: “Those are like my happiest memories. Of like, my parents coming to swim meets and going to dinner after and doing all that kind of stuff. Because that was just like an experience. I'll never get back kind of thing.”

Familial support was also critical to Eduardo's success. Not only did he need support on the swimming front, but on his educational journey as well. One of the hardest parts of going to college for him was coming to a new country and learning a completely new language. He remembers the decision to come to the US saying “It was my family, for me to come to the US. And I mean, they sent me to a completely different country. Knowing that I didn't know the language.”

For Eduardo, he had to find a school that would support his educational endeavors while he learned the language. He spoke fondly of his alma mater, “I went to Limestone,



because it was the only school that will take somebody that didn't speak English. And having their support, and during my times of struggle, they helped me stick with the plan and continue with what I wanted to do.”

In Eduardo’s story, he also discussed how he built a new family here in America to help support him. He glanced lovingly at his wife in the other room during our interview, saying, “And then my wife, I met her my freshman year. She taught me English, and she supported me. She took the role of my whole family, and she became my family. And that's why I married her.”

Families continually provided support for their swimmers. Like Eduardo, Donna also had a supportive family. They advised her to find a career she loved, while giving out helpful advice. Her mom was focused on her happiness, saying “My mom always told me find something that's gonna make you happy. Because happiness, if you're not happy, you know, no matter what you're doing, you're just not going to have a fulfilling life.” On the practical side her father focused on the monetary aspect. Donna remembered her father advising her “You need to make money. Find some way to make money.”

Families were a constant source of support, especially when it came to the career preparation from. Swim Coach not only leaned on her family while she was in school, but during her careers at various points as well. She reiterated the importance of having support at all points in her life saying, “I'm very blessed. I've got those supportive people. Yeah, because definitely I have a weird career. So definitely having supportive people in your corner.”

Families provided unwavering support for the swimmers as they formed their professional careers and completed their swimming careers. Support not only came from the families but from their peers, friends and teammates. These friends helped the swimmers to navigate their journeys both academically and athletically as well.

### ***Friend and Peer Support***

When transitioning out of their swimming careers, many of the participants discussed how their friends and peers provided support. This support was sometimes as basic as getting through an event with their friends, while others used their friends for studying or getting them through difficult points throughout out.

Anne relied on her teammates and friends to help her get through her nursing program. She remembers how her peers pushed her to succeed in a short, but tough class. At one point during the program, she had to “take one class in three weeks, and you learn 15 weeks of material in three weeks. And the only people who really know how to get through it are the people who've been through it.” In Anne’s situation, she relied on her older teammates and coaches on how to manage this challenge. She said “I reached out to the coaches and the other swimmers for advice. How do you manage to learn 15 weeks of material in three weeks and still stay sane?”

Practices were also times that the swimmers relied on their peers for support. Thomas talked about how he leaned on his teammates to get through tough practices. Many of them are still lifelong friends, despite graduating almost thirteen years ago. He talked about some of the relationships he has, “Yeah, so I actually loved my college team. I had a great relationship with every like most of my teammates. I'm still friends with

them to this day.” The love for swimming did not end when their time in the pool was completed. Thomas shared “I actually have a bunch of swim nerdy chats and texts. While training, I was in lane seven and still have a group chat named Lane seven for life with those teammates. And this is literally like 13 years later.”

Friendship was also important to some as they knew that while collegiate swimming was only a short time, friendships can last much longer. Sarah was adamant about how important friends were in swimming, as the sport is fleeting. She knew that there was no likelihood of swimming professionally and encourages others to find supportive friends: “It's more just about having fun with your friends and swimming rather than like your time and like putting effort into just schoolwork.”

Coach Mike had a friend who helped him through his transition. One of their first part-time jobs out of college was working at an aerobics class. Coach Mike reflected on learning how to teach the class, saying “I was with another guy and said hey, I'll take it if you take it. We sat in the back and we screwed up everything. We're uncoordinated. We'll return as best we can.” Another friend also helped to catch him when he messed up teaching and acted as a mentor for him. Coach Mike reflects on this friend saying: “But Sue was there. And she bailed me out. And I taught and I taught another one. And another one. And I got pretty good at it.”

Friends were also important when the sport of swimming ended. Navigating the transition from a collegiate athlete to being a regular person can be a very jarring and difficult experience. Veronica recalls how she and her friends figured out how to deal with life after swimming ended:

We had one year left of school and had finished swimming. We were all like, all right. We can hang out, now what do we do? So, I mean, we spent a lot of time hanging out with each other. But we probably weren't coping in the healthiest way. Obviously we weren't only drinking and going to the bar and doing something like that. But when I think of that time, that's what I remember – fun with friends. And we had a lot of fun.

Friends provided invaluable support during various stages of the swimmers' journeys. For some, they provided support by simply being there, while others were key players in helping the interviewee get through a tough point in their transition. Another group that provided support was their swim coaches. In some instances, coaches provided academic support, while others were pillars for their swimmers to lean on.

### ***Coach Support***

Coaches are someone who not only recruit the swimmers but are a major source of support for many during their time of collegiate swimming. Receiving support from a coach was discussed by many of the participants during their interviews. Dan recalled how a coach's support shaped the way he tackled some of his first roles. He discussed his relationship with his coach saying "I had a really positive experience. His commitment and attention to what I was doing was really impactful." When Dan landed his first job as a coach, he remembered this coach. He said, "When I did get into coaching, I just always said, hey, if I can impact one athlete, the way I was impacted by him, I've done my job."

Coaches provided support on the academic front as well. Sarah used her coach as a sounding board to discuss different career options. She relied on this coach for not only

their advice, but to support her in her academics and accounting career saying “I think I did take advantage of my coaches. Rather than my professor, I asked my coach - hey do you know anyone in accounting? I want to do this with my career and used her as a sounding board.”

In Sarah’s situation, she appreciated having the space to discuss her career goals and having a neutral third party to help her. While having a sounding board was beneficial, she recalled how having the support was nice, but she knew it was probably never result in a job. She reflected on her coaches role, saying “She's not going to give me a job, compared to if I reached out to my professors. But I feel like it was nice to have a little sounding board there and just still have some type of support.”

While coaches were there to support their athletic careers, some provided even more hands-on support for academics. Sydney relied on her coach to get her through academics and swimming. She had memories of travelling to the championship meets and having to take exams early in the morning or between prelims and finals. She remembered that her coach would have to proctor exams saying: “I don't think I really think I gave him much choice but I think it was like this is what it is and or we're not gonna pass so you're my proctor. You know, sit on the first floor of the hotel and that was it.”

In some cases, coaches had a meaningful conversation which their swimmer discussed. Chris recalled the conversation he had with his coach when he finished swimming, which reminded him of the value he provided, and how important enjoying his last moments in his swimming career were. Chris was emotional about this

conversation and relayed how it was highly impactful, with its contents sticking with him today:

I had both my high school coach and my college coach who would pull aside seniors who are after completing their four years. And they would pull us back and be like, 'Listen, this is it. You just did four years, all these freshmen look up to you. They value your friendship, they value you as an athlete, you have to take 30 seconds or a minute to enjoy that. You're never going to feel this, like special feeling again. So just enjoy. And whatever you swim on this last day, it's fine.

Other swimmers received support from coaches when it came to their careers.

Eduardo used his coaches as references to land on-campus jobs. As a student in the United States still learning English, he needed all the support he could get. Eduardo not only had strong parental support, but his coaches were there to support him. He recalled this saying "I used my coaches as reference to get jobs on campus and things like that. So I'm very happy with how I was able to shift gears."

One final participant recalled how important the support was from her coach.

Anne had a rigorous nursing major. Support from her coach came when he helped her to navigate her tough nursing schedule. Due to her clinicals and practicums, Anne was pulling extremely long days and attending practices at odd hours. She remembered her coach supporting her fondly saying "Yes, I don't think I would have gotten through nursing school without them." As reported, for many of the swimmers, their coaches provided key support and helped them throughout different points in their journey. Interestingly, the swimmers who reported receiving the most support were from

Divisions II and III. This does not mean support was not given to Division I athletes, but those in lower divisions remembered significant support.

To finish the discussion on support, there was one final community that some swimmers reported. This support came from the overall swimming community. Many of the swimmers considered themselves to be lifelong swimmers, and they knew that at any point, they could return to the swimming community and be welcomed back into it.

### ***Support from Swimming Community***

The support that came from the swimming community varied from participant to participant. Some relied on the swimming community after graduation. Others felt that they were always a part of the swimming community no matter where they were, or where they went. Swimming is its own unique community and many of the participants felt that they could rejoin it whenever it best suited them and their needs.

The swimming community is not limited to coaches or peers. Eduardo was very adamant about his huge support system. This system was comprised of trainers, and others who helped him to rehabilitate from his collegiate swimming injury. In his opinion, he would not have been able to properly take care of himself and recover from his injury. He discussed the care of his injury saying, “The trainers, the athletic training department, my college was very good to me through my injury. The trainer that took care of me was an awesome guy.” Eduardo felt extremely fortunate to have this support, since prior to his Limestone experience he would not have received the same support. He recalled how lucky he felt having access to the trainers and other collegiate resources “I was very happy to have access to that I didn't have access to that before I got to college.”

Some swimmers never left the swimming community because of how amazing and supportive it was. Donna discussed how fortunate she was to build a full-time career in the swimming community. She was extremely adamant about networking within swimming and maintains how valuable the community. She stated, “I’ve just had this to me what I consider an amazing life, like just given these opportunities to meet some of the best people in the sport.”

In another case, the swimming community was important after graduation. Chris felt that the swimming community and being a lifelong swimmer was important to him. He discussed how he did not feel he was in life post-sport; he views swimming as an ongoing sport and community saying “And I think building your relationship with swimming that helps you stay in the sport is the most important thing. It will always be there for you. You can do it until you’re 70.”

Not everyone fell on the swimming community for support. One participant felt it was their obligation to build their own supportive swimming community. Swim Coach discussed how she is building her own swimming community, and that at the heart of this community is a place to learn, grow and ask questions. When it comes to her swimmers, Swim Coach said she “encourages them to ask why. I tell them, if you don’t ask me questions, I’m gonna ask you questions. And they didn’t, at first. And I started asking questions. They’re like, Oh, crap, we don’t know this.”

One component of this community Swim Coach is proud of is fostering an environment where swimmers are safe to ask questions and not be afraid. She glowed with pride as she described the environment on her pool deck “It made them start asking



questions and not being afraid to ask why. I think kids are told quit asking questions. Shut up, be quiet. Because I said so. Now they're getting to ask these questions, they're getting to learn.”

One of the participants wished that she could get back into the sport to be a part of the swimming community again. Colleen recalled how valuable the swimming community was saying, “Well, I don't really swim anymore. I do think it is a good community of people to be with and to network with. I've always thought about going back into it because it was always just really good.”

Ultimately, support can come from a variety of different places. For many of the swimmers, their coaches, family, friends and the swimming community provided them with a place to lean on when necessary. Overall, very few of the interviewees discussed their levels of support, and rather focused more on how they forged their own way through both collegiate swimming, their career preparation and their lives post-sport. This is not to say that those who did not discuss it did not receive support, rather that they were focused on themselves and their own individual journeys.

Some of the participants also called out the need for more support and assistance to help during the career preparation and life post-sport process. There were a variety of ideas, including having more alumni involvement, have programming and classes for transitioning swimmers, and having more resources from the NCAA, among others.

### ***Need for Additional Support***

The need for additional support was reported frequently. Many of the participants discussed how sudden and harsh the loss of the sport was. This need for support is critical during the transition phase for the swimmers.

Coach Mike was a participant who discussed how difficult his transition was. He described how he needed support upon the completion of his swimming career. Losing swimming left a massive void in his life, and he needed help to fill that void, "It's a massive vacuum, it's gotta get filled with something, hopefully something healthy. And for me, it was as I was trying to find my way." A variety of ideas arose when it came to different ways that people could give and receive support.

One of the ideas that presented itself was involving the alumni base with the activities of the team. This would allow the alumni to get professional experience, while still being a part of the sport. SwimForeverFast came from a program that has a large, proud alumni base. They suggested:

I think that there has to be ways for the program itself to pull back some of the athletes. Maybe make someone partially a manager, or they deal with designing the shirts for the next year's class. Like stuff like that, where it's like, you eat, sleep and die this team. And then you can kind of show your dedication to the program through like small acts that bring you back. You could order the meals for all these people. Or if you want to be an event planner, organize the meals, organize the buses, stuff like that.

Two other participants felt support could be given by meeting with current swimmers on the team and discussing what the transition process looks like. This would

give current swimmers the opportunity to ask difficult questions, see how difficult the transition can be and allow them to receive support from these alumni.

In this vein, Veronica suggested two different ideas. The first was bringing in swimmers who have specialized in the mental health field and are now practicing therapists saying “Have a bunch of former student-athletes that are now therapists come in. Tell the swimmers that they're here to talk to you, or even just resources for counselors, some something along those lines. It's just such a jarring transition.”

Veronica also had the idea of alumni support, having them show up at the end of the season to speak. She said “Even if they had someone come and talk to the graduating seniors. Tell them this was my story and how I dealt with things.” She continued that thought process, explaining that she felt honesty and vulnerability with current swimmers would be beneficial. She explained how she be vulnerable and honest as she would handle an opportunity like this:

If I went back and spoke to the current seniors saying, this is how you're gonna feel, you know, so just having something where you, at least just start the conversation of, you're gonna feel lost, you're not going to know what to do with your time. If you do, that's fine, congratulations. But most of you are going to sit here and go now what.

Alumni was a popular request when it came to support. Hans echoed Veronica's statement of going back and helping to mentor swimmers on his team. After reflecting, he thought it would be beneficial to hear from alumni first-hand about what they had

experienced when swimming ended. “Former athletes should come back and they can talk about their experiences.”

He advocated for an exit interview, so that programs could get feedback first-hand on how they could better support their retiring swimmers: “I think they should also have some sort of exit interview. An appropriate exit interview question would be ‘Are willing to set yourself up as a volunteer to send future student-athletes your way? For you to answer questions?’” This was something Hans expressed excitement at participating in, saying “If that had been an option when I was leaving collegiate swimming, I would have signed up to do it.”

The topic of mentoring was also discussed by other participants. Susan advocated for mentoring, especially for female swimmers. She recalled how difficult it was for her to find her own path into the sports industry and she lamented that she did not have that support: “I don't think that there were as much encouragement for women to go into sport related type of work.”

Going into slightly different path, Susan also suggested student-athletes do an internship of some sort, in addition to the mentoring. She lamented, “I would have liked an opportunity to do internships or mentoring. Almost everything was male-oriented.”

Internships were a suggestion that Dan addressed as well. He felt there was so little time for student-athletes outside of swimming and academics. He suggested it would be beneficial if the NCAA more closely monitored its 20-hour policy saying “There's got to be a better avenue for student-athletes to be able to work internships and

get practical job experience. It's really challenging because there's a 20-hour rule, but we know it's not being adhered to at the top levels.”

Dan continued that he thought it was invaluable to obtain real-life experience in a career or field. He called on the NCAA to assist in giving student-athletes the opportunity to get that experience. “I would say the more real-life experience that you can give an NCAA athlete in their prospective field, the better off they're going to be when they graduate.”

A few other participants also called attention to the NCAA to provide more support during the transition process. Donna advocated for sending swimmers to a NCAA conference that had a Career Prep Academy. She thought it would be beneficial for those in attendance to come back and share the knowledge they had learned “Maybe sending a portion of kids, maybe one person from each sport, for them to go to like a Career Development Academy. And then bring that information back to their school.”

She continues that many swimmers and student-athletes do not know their worth and value. She thinks that the NCAA does need to focus more not only on career development, but on helping student-athletes and swimmers to understand and recognize their value in the workplace: “I think the NCAA should do some kind of career development, where they bridge the gap so an athlete knows that these are the skills you learned being on your team. They are going to be valuable in the real world.”

Thomas also called on the NCAA to provide more help in building resumes and preparing for their lives after graduation. He discussed how in Division III, he had a different experience than many of the Division I and II swimmers but reiterated that this

can be useful among all divisions: "I do think, in compliancy, there should be something built into athletic departments that helps like athletes start building, like building resumes and building this kind of stuff."

Similar to Thomas, Swim Coach also wanted the NCAA to provide a class or a session on what happens in life-post sport. "Definitely a life at after college/after swimming class." These classes could cover a variety of topics and could be custom made to fit the institution and Division. Swim Coach further discussed how life skills could also be focused on as well. She went on to coach at a Division II institution, where some of kids struggled to do basic activities when they came to college. "Especially after COVID, the kids came into college, not knowing how to do laundry. We literally had to go into a class on this."

Another idea that participants discussed was having a class that focused on economic literacy. Colleen, who is a chiropractor that owns her own business talks about how important it is to understand financials. She said: "I think everybody should be required to take some kind of financial accounting class, because they don't teach you how to do your taxes or any of these things." Colleen was quite blunt with her advice, saying it is not easy financially after graduating. She said "I think it's good for people to be able to budget their money. When you get into the real world, there is no mommy and daddy paying for stuff anymore. You got to pay for these things on your own."

Swim Coach and SwimForeverFast also advocated for financial classes as well. Swim Coach remembers how she struggled with finances after graduation, as she needed a better understanding of what she was dealing with. "I wish I would have taken some

sort of financial class and just learned how to do taxes and what the financial terms mean.” She remembers getting her first job and being handed her benefits package and trying to understand what it meant. “Even now we're trying to set up for retirement. What the heck, like I heard of a 401K, I heard adults talking about it. But I didn't know what it meant.”

SwimForeverFast did take a financial class through their institution. They did not take this class until they were in graduate school. Despite taking a class with a bunch of freshmen, they recall how much they learned:

I took Money 101 when I was in grad school. It was literally the most boring class I've ever taken. But it was so applicable to the world because it taught me about, you know, checking and savings accounts, like how to do my taxes, what are taxes? What is self-employment tax, a Roth IRA, like, verbiage, I knew, but I didn't really know.

A variety of ideas were presented on how the NCAA and others could provide more support during the transition process. However, there were two other ideas that were suggested by participants. These supports did not necessarily have to come from an institution or entity but were ways to support themselves as they navigated these treacherous waters of career preparation, transitions and landing their first careers. These two concepts were the idea of finding new activities and finding ways to do better self-care.

### *Self-Care and Activities Outside Swimming*

When it came to establishing a new routine after retirement from swimming, some of the participants had ideas outside the box. Coach Mike discussed how he found an aerobics class to fill his time. He wanted something that would keep him active and healthy while having fun: “I walked into Bally’s one day, and I saw all these people. I heard some pretty cool music. I saw some cool lights. I wondered what was back there. I walk back there and it’s an aerobics class.” Coach Mike went on to teach aerobics classes while figuring out his career journey. But this was his first step in finding a new activity to fill the void swimming had left.

Veronica also discussed how she has struggled to find an activity outside of swimming since her retirement 8 years ago. She recommended that everyone find a hobby or something they enjoy outside the sport of swimming saying, “I think I would find a hobby outside of swimming.” She lamented that it is very difficult to find a new hobby now, and that she thinks having a new activity could have helped her to cope after she was done swimming. She remarked how she has been graduated since 2016, but said, “I still do not have a hobby, unless you consider reading a hobby. I think having a hobby would have helped me a lot when I was done with swimming.”

Finding a new hobby was something that others discussed at length. Russell recognized the importance of taking the time to put yourself first and to find a new hobby. He advised, “Figure out what your interests are, and what’s going to light you in this next stage, I would say, you know, don’t just be a swimmer, develop hobbies, do other things”. This advice doesn’t only apply to hobbies but potential roles that you might



be interested in as well. He recommended, “I would say, get some experience, take some time outside of swimming, to discover what your interests are. You know, the best job is one that you like.”

Finding new activities goes together with the concept of better self-care. It allows the swimmer to take a step back and support themselves as they are navigating their transitions, their career preparation and their lives post-sport. This was one of the biggest regrets that some of the participants reported, and something they wish they had done better and taken more seriously.

Eduardo was very adamant about swimmers taking better care of their bodies. Upon graduation, he went into the police academy and wished he had taken better care of himself during his swimming days. He said “Make sure you cool down and warm up take care of your body. So you're not beating your body completely.” He continued that he is much more self-aware of his limitations saying “I know the boundaries of what I can push and what I cannot push. I'm a little bit more aware. I think I was very naive on it. In general with everything I was like, just go with the flow.”

Thomas also warned swimmers to take better care of themselves. He said that the best thing that he had done was to move out of his college town and start to focus on his career. When it came to taking better care he said “Take yourself seriously. Because I think college kids don't really take themselves totally seriously anymore until they have to. I wish I knew earlier to like, stop screwing around and like try to get stuff in line.”

Russell encouraged swimmers to support themselves by considering getting mental health help and seeking out a therapist early on. “If there was anything that I

could tell my younger self, it would be. Man, go start working with a therapist earlier in life.” He continued to break down the stigma surrounding mental health saying, “That’s the one thing that I would tell myself. I think I did a lot of things, right. It’s just nice to have a neutral person to talk about work.”

Self-care was something that was also important to Veronica. She stated that swimming had been a way to manage stress. When she retired, she realized how important it was to find new ways to manage her stress, saying “Swimming was my outlet. It was a workout, it was my time for myself, I could center myself during that time. I didn’t have to think about anything else if I didn’t want to.”

Another concept that Veronica discussed was self-grace as she navigated no longer being a swimmer. This kindness goes hand-on-hand with taking care of oneself. As a Division II swimmer, swimming was incredibly important to her and taught her how to work hard. At times, she acknowledged how difficult it was to remove the swimmer mindset and to give yourself grace as you are navigating your transition:

When it comes to personal stuff, whether it’s working out or trying to eat healthy, or trying to be better, professionally, there’s always going to be growing pains and as athletes, we are so hard on ourselves. Things are gonna be different, and it’s gonna feel weird. Just embrace it and roll with it.

Support for the swimmers can come from many different sources. While the participants in this study cited how they received support from their friends, families, coaches and peers, they also admitted they needed additional support. This support could come from alumni, mentors, additional classes and more. Upon completion of the

transition from student-athlete/ swimmer to a swimmer, all of the participants moved on and obtained full-time careers. In this next section, I discuss the third theme that presented itself, which is discussing what the swimmers are achieving in their lives post-sport.

### **Active and Meaningful Jobs**

The second two themes tied into answering research question 2: What are the life post-sport career outcomes of former swimmers who competed in NCAA Division I, II and III? When it came to the career that the swimmers were pursuing, many of them were making similar career choices. One theme that emerged was how much the careers enveloped the entire identity of the swimmer. In many cases, the swimmer fully embraced their new career identity and threw themselves headfirst into their new roles.

Another aspect of the roles they chose was the importance of impactful and meaningful roles. For many of the swimmers, it was important to them to be in a role where they could see the daily difference they were making. Many did not want to be stuck behind a desk, and valued working with people and sharing their knowledge and talents. They reiterated wanting to give back to the community and be in a position that was both very active and engaging. These roles all varied, however, many of the participants ended up in active roles that impact or give back to the community in some way.

Before transitioning into these roles, they had to navigate the process of identity loss and the loss of structure that swimming had provided. This was a very difficult process, with all participants discussing how difficult it was to lose the swimming

identity. While this identity loss was easier for those who already had a career path in mind, there was still a sense of loss when it came to their swimming identity. That loss of identity and structure will be demonstrated more below.

### ***Identity Loss***

Identity loss was a common experience for most of the swimmers. Coach Mike shared how sudden his identity loss was after completing his final conference meet: “You know, so you never lost sight of what you were going for next, right? All of a sudden, that's gone. There's nothing more in front of you. It's really hard to imagine, we were only at a college level.” He continued by reiterating his loss saying “That's I mean, that's all you knew. And now all of a sudden, you're done.” Not only was this process hard for him, but he was very upset by it and had many difficult emotions that he had to navigate, “It's really cool for a day or two. But when it's been part of your life for so many years, that's all you know, right? And it's really sad. It was sad for me.”

Identity loss continued to be a common theme among Division II swimmers. Veronica grieved her loss of swimming identity. She felt like her swimming career was just over very suddenly saying, “They're like, cool. Thanks for swimming for us. You did great. Congrats.” In the heat of the moment, it felt like nobody seemed to care that her swimming career was over. She personally struggled, and recalled how upset she was. She describes the sadness she felt as the reality set in that her swimming career was over. She recalled “I just remember sobbing my last day of my championship meet. I sat on the pool deck until it was basically empty. My bus almost left without me. I just remember being like, this chapter of my life is over.”

Retirement and leaving the sport of swimming was not just something that happened overnight. For some, it took years to navigate this loss and to re-establish a new identity, SwimForeverFast discussed how they struggled with their identity loss and how the sport suddenly ended:

There's two folds here. I think as a swimmer, there's no transition period from when you stopped swimming to when you just become a normal person. And so, I struggled with that transition. For years, I think I struggled through that transition until my first job. Like I quote, retired, but I didn't really retire in my head.

Loss of identity seemed to plague others in the study as well. Andie reported that she also struggled through her retirement and loss of identity. Not only did she lose her swimming identity but she experienced grief, loss, and other tough emotions. Andie used terms like “depression” and “self-hatred.” She explained that “swimming kind of covered [those emotions] up,” and “made [her] feel like a better person.”

Her experience echoed the sense of grief experienced by many of her counterparts. As she discussed her sense of loss, she also explained anger she felt due to the sacrifice she had made for swimming:

After I retired, I mean, I was pissed at swimming. I was like, really pissed at the sport because I felt like I ended bad. It took so much from me, I, you know, I hated it. And I hated the way that I ended. And I didn't achieve all the things I thought I should achieve.

She explained that it was difficult for her to move forward and start planning her career. Poignantly, she explained, “That was my only life, that was all I knew, just didn't

see anything past that.” Ultimately, Andie struggled for a long time and ended up going down a dark, difficult path as she struggled to find a new life and identity after retiring from swimming “I mean, like, probably within six months after graduating, I mean, I ended up like, on the streets. Like, I mean, down a really crazy alcoholic addict path.” Andie did end up navigating this loss. She became more involved with her family, becoming a teacher so she could have the summers off to raise her children. Andie made it a priority to get involved in swimming again and to find more purpose in her life, which she feels she has accomplished.

Andie’s experience was a hyperbolic illustration of the experience of many other swimmers. Many of them described this loss as sudden and very startling. Losing their swimming identity was a struggle, something that occurred across all genders and all divisions.

Donna was a Division III swimmer who reported her own struggle with identity loss. She remembered the sense of loss she felt saying, “You kind of just wake up one day and you're like, What am I going to do? This big big part of my life is gone.” This sense of loss was not easy to navigate, as she had to find a sense of purpose. She discussed her feelings after her last competition: “When you swim your last swim meet, you're kind of like, I'm not doing this anymore. What's my purpose? You really kind of falter and figure out like, what is my purpose? This has been my purpose for so long.

To mitigate this loss, Donna threw herself into finding a purpose upon retirement. After moving through a few different careers, she landed a full-time role in the swimming

industry as an Aquatics Director and Head Swim Coach. She feels she can stay involved in the swimming community, while taking on a new role within it.

For Donna, it was an easy decision to stay involved in the sport of swimming through a variety of different outlets, such as triathlons and masters swimming. During this journey of finding her new identity, she gained her confidence back, and worked on rebuilding her mental health: “I've stayed involved in the sport because it's a mental health thing. And it's what gives me confidence again. It's so important to me to be able to excel in my sport and makes me feel good about myself.”

Everyone had to navigate their loss of identity in a different way. For some, this process was more difficult due to a strong swimmer identity and being away from home. Coming from Brazil, Eduardo had thrown himself into his swimming identity and relied on his swimming support systems heavily. Losing this piece of him was very difficult, “It was very challenging for me, once I stopped swimming. Just to understand that I wasn't swimming anymore. It took a while for me to change the mindset of like, you are not an athlete anymore. You are retired.”

To work toward a new identity, Eduardo turned to exercise and working to a new career goal to fill this void: “What helped me after college, was CrossFit. I do CrossFit now.” Once Eduardo graduated, he started working towards his American citizenship. Upon obtaining citizenship, he was able to work toward his coveted goal of becoming a police officer. In building this identity, he threw himself wholeheartedly into being a police officer, “Being a police officer, it's helping me build a different identity.” He reflected on how it was similar to building his identity as swimmer saying “Being a

student athlete, you create that identity that people know you are on the swim team. You have that label. And whenever you don't have that label anymore, I felt lost.”

There were two participants who acknowledged their loss of their swimming identity; however, they didn't struggle with it nearly as much as the other participants. Both of these participants were female Division III swimmers. They both discussed how their career and life beyond the pool was their focus. Colleen discussed how she was ready to close the chapter of her life that was swimming saying, “It was 15 years of my life. It was weird, weird ending to a story, but it was time to close a chapter and start a new one.” Swimming gave Colleen many useful lessons, which “really have helped me in shaping how I run my everyday life.”

While swimming while still an important piece of her life, Sarah had a similar sentiment as Colleen. She felt the loss of her identity, but it wasn't a traumatic loss for her. She discussed how you shouldn't put all your worth into swimming, especially when you can join another swimming community in the future. She warned, “Your education does matter and getting a job after school does matter. Don't put all your eggs into swimming. Your job is going to be your number one reason why you are in college. Not swimming.” She reiterated the loss of identity, but implored other to remember that swimming is a lifelong community saying “You're gonna swim your last race ever as a collegiate swimmer but you can also join masters.”

Susan was one of the few who did not have an issue with identity loss as she transitioned from the sport of swimming. She reflected how easy it was for her to move on: “I was really into outdoor education. I was active in hiking and camping with



different groups. So if anything, I felt like I have more time and don't have to wake up at five in the morning for swim practice.” Susan had a different experience with the sport of swimming as she felt like she competed at a time when the collegiate swimming expectations were much less rigorous than today’s standards. She recalled how different swimming was saying: “We did do weights, we did have double workouts, we had a Saturday workout. It wasn't as intense as I see the activity level now for sport teams. You did have energy left over to go hiking or something.” She felt that swimming was just one part of her identity, but she had plenty of time and energy to do other things after practice. She called out the difference within swimming today, “I you just weren't taxing yourself enough to the point where you had to just flop down in a bed and never do anything else for the rest of the day after practice.”

Identity loss was prominent for many individuals as they moved from swimming into their full-time careers. This was something they had to navigate as they transitioned out of collegiate swimming and into their full-time roles. During the reporting process, it was clear that many of the swimmers had picked similar roles to transition into, which will be discussed more at length below.

### ***Careers and Full-Time Roles***

One of the biggest themes that emerged was how the participants were in an active role where they felt like they were giving back to the community or having an impact on those around them. The roles varied, but there were three individuals who went into the medical field (1 Division II Female, 2 Division III females). Five worked in the

Aquatics industry as either coaches, administrators or a combination of the two (1 Division I Male, 2 Division I Females, 1 Division 2 Male, and 1 Division III Female).

Another six participants worked in an educational/administrator role (2 Division I Males, 1 Division I Female, 2 Division II Females, 1 Division III Male). Two of the participants went into service roles, which included a Coast Guard Officer and a Police Officer (1 Division 2 Male, 1 Division III Male). And finally, one participant went into the accounting field (1 Division III Female). Each of these roles is different in how the swimmers had an effect on the people around them. However, it became quite clear how important this concept was and how much they loved their jobs.

There were two interviewees who ended up in the nursing field: Sydney and Anne. Sydney works in a hospital taking care of very sick or very injured children and babies: “I do work in two different hospitals. I really enjoy sick patients. The babies are where my heart is. I wanted something with a little more umph, so I work at another hospital for the PICU purposes.”

Sydney loves her role in helping sick people and wouldn't do any other career. She reiterated her love for her job saying “I definitely love it. I don't think I would do anything else.” Sydney also stays active in the sport of swimming, as she is a lifeguard instructor in her spare time. She loves being in teaching, educating and sharing her knowledge with others: and

Anne also works in the field of nursing. She started her career as an emergency nurse but has now moved on to being nursing faculty. She recalled, “Yes, I was a nurse for six years before I started teaching, and I worked primarily in the emergency

department.” While she loved working in the emergency department, it did take a toll on her both mentally and physically, which resulted in her transition to faculty. She discussed this change of pace, “I've only been at this current job for one year, and I really like it. It's much different than actually working in the emergency department. It's less stressful on my body. But it's still mentally challenging. I really like that.”

Education is an important part of Anne’s job, something that she takes very seriously. Daily, she is playing a vital role by teaching new nurse's critical skills. Because of her expertise in the nursing industry, she is qualified to teach a variety of courses and topics, such as “med surg, psychiatric nursing courses, and maternal child courses.”

Similar to Sydney, Anne is still involved in the swimming community as a coach. Giving back doesn’t stop with her nursing education. Anne decided she wanted to stay involved in swimming, preferably in way that wouldn’t physically hurt her. To stay involved, she turned to coaching. “Well, what better way to get back into it without re-injuring myself than to coach kids? So I started coaching in the fall of 2016. And I still coach now.”

The medical field was also a calling for another one of the participants. Colleen pursued a career in the medical field as a chiropractor. She explained her job simply as “I help people reduce their pain, increase their mobility, and have better quality of life.” She explains that being a swimmer who was injured played a huge part in why she wanted to be a chiropractor:

I think that being an athlete and getting injured all the time, influenced a lot because I was like, I'm broken. And so now I get fix people, so they're not broken

anymore. I feel like I also can speak to that too, because like, when I tell people my success story of how I came to be where I'm at or they read my profile, they're like, wow, like, you've been through it. Yeah, I've been through, I've lived it.

While Colleen is no longer involved in the sport of swimming, the sport was what propelled her toward her goal of helping others. She believes that her own struggle and injuries make her a better chiropractor. All three of these swimmers give back to people by being a part of the medical community. In some ways, they help heal sick and injured people. Alternatively, they also stay involved with swimming, sharing the love of the sport with the next generation.

While the first three participants were drawn to medicine, not all participants ended up in such an active, giving role. Some of the participants ended up in more administrative or educational roles, which allowed them to help people through sharing their knowledge and skills. Russell works as an educator of swim coaches, where he still has an impact on people, but through a less direct route. He discussed his role saying: “I work with people a lot less regularly. And that's become way more enjoyable. I really like helping people, but I like doing it in a way that I can do it on my own.”

Russell loves having the freedom to do what he needs, as it not only has improved his quality of work, but his quality of life. He also loves the role that he plays saying “I like that freedom. My quality of life and work life has definitely improved over the last couple of years. So I really appreciate that. And so yeah, in general, love my job.” Being able to impact people through education was a goal for some of the other participants as well.

Dan has a similar job where he is also able to help people through education. His new role enables him to reach swim coaches around the world saying, “Now I'm helping to do webinars. And I was on a podcast and apparently, I'm going to be teaching courses. So who knew? It's a pretty cool place to be right now.” Dan had been a swim coach for a long time before this new job. For many in the role of swim coach, he realized that there were other ways he could still impact and be a key player in the sport of swimming.

Before turning to his educational role, he was a swim coach for many years. He credited his swim coaching knowledge, as he felt it propelled him to the role he currently is in. One perk of his new job is how much of a larger audience he can reach, while challenging him in new and different ways. He explained, “It's amazing. So far, there are a lot of challenges and roadblocks in the way. And it's been very interesting to try to be creative to come up with ways around that in order to continue to run successful events.”

For him being on the other side of large events was very eye opening. He further explained, “It's very different to see how the sausage is made, to be on the back side of things and see all of the headaches and still be able to run an event where the participants don't realize how much of a dumpster fire it can be sometimes.” He takes pride in his work, as he constantly deals with satisfied customers. He explained this rational, “It means we're doing a good job if we can run something, leave it totally drained and exhausted. And then get the surveys afterwards with five stars from the majority of participants. That means that we did our job right.”

Susan was also influenced by her love of the sport, which kept her in the educational realm as well. Susan's last role before retirement was as a professor. “My last

job was University of British Columbia. And I taught in the Faculty of Education, in curriculum studies and in Kinesiology.” Prior to this job, Susan had a career that has spanned over 50 years. She had a variety of roles that were all in the educational realm: She listed off some of her roles, “I was an actual high school teacher and coach at one point. I worked for fitness companies, and primarily fitness for kids, and did a variety of coaching.” Eventually, she went on to earn her Ph.D. at the University of Georgia. This then catapulted her to a role at the University of Wisconsin in the kinesiology department.

As her career continued to progress, Susan taught a plethora of different classes and courses. She was very passionate about teaching, sharing her knowledge of the outdoors and mentoring. Over her long and industrious career, she estimates that she taught 100s of students. She reflected, “I taught some courses in education. One of my specialties was multicultural education. Then I taught the courses that teachers needed to take to get certified.”

Aquatics courses were her passion, and Susan always ended up going back to this love. She explained “I’ve always seen aquatics as my strength and outdoor education. I often taught different types of aquatic and outdoor education courses in terms of activity courses that I’ve taught.” Of course, being a PhD, Susan was also qualified to teach a variety of other courses. She also taught research courses and worked with people who wanted to become teachers and professors.

Andie was another participant who ended up in the educational realm and works with students daily. She is one of the few participants that did not love her job. Currently,

she works as a first-grade teacher, which allows her to have her summers off and take care of her kids. “I am currently a first-grade teacher. I am also a single mom of three kids.” While juggling all these different roles, Andie is another person who is still involved within the swimming community. She both trains and works with younger swimmers:

I also train competitively for swimming. I coach the littles mostly. And then yeah, I mean, I have loved swimming with them, they accept me like, I'm like one of their group when I swim with them so, and it's really neat to listen to them and to like, kinda remember, you know, reminisce of what it was like back then.

Education is one of the ways that many of the swammers had a meaningful impact. For some, they educated students in new skills, while others taught within the realm of the sport of swimming. Either way, they had an influence on the next generation, and played a part in shaping them.

Looking at the participants thus far, many stay engaged with the sport of swimming from afar. However, some of the participants have ended up staying involved in the aquatics realm through full-time careers. Hans and Donna both coach and work as administrators for either their pools or their clubs. Both have slightly different positions, but they both serve in hands-on roles and while playing an extremely active part in swimming.

Hans is a site coordinator for his local swim team, which means that he plays numerous roles. Some of his responsibilities include being a coach on the pool deck, while juggling administrative expectations and overseeing the part-time coaches. While

he is currently trying to transition into firefighting, he discussed what he currently does on a daily basis: “I am on the pool deck. The site is small enough that it's kind of an all-roads lead to me. I coach, I take care of all the admin work for the site, I coordinate with the head coach.” Hans has a very hands-on approach for his site as he is always on the deck running workouts “I am on deck. I am specifically in charge of our upper groups. I always have assistant coaches rotating in but I'm on deck coaching at least one of those groups once twice, sometimes three to three days a week.”

Donna has a similar position, but at a country club. Her official title is Director of Aquatics and Head Swim Coach. Donna works year-round and her position fluctuates based on the seasons. “In the spring, I'm responsible for hiring, training, supervising, and scheduling the lifeguard staff. In addition, I do manage all aspects of the swim team. We have 160 members on our team. And I do all the registrations, the preseason planning.”

Donna also helps oversee swim lessons, manage pool chemicals, and oversee each of her assistant coaches in the summer. During the winter months, she does more mundane tasks like updating her handbooks and policies and mapping out her plans for the upcoming season. She absolutely loves her job, specifically the aspects where she gets to train her staff and share the love of the sport with her swimmers.

These two participants felt fortunate to be able to stay in the sport of swimming, which allowed them to help mold the next generation of swimmers. Not only are they able to help them athletically but are able to serve as mentors and role models for many within their communities.



When it came to being a role model and protector, the next two participants took this very seriously. Eduardo is currently working as a police officer and Chris is an active-duty officer in the Coast Guard. Eduardo and Chris both discussed how they serve people and are a part of a much bigger mission and community. While Eduardo only recently transitioned into the role of police officer, he shared his love and excitement for the job. He feels he can help and protect others on a daily basis saying, “Oh yes, I do love it. It's long hours, but I really love it. It's fun. Everything. Every day is something different. Talking to people and helping people.”

As an active part of the military, Chris feels that he is serving with his peers and is a part of something much bigger than himself. When he first left college, he was serving missions aboard boats in Alaska, and working with a small crew. Over the years, Chris elected to stay in the Coast Guard longer than his minimum obligation. While he is no longer on a boat, he hopes to serve a full twenty-year career. Currently, Chris works in an administrative position to ensure veterans are receiving their healthcare, but reflected at length on some his past roles, and how rewarding it was saying “I stayed longer than I absolutely had to pay back. So, I'm here by choice.” He further explained how much the Coast Guard and its missions resonated with him, “I enjoy the missions of the Coast Guard. The people I get to serve with are amazing. So being able to give back to them in this way is really rewarding.”

The interviews demonstrated how each participant felt they were having an positive influence or having a meaningful effect on others. Giving back was displayed by dedicating their lives to the medical field, through teaching and shaping the next

generation or by serving and giving back to the community at large. Whether the participants realized it or not, in many of their situations, swimming did have some sort of influence in their pursued roles. Some stayed in the sport completely as their full-time jobs, while some felt like the traits they gained from the sport helped them to be better workers. This notion ties into the fourth theme that arose, which was the heavy influence swimming had on the lives of the participants.

### **Swimming Influence and Identity**

The final themes helps to answer research question two: What are the life post-sport career outcomes of former swimmers who competed in NCAA Division I, II and III? It is clear that even in their lives post-sport, swimming played a major role in the decisions the swimmers made, the careers they pursued and the activities that they were a part of. When the interviews were conducted, 14 of the participants were still actively involved in swimming. On average, the participants reported the average number of years they had been involved in the sport of swimming was 35. The lowest amount someone had been involved in the sport was only 15 years, with the highest end of the range coming in at over 50 years.

What this involvement looked like varied from person to person. As discussed in the previous section, some were involved in aquatics as their full-time career. Others coached part-time or still swam at a lower level. Regardless of their involvement, it was apparent how much of an influence swimming both had and continues to have in the participants' lives. In the following section, I will discuss the strong swimming identity

that most participants identified. Then I will discuss how different experiences within the sport of swimming shaped these individuals.

### ***Strong Swimming Identity***

A strong swimming identity was already held before participants even stepped on campus. Swimming was not an activity the swimmers started while in college. Rather, they were recruited to swim for their respective colleges after building a formidable swimming career in high school. This identity resulted in a deeply entrenched swimming identity, which carried on through their collegiate swimming careers. When asking the participants how they would introduce themselves and how they would identify while in college, many discussed how swimmer was the first thing that came to mind. Veronica recalls introducing herself saying “Veronica and swimming, like, that’s was who I was. That was my identity. That’s how people knew me. I was the swimmer.”

Swim Coach had a similar story about how swimming played a huge role in her life. As a Division I swimmer and someone whose family was heavily involved in the sport of swimming, she recalls how it was a constant in her life from a young age. Even before becoming a full-time coach after graduation, she shared how she introduced herself while in college saying: “I always said, I’m a swimmer, because I love swimming, and I loved being in the water. That was always the consistent thing in my life. So I want to, I always introduce myself as a swimmer.”

The swimming identity was very strong, especially with another Division I swimmer. SwimForeverFast also discussed how swimming was always a part of their life. Their family was also heavily involved in the sport and they don’t recall existing

without swimming having an influence in their life: “I swam since I was four years old. So I think for me, swimming has always been, as I can remember a huge part of my life, like I don't remember life without swimming.” This identity was prominent, not only when they were a Division I swimmer, but carried on into their career today. Swimming went as far as to influence their career today, as SwimForeverFast currently runs a successful swim coaching business.

Russell reflected on the multiple identities he held while on campus. Despite these multiple identities, he felt that swimmer was the one that held the strongest prominence and prestige. Russell was a Division I swimmer, while juggling being a Resident Assistant and an Aerospace Engineering major. While he enjoyed the other roles he held, he knew being a swimmer was in the forefront of his identity and gave him higher social status, “Swimming has or being an athlete has the most, I would say, demands the most immediate respect and status. So, I think I relate to that the most.”

Swimming was a primary identified for another one of the Division I swimmers. Hans discussed how he felt swimming was the most primary role he held while in school. While he credits swimming for getting him to college and graduating, he said he felt like himself and others majored in swimming while on campus. He said “I was one of those guys who went to college to major in swimming. So, frankly, I was not a very good student, my swimming was always what I was going to prioritize.”

Hans discussed how prominent his swimming identity was at length. For him, being a swimmer was a source of pride and he took great pleasure in telling others of his social status saying:

I was definitely finding any opportunity I could to shoehorn that I swim in college into the conversation. If I'm being honest with myself, it was a little bit of vanity, but in large part, it was recognition of the positive impact that the pursuit of high-level athletics had on me as a person. I, frankly, would describe it as easily the single most formative experience of my life. Once in a while, I wonder, what would my life have been like if I had just gotten to college to be a college student. Obviously, you never know, but I don't think I would have graduated college if it weren't for swimming in college.

Across the board, a female Division I swimmer reported her deeply engrained swimming identity as well. Andie reported how her swimming identity was everything and a central part of her life: I lived, breathed swimming. I mean, that was my only friend. Swimmers were who I lived with in the dorms.” As previously discussed, Andie was one who struggled when she graduated from college and lost her swimming identity. It took her many years to overcome that loss, and now participates in masters swimming, with a goal to compete at the upcoming master’s nationals.

The strong swimming identity was also prominent in swimmers in other divisions. Coach Mike was a Division II swimmer who also had a deeply entrenched swimming identity. His family worked in swimming, and he continues that legacy today. One of the key components that he credits swimming for is giving him a positive attitude and being the person to always uplift the group and make any situation better. “As I look back at my swim career, I really was a lifter and one providing forward motion, propulsion to the group. Very rarely was I a drag or a weight and my teammates would tell you the same.”

Swimming was still a primary identity for several other participants; however it wasn't their most important identity. For some who participated in Division III, they were able to easily leave the identity of swimmer behind. This was because they felt their swimming career was over, a chapter was closed, and it was time to move on to the next phase in life.

Chris spoke about how important his swimming identity was, but his cohort within the Coast Guard Academy was more of his main identity, "Yes, I was a swimmer, but it was certainly less important in my college identity than it was I was in my high school identity." He explained how other factors were more important in his identity, saying "If I was introducing to myself in college, I would be more likely to say that I was in the Gulf cohort. For whatever reason, our home states were important for identity. So I'd say I was from Maryland."

Division III swimmers continued the trend of having a lower swimming identity. While swimming was still an important part of their lives, it was not their main identity nor focus. Colleen felt it was more important for her to focus on her academic identity and completing her senior year thesis. She discussed how academics should always come first saying "That comes first, that should always be first. Yeah, academics are important. Unfortunately, unless you're Michael Phelps, swimming is not going to give you a career."

When it came to her main identity, Sarah, another Division III swimmer, had a similar comment. She was extremely adamant about keeping swimming as her secondary identity, saying "It's like a slim percentage of making it to the Olympics and being a

professional swimmer. So it's more just about having fun with your friends and swimming. You should be putting effort into schoolwork.” Sarah felt it was more important to put the focus on what comes after college, rather than being hung up on swimming.

Overall, when looking at all the participants, 13 discussed having a deeply entrenched swimming identity. Those who identified themselves with this moniker were from all Divisions and were all sexes. The four who did not have as strong of a swimming identity were one Division II female, two female Division III swimmers and one Male Division III swimmer. Swimming was still an important part of their identities, but other roles became more prominent during their collegiate swimming years.

Swimming also influenced many of the experiences in the swimmers lives. This next section will focus on how experiences within the swimming community influenced. Some of the decisions were in regard to their career preparation, while other decisions were made in their lives post-sport.

### ***Experiences Related to Swimming***

Swimming was a constant influence on many of the participants, not only from a career standpoint, but from an educational standpoint. It was a constant throughout so many stories and held an influential role in their lives. Below I highlight some of the key takeaways participants discussed and demonstrated just how interwoven swimming was in their lives.

Being a swimmer takes dedication and requires collegiate swimmers to be able to juggle many commitments and pressures. Anne credited swimming for giving her

multiple transferable skills, which helped her to be a better nurse. She discussed what transferable skills she learned over her swimming career, including time management. She described some of the pressures of being a nurse and how swimming helped her to deal with the chaos of being a nurse, “You have five or six patients, and you need to manage your time to get everything done. Working well under pressure, knowing you only have so much time to get everything done - there's only 24 hours in a day.”

As many swimmers know, swimming can be a difficult and unforgiving sport. Being able to walk off the pool deck and continue with her day was something Anne credited to swimming. As a nurse who deals with sick patients, she needed to be able to disconnect and return back to the floor to continue patient care, despite it being tough at times. She recalled the ability to leave things on the pool deck, saying “Knowing even though things are hard, tomorrow's a new day. You had a bad practice or a bad swim, you're gonna have a bad shift, or a bad day at work. You just gotta leave that at the door.”

Transferable skills were something Chris discussed in his interview. He credited swimming for teaching him how to remove emotions from tough conversations and being able to take criticism. In his role in the Coast Guard, others relied on him to provide strength and leadership. To become a strong leader, he had to be able to discuss his performance without emotion and learn where he could improve from others: “Being able to discuss a performance without being too emotionally involved is like a big win.” Chris also felt that he gained a huge realization as a swimmer. One of his biggest takeaways came from comparing himself to fellow swimmers. He used to get hung up on others and



their performance, but one day he realized everyone is at a different point in their journey of life. This is a concept he continues to apply on a daily basis:

And I think that is like an important maturing process of the sport that you realize we're, we're built different, we've assigned different importance to swimming and working out and versus social or academic or whatever else we have going in our lives. And that is a lesson you take moving on in the real world. Everyone's in a different spot. And even though you're both at work today, and you're wearing your business clothes, someone is not at the same level as you and maybe you need to take a little slack or cut them a little slack, or I think that was an important maturing kind of realization.

One final participant credits swimming for toughening her up. Not only could she cope better in tough situations, but Andie used swimming to help shape her time management skills, among other key traits. She said, "I think swimming was good for definitely toughening me up. Definitely teaching me how to schedule things, learning to get along with others and being in close confinement with others."

Swimming is a valuable sport. Not only did it allow the participants to stay active, it allowed them to get a college education and gain important transferable skills. Being able to mature and grow throughout their journeys allowed many of the swimmers to continue to stay involved with the sport in different ways. They were able to take a step back and figure out their new roles and find a way to stay a part of the supportive swimming community. For this next group, they found a way to stay involved in swimming without having to put their bodies on the line.

At a local level, there are many opportunities to stay involved with swimming. Sydney discussed how she returned to her roots to get involved in swimming again. While she has a full-time role, she works at her local pool. This was the same pool she started swimming at when she was five. Because of this tie, she still finds time to teach swim lessons and teaching local kids how to be lifeguards, “I certify kids on teaching lessons. And that's my favorite thing. I love teaching kids. It's the ones that want to be instructors. And I just, I love it. I think that's why I'm still around with the kids.”

Staying involved with the sport does not have to involve coaching. Susan stays involved by swimming in different places, such as lakes and oceans while wearing a wetsuit. She credits swimming to being a key part of having positive mental health. This was something that she never realized until COVID shut down her local pools. She credits swimming, saying “And through COVID, swimming saved my life. I had no idea how important swimming actually was, until COVID closed the pools, and there was no opportunity to get into the water.” She reflected on her love and peace from swimming saying “I recognized that swimming gives me peace. It's a big part of my mental health - being in the water.”

Others stayed in the sport for a different reason. While love for swimming was also a big part of why Hans decided to coach, there was more to his story. He admitted he felt he had unfinished business in the swimming world he wanted to address: “I will admit, part of the reason I went into coaching was because I felt I had unfinished business.”

Hans also talked about many of the fond memories he credits to the sport of swimming. He used to be a part of a summer league during his teenage years, which is notorious for having a fun, laidback atmosphere. He swam as long as he could and coached once he aged out. These summer league memories were also a big part of what pushed him into the role of full-time coach/ site coordinator:

I would paint my whole body - war paint and that sort of thing. I took some campaign poster board and an aluminum pole and turned it into like a big battle axe. I'm waving it around the pool scaring some of the little kids. But anyways, that's how I fell in love with coaching.

Swimming involvement can come in many different ways. For Sarah, she is currently involved with the sport on a part-time basis as a coach. She wishes that she had been exposed to different ways to stay involved with the sport, as she might have found a way to pursue a career in swimming. In her interview, she lamented at the lack of education on how to get a career in sports without having to be a coach. In her opinion, Sarah felt that if more alumni knew of non-coaching opportunities to stay involved with swimming, they might take advantage. She called attention to learning about different ways she could have an accounting career in sports saying: "Can we have other jobs that you could do? Like finance at a swim team, or at a pool or a Parks and Rec kind of thing. Present more of a wide range of opportunities within sports."

Sarah makes the valid point of how vast the sporting community is. Not everyone has to be on the pool deck in order to stay involved with swimming. For the next set of

participants, swimming completely shaped their career paths, rather than just having an influence on them.

Swim Coach's entire identity is tied to being a swim coach. She told the story of how she came back and took over her club team. This was the same team she had grown up on and where she met her husband. In her case, taking on the team was both a challenge and a point of pride, saying "They didn't have a head coach, they just had parents that were volunteering. And I was like, you know what, you guys need help this. I didn't want to see this club team fall apart."

Swimming also influenced the career choice of Coach Mike. His family had been a large part of the swimming community and had instilled their love of the sport in him. While he initially had an office job, the company wasn't doing well. Rather than wait to be laid off, he accepted the challenge of building a failing swim team:

I took the full-time job of head coach of a team out here with 70 kids. And I said, I said "What's your biggest obstacle? What's happening with the team?" And they said, "We're \$30,000 in debt. We might close our doors. We might not renew a pool lease next year. But if you're willing to give it a shot, we'll hire you and see what you can do." So, I got busy. And that was the beginning of August. By the beginning of September, we had doubled the team in one month. ☹️

SwimForeverFast had a similar experience where their entire life was deeply involved in the sport of swimming. At this point, they have been involved with the sport for over 30 years and have big plans to expand and build their coaching business more. When it came to picking their career, it was a natural progression to take the next step

into coaching professionally. They recalled: “I don't remember life without swimming. So the transition into coaching was pretty seamless.”

Swimming has played a role in so many of the participants' lives. For some it helped them to build transferable skills for their future careers. Others used swimming as a community to stay a part of, without having to compete at an elite level. The final group of participants continue to stay entrenched and involved in the sport at a professional coaching level.

### **Chapter Summary**

To summarize, this chapter has discussed the four themes that presented themselves during the analysis process. Research Question 1, which related to the participants the career preparation, had two main themes emerge. First, the theme of trailblazing and finding their own path became clear. Many of the participants had to figure out their careers in their own unique ways. While they used many different resources on campus, they also had to figure out what came in life-post sport through their own unique journeys.

The second theme for R1 was the support that each participant reported. Some of the support systems included family, friends, coaches, and the swimming community itself. The participants also reported how they needed more support and how they wished they could have taken care of themselves better care of themselves during the transition process.

The third theme was tied to R2 and what their lives looked like post-sport. To summarize, many of the swimmers took jobs that were both actively involved in their

communities and allowed them to have an impact on the people around them. Based on the conversations had, many of the participants wanted roles that allowed them to completely throw themselves into a new identity. Alternatively, many of the careers that the swimmers took on were influenced by the sport of swimming. This led to the fourth theme, which was the far-reaching impact of swimming.

Many of the participants cited how strongly their identities were tied to the sport of swimming. When it came time to transition to their careers, it was very difficult for many of them to navigate that transition. For many of the swimmers, swimming was still deeply engrained in their day-to-day lives, with 14 total still being involved in the sport in some way to this day. While some swimmers only credited swimming with giving them transferable skills, others found various ways to stay involved in the sport on a part time basis. Others made swimming their entire careers and continue to professionally coach today.

To conclude this study, I now turn to the final chapter. Here, I will briefly summarize the study, its findings and how the knowledge can compare to the literature. I will also discuss implications for practice as well as research that can be done to further the knowledge of the swimmer community.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

To conclude, this qualitative study sought to learn more about the career preparation of Division I, II and III former collegiate swimmers. I also explored more of the former collegiate swimmers' life-post sport outcomes. This research was guided by the following two research questions:

Q1: How do former swimmers at NCAA Divisions I, II and III institutions describe their career experiences related to career preparation?

Q2: What are the life post-sport career outcomes of former swimmers who competed in NCAA Division I, II and III?

To capture the data, 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Each interview was virtually conducted through Teams and lasted an average of forty minutes. To participate in this interview, the individual had to be used some of their four years of NCAA eligibility, have competed in the sport of swimming at a Division I, II or III institution and graduated in or before 2018. To ensure that swim coaches did not saturate the sample, only one-third of participants interviewed were professional swim coaches. Multiple professions were represented, including Doctors, Nurses, Administrators, Swim Coaches, Police Officers, Coast Guard Officers and more.

When the call for participants was posted, it was sent out to over 50,000 individuals. One reminder email was sent, with interviews taking place over a month's time span. As the call for participants went out to the swimming community, many of the participants were still involved in the sport, through coaching, masters' competition, or involvement in the aquatics industry. The population included: Six Division I athletes

with three males, two females and one non-binary individual, five Division II athletes comprised of three women and two men, while Division III was represented by four women and two men.

In this chapter, I further discuss the findings of what career preparation looked like for the former collegiate swimmers and what their lives look like in life-post sport. It is important to note that no two journeys were the same. Many of the swimmers took pride in forging their own career paths as they navigated college, collegiate swimming, and their academics. When they retired from swimming, their loss of their swimming identity was profound. 13 of the participants took time to discuss just how life changed and how hard it was to lose their swimming identity. This fueled their desire to obtain another career that could offer another identities for them to put all of themselves in, as well as to allow themselves to continue to have a meaningful life with a purpose, with visible influence on others.

The findings provide a comparison with the literature presented in Chapter Two. I then turn to discuss the implications for both the research and recommended practices. Some of the suggestions for future research include doing more studies on collegiate swimmers, and learning more about what happens to collegiate swimmers in their lives post-sport on a larger scale. For recommended practice, there is a need to support swimmers across all divisions during their college years for a more comprehensive career preparation. There is also a need to support collegiate swimmers to better deal with their transitions from very focused student-athlete to being a swimmer with a professional career. To conclude, I close the chapter with a personal reflection and summary.



## **Discussion**

Many findings emerged from this study, but I turn my focus to three in particular. First is the strong swimming identity that many of the participants discussed at length. This is not surprising as the call for participants went out to the swimming community, resulting in having interviewees more involved with the sport. Of the seventeen participants, 14 of them were still involved in the sport of swimming in some capacity.

The second point of discussion is the transition the swimmers underwent and landing their roles upon graduation. Many of the swimmers felt that they lost a key part of themselves when they retired from swimming. This resulted in them taking on roles that consume their entire identities while giving back to others. This part of the discussion on how collegiate swimmers transition to post college swimmers with professional careers will be guided by Schlossberg's theory of transition and 4S System (Anderson et al., 2022).

The final part of the discussion is how individualized the career preparation process for collegiate swimmers should be, and in addition, how career preparation never truly ends for everyone. This echoes the life-span, life-space theory of career development of Super, Savickas and Super (Brown & Brooks, 1996). A person's roles in life are constantly changing and evolving, such as becoming a spouse or a parent. The same applies to career pursuits and how the importance of career in one's life could vary as their roles in life change (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Most of the individuals in this study were wrapping up their Growth phase and moving into more of the Exploration phase, according to Super, Savickas and Super's life-span life space theory of career

development. This will be discussed more at length to give the full theoretical perspective.

### ***Identity Loss Among Swimmers***

One of the most compelling findings was the identity loss the swimmers reported. All 17 participants felt very strongly about their swimmer identity, in terms of the time they spent on the sports in their life. Four of the participants cited a lower swimmer identity compared to their counterparts, but still held swimming as one of their main identities. For many in the study, swimming had been a part of the participant's earlier memories and still held a strong piece of their identity today. While they were in college, they spent time with other swimmers, lived with them and were friends primarily with the swim team. This echoes the study done by Jayakumar & Comeaux (2001). They discussed how strong athletic identities may occur when student-athletes socialize, study, and have similar majors, although in their study they argued it can sometimes lead to social isolation.

These strong swimming identities may seem surprising to the reader, especially as swimming is a non-revenue sport, and none of the participants competed professionally after their collegiate swimming years. In this study, the average amount of time that the participants reported as being involved in the sport was around 35 years. This number includes before, during, and after their collegiate swimming careers.

While swimming collegiately, it was expected that the swimmers spent 20 hours per week practicing. Outside of practice and competition, they were found spending time with their peers on the swim team, working extensively with their coaches and athletic

support staff, while juggling their academic and athletic responsibilities. It is no wonder that the participants all identified themselves as swimmers first, with many of them holding that identity as a badge of honor. During the interviews, some laughed while describing how they smelt like chlorine wherever they went and were dressed from head to toe in their swim team gear.

Literature has pointed out that identity loss affects all student-athletes across all sports (Adler & Adler, 1987). This loss of identity is typically more difficult to cope with when athletes report a stronger athletic identity, particularly one that has been entrenched in their lives for a long period of time (Harrison Jr et al., 2013; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Lu et al., 2018). Of the 17 participants, 13 talked at length about how strong of an athletic identity they had. Despite hanging up their suit and goggles at the collegiate level, swimming was an important part of the swimmers' lives and continues to remain a prevalent part of it today.

When looking at the strong swimming identity, it is important to note that the call for participants went out to swim coaches and to the swimming community at large. Seeing as the call went out to the swimming community, it is not surprising to see this strong swimming identity within the participants. For many in this study, they discussed how swimming was a lifelong sport and almost all of the participants still swam or coach this day. The outcome of this study might have been different if the call for participants had gone out in a different manner. One way to remedy this in the future is by reaching out to alumni associations and seeing if they have contact information of their former

swimmers. This would open the pool of potential interviewees to a much broader audience of swimmers with other occupations and life post-sport outcomes.

The findings in this study echo what was found by Sparkes (1998). Sparkes identified a swimmer who still had a high athletic identity after having to forcibly retire from the sport due to an injury. This strong swimming identity was considered an Achilles Heel, as it was holding the swimmer back from pursuing more in their life post-sport. Of the seventeen participants, only one swimmer, Andie, reported extensive difficulties during their transition process. While the transition itself might have been difficult to navigate, ultimately everyone transitioned into a new identity and a meaningful full-time career.

One important gap to note is that there did not seem to be a significant difference between genders when it came to looking at athletic identity. Of the ten females in this study, only three females displayed a lower swimming identity. I would not classify them as having a low swimming identity overall, just lower than other females in this study, as the participants indicated having fewer struggles moving away from her swimming identity when it came time for them to transition. These results disprove Sturm et al. (2011) and Meyer (1990) who found that females in all sports often have a much weaker athletic identity. On the opposite side of the spectrum, of the seven males in this study, six showed a very strong swimming identity.

This matter of identity loss ties into the second discussion topic, which surrounds the careers the swimmers found themselves in, which for many were active, meaningful roles within their communities. Guided by Schlossberg's theory of transition (Anderson

et al., 2022), the following discussion explored how swimmers moved through their transitions and navigated landing their careers.

### ***Transition From Swimmer to Swammer Using The 4S System***

Inevitably, all seventeen of the swammers had to transition out of the sport of swimming and into a new full-time career upon their graduation from college. To explain more of the transition process, I turn to Schlossberg's theory of transition and the 4S System (Anderson et al., 2022). The 4S stands for Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies. The Situation is the first part of the 4S system. From Schlossberg's perspective, the situation is the trigger and timing of the transition. A situation involves what people in that transition process are capable of controlling, how one's role is changing and how long it takes, the amount of stress it brings and the previous experience with the transition itself (Anderson et al., 2022).

When looking at the situation of the swammers in this study, all their transitions were triggered by the same event: their retirement from collegiate swimming. For fifteen of the participants, they were forced to transition when their swimming eligibility ran out. Only two of the participants in this study elected to not use all four years of swimming eligibility and ended swimming to transition on their own terms. For everyone in this study, their transition was inevitable, and an expected event.

The Situation shaped many aspects of the transition. In the previous discussion, many participants discussed their identity loss, and how difficult it was for them to transition into a new role. Many things were out of the control of the participants as they navigated the situation. In many of the interviews, it was clear that participants expressed

having had many emotions including stress, anxiety, fear, anger, and sadness during the transition process. While this situation was unable to be totally controlled, many of the swimmers worked diligently to find careers that would allow them to build an entirely new identity as well as to fully commit themselves in. This resulted in their roles drastically changing from what they knew before to something entirely new.

Some, like Colleen, Sarah and Chris were excited for this transition and role change. They looked forward to changing their roles and identities upon their retirement from swimming, and it was a clear goal they had in mind during all four years of the athletic and academic careers. From their perspectives, they knew they had much more to look forward to in life post-sport once they navigated their transitions. During the interviews, Colleen and Chris discussed how their roles came to consume their entire lives. Chris is an active-duty member of the Coast Guard and plans to stay enlisted until he is no longer eligible to serve, around the 20-year mark. Colleen's path was slightly different. She is a Chiropractor who owns and runs her own practice. She has dedicated her life to helping sick and injured individuals to recover from injuries and to live a pain-free life.

Each of the participants had to work through their transition in their own unique way, as defined by the 4S System (Anderson et al., 2022). No two individuals will have the same journey, and they must work through their transition process independently. What next factors into the 4S System is the Self, which turns inwardly to look at the individual (Anderson et al., 2022).

The second S is Self, which considers the characteristics of the person undergoing the transition (Anderson et al., 2022). There were a wide range of participants in this study who had different abilities, personalities, levels of resilience and adaptability, among many other admirable traits. When looking at the different versions of the Self, all three NCAA Divisions were represented, three genders included, and many different stories were shared. All the individuals had graduated at least 5 years prior so they could look back and reflect on their career preparation and lives post-collegiate swimming.

There are many ways to describe the Self that emerged during this study. Many participants were outgoing and not intimidated by any challenges that came their way. For instance, SwimForeverFast, has built their own business in a niche sector that extends their swimmer identity into a social enterprise. Others embraced navigating career preparation and finding their own unique path to a career. This held true in the stories told by Coach Mike and Hans, whose careers took many twists and turns, before landing in the roles they are in today. Throughout many of the stories, there was sense of comradery, giving back to the next generation of swimmers and swammers as well as being a part of something bigger than themselves that emerged. Several participants, such as Veronica and Sarah spoke about how they wanted to help the swimmers on their alma maters' teams to navigate their transition.

While the age range of the participants varied, many were passionate about their roles and careers. Several swammers, including Donna and Eduardo, discussed their commitment to making a tangible impact on those around them. In Donna's story, she discussed how much she had received from the sport of swimming. Her goal with her

career was to give back and teach others the same love she felt for the sport. In Eduardo's case, he felt the sense of support, and wanted to pass along this selflessness and sense of community to others. In both these stories, the swimmers demonstrated their selflessness and their commitment to the next generation, not only of swimmers but people as well.

Further reflecting on the Self represented, each of the participants was resilient and faced their futures differently. While fear and anxiety were some common initial reactions, they quickly matured and overcame hurdles. Andie was a participant who overcame much difficulty in her transition. She was filled with anger and resentment, ultimately ending up going down a dark path of addiction. Andie was eager to share her story of career preparation or lack thereof and encourage others to not make the same mistakes she did.

Another sense of Self that presented itself was the concept of self-reliance. Many of the participants took an additional step to seek support while on-campus to help them maneuver their career preparation and subsequent transition. Reflecting inwardly, I argued that many of the participants, including Anne and Veronica demonstrated willingness to seek out help by attending tutoring sessions and seeking other academic support. Others in the study, such as Susan, Sarah, and Sydney, showed persistence by making their schedules fit internships or part-time jobs while juggling swimming. Further interpersonal skills were shown when they worked to expand their networks.

As demonstrated in the interviews, swimmers are a tough bunch, showing resilience and adaptability among other crucial traits within their Self. The stories in this study confirmed the positive traits swimmers gain as part of being a student-athlete. In



previous studies, some of the skills student-athlete possess included: being results oriented, coachable, and willing to learn, time management, can perform under pressure, values teamwork, self-motivated, ability to multitask, discipline, sacrifice, ambition, dedication, integrity, leadership abilities, perseverance, teamwork, a strong work ethic and drive to succeed among many other desirable traits (Duderstadt, 2009; Henderson et al., 2006; Long & Caudill, 1991; *Marketing Your Athletic Skills: How Playing Collegiate Sports Can Help You Land a Job*, n.d; Ryan, 1989; Soshnick, 2013; Williams, 2013).

Throughout the interviews, swimmers showed these desirable traits. Some dedicated the time to attend extra career preparation, such as Veronica and Donna. Others, such as Dan and Thomas adapted and persevered when their internships didn't work out or they changed their career paths to better suit their futures. Still others, such as Russell, showed a strong work ethic and a drive to succeed.

One final component of the Self is viewing it through a sociological lens. Goffman (2002) views the Self as a performance an individual puts on. The person acts outwardly in a specific role to gain the acceptance of the others around them, while inwardly having their own internal thoughts, feelings, and persona. In Goffman's (2002) view, there is a setting in which the individual performs, and the act of dramatization, where the individual plays a role. In this dissertation, it is apparent that while the participants were swimming, they played many roles. For most, the biggest role they were playing was the role of swimmer and student-athlete.

Based on the data, it is apparent that for many, the role of swimmer was a performance they loved both inwardly and outwardly. Many discussed their love for the

sport and totally immersed themselves in their performances. Once their role as swimmers ended and they shifted into a new role, this forced them to adapt their performance. For many, they shifted into new roles that consumed their identities. Again, these roles were performances that they loved. These new roles allowed the Self to give back and have a meaningful effect on the others around them and in their communities.

Further, many continued to play the role of a swimmer, but in a different way. Some adapted their performances to become part-time coaches. Others got involved in aquatics and teaching. Still others went back to performing as a competing swimmer, although at a much lower level. This concept of Self takes into account more of the person, their thoughts, persona, emotions and performance, whereas the concept of Self from Schlossberg is based much more on the traits of the individual swimmer. Closely tying into the Self is the concept of Support, the third S. Many of the swimmer relied heavily on their support systems for guidance and strength while navigating their transitions.

Support is the third S within Schlossberg's theory (Anderson et al., 2022). Support comes in a variety of different ways, including from family, friends, the community, and the institution itself (Anderson et al., 2022). The participants in this study discussed the support they received, which came from numerous fronts.

For many, they discussed how their families were their biggest supporters. Family helped them to choose their major, choose their career path, and were the swimmer's biggest cheerleaders both inside and outside of the pool. This study confirmed the findings of many studies that asserted that those who get support from their family and

coaches often make better plans for their lives post-sport and get needed help during their transition process (Vilanova & Puig, 2016; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004).

Family didn't only mean blood relatives. One of the participants created his own family in the United States and went on to marry the person who supported him throughout his collegiate swimming career.

Friends and teammates also provided support in different ways. Some teammates were supporters from the pool deck and helped their teammates get through tough practices, such as in the stories of Thomas and Coach Mike. Many of the swimmers in this study were still friends with people they swam with during their collegiate days, demonstrated in the stories of Swim Coach and Veronica. Friends were also helpful when navigating tough classes. Participants shared how their friends helped them study, gave them encouragement, and were there throughout many different aspects of the swimmers' journeys. Seeing as many of the well-supported participants were successful in their career transition and all held full-time roles, the finding of this study confirms what Monda et al. (2015) asserted in their study of all student-athletes that those who had strong support systems and clear academic goals were likely to be the most successful.

Support also came at an institutional level. Some of the participants, such as Veronica and Donna discussed how they utilized on-campus resources, such as career centers, for resume writing and prepping for interviews. Others, such as Sydney spoke about her coach proctored exams while on the road at swim meets. Still others, such as Eduardo and Anne, reported how athletic trainers and free tutoring helped them to succeed.

Throughout the interview process, very few participants discussed their institutional support. Of the 17 participants, only 10 alluded to the help they received from on-campus resources. This finding supports numerous studies, which discussed how student-athletes tend to underutilize their on-campus resources and can lack maturity when planning for their future careers (Martens & Cox, 2000; McQuown et al., 2010; Watson, 2005). This is an area that can be improved on by making simple changes, such as bringing awareness to resources on campus, allowing swimmers the autonomy and time to figure out and pursue careers, and enforcing the 20-hour rule so there is ample time to pursue life outside of swimming. Institutional support can also be improved by offering on-campus programming, such as the Life Skills Program, which is sponsored by the NCAA (NCAA CHAMPS/ Life Skills, 2018)

One final place that provided support was the swimming community itself. This is a very broad term, and based on the interviews, it can be argued that the swimming community is made up of family, friends, peers, coaches, and the institution itself. Regardless of how the swimming community was defined, the participants made it clear that it is lifelong and exists wherever these swimmers continued their lives and careers.

Susan is an excellent example of how the swimming community is life long. She was a participant in the 65+ age range, and still competes in masters swimming and coaches today. In one of her reflections, Susan spoke about a 90-year-old woman on her local master's team. Susan explained that if she lives that long, she hopes to emulate what this woman represented. In Susan's mind, this 90-year-old swimmer demonstrates that

the sport of swimming is for everyone, and you can participate at any level and any age, even if that means you must swim in a wetsuit in a lake.

Chris was also very adamant about how he disliked the word post-sport and how he felt he would always be a part of the swimming community. He explained that even though he was retired from collegiate swimming, he hoped to never enter a post-sport phase. Chris still competes in triathlons, hires swimming analysts to critique his strokes and participates in swimming for his overall health. He credited that the swimming community is something he will always be a part of, regardless of his level of participation. As demonstrated by both Susan and Chris, they felt the swimming community and the support it provided is always open and available to them.

One final element to the 4S system is Strategies. Strategies are how the participants cope with the transition using all aspects of the self, the situation, and their support systems (Anderson et al. 2022). Strategies for coping during this transition process varied. As demonstrated, some participants learned on themselves or built their own support systems. Other participants leaned heavily on their new careers and found other ways to navigate their transitions, such as new hobbies or activities.

As the data were analyzed, it became apparent how many swimmers jumped into roles that consumed their identities. For many, it appeared this was a way to build their new sense of Self, and to give them entirely new Support and Situations. One of the key takeaways from the data was the concept of the active roles. These roles had an immediate effect on those around them. This could be through leadership, education, service, and many other components. One recurring theme is 15 of the 17 swimmers

loved their full-time roles and couldn't see themselves doing anything different. When looking at the roles, there are further themes that emerged in regard to their roles.

Three participants transitioned into the medical field, with two going into nursing and one becoming a doctor. During their interviews, the nurses spoke about how they wanted to help sick people, and to share their knowledge of their profession with others. Not only do they do this through nursing, but through teaching roles they have as well. Both nurses either teach other nursing students or teach others in the aquatic's realm.

Colleen, the doctor in this study, discussed how being an athlete helps her to relate to her patients more. Her patients understood she has been injured and has been in their shoes. From being in their perspective, her swimmer experience allowed her to be more compassionate and understanding. It allows her patients to see that she has overcome a similar situation, since she discussed her injuries and how she overcame them.

As the participants shared, many swimmers played active roles in their communities and turned their time and attention to working alongside and serving others. Eduardo threw himself into a whole new identity as a police officer. During his interview, he discussed how he loved being able to serve others within his community and give back. Chris, a Coast Guard officer echoed this sentiment. He discussed how he is a career Coast Guard officer and will stay involved with missions until he has served his fully allowed 20 years. Chris loves working along others on missions and figuring out how to be the best commander he could. In his role, he valued being a strong leader who worked

alongside the rest of his team members. Serving others doesn't always involve being in a visible role, as some do behind the scenes work for their organizations.

Four of the participants were in administrative roles during their time in this study. They discussed how in their situations they play a role in an educational sector, which allowed them to take on new identities and cope with their transitions in different ways. For Dan, Steve, Veronica, and Russell, they are still involved with organizations that allow them to be a part of education. All of them are involved in their local communities despite taking on a more organizational role. This doesn't mean they are only sitting behind a desk. They are involved by producing content, running webinars and in-person clinics, performing outreach, and playing a part in affecting the future generations to shape their careers. One of the common threads in these swimmers' stories was the different ways they were able to reach people. Although they did not originally go into a teaching or leadership role, their careers evolved in ways they did not foresee. Their strategy to cope during their transitions was to find a way to have an impact on others, even though what some may consider a non-traditional route.

Those who stayed in the swimming community also utilized a different strategy to cope with their transitions as well. Coach Mike and SwimForeverFast created their own successful swimming businesses. Not only are they able to run a successful business, but they are also able to coach and continue to share their love of the sport with the next generation. In both cases, Coach Mike and SwimForeverFast have a massive far-reaching influence on the many swimmers they mentor and oversee. Swim Coach was one who is creating her own community. As her name suggests, she is a swim coach who is creating

her own swimming community. In addition to swimming, she teaches her swimmers critical skills such as learning, growth, asking questions and never giving up.

Still others took their strategy a step further. Hans and Donna are both in leadership roles within the Aquatics industry. Hans oversees swim teams' sites, mentors other coaches, and helps them to realize they should put themselves first. He discussed his sadness at leaving swim coaching professionally, but he knew he had to show others how important it is to take care of yourself and your family first. Donna also mentors many individuals. She oversees hundreds of kids every summer, either as their aquatic center director on the pool deck or as their coach. She helps to shape the swimmers and employees she oversees, instilling positive traits into the next generation of swimmers while having fun and being a part of the sport she loves.

Many of the participants in this study also recommended finding other strategies to cope with the transition. The ways they had dealt with mental health was a common regret, and how to give more grace to oneself during the transition process was discussed. This concept of stress and poor mental health aligns with studies reporting how student-athletes are more likely to have mental health issues, experience higher stress, burnout, and their sport feeling like a burden (Ryan et al., 2018; Sudano et al., 2017; Van Raalte & Posteher, 2019). Other swimmers reported some of their strategies for coping with the transition. Many reported how they found other hobbies or found ways to be a part of swimming in different ways, such as coaching or part-time jobs. Even if the transitions were tough, all of the swimmers ultimately navigated it, and are happy, healthy individuals today.



The 4S System is a helpful theoretical tool to help understand how the swimmers navigated their transition process from the sport of swimming to having full-time careers (Anderson et al., 2022). There is one final piece of discussion, which focuses on the concept of the individualized career preparation the swimmers underwent as part of the transitions. To explain this process further, I now turn to the life-span, life-space theory of Super, Savickas, and Super (Brown & Brooks, 1996) to better understand the career development process.

### ***Life-Span and Life-Space Approach to Career Development for Swimmers***

The life-span life-space approach to career development uses a two-fold lens to understand career development (Brown & Brooks, 1996). As a person moves throughout their lives, they enter different phases of development and different identities. These pieces of their lives will forever be interacting and intercepting. Careers can carry various importance as the person moves through their lives. Roles are constantly changing, life is constantly evolving, and life is viewed as a chaotic ever-changing event. When taking Super, Savickas and Super's theory into consideration, career development can be viewed through two unique lenses.

Looking from the angle of life-space, there is the concept of work being only one role in a person's life. Simply put, careers can mean different things to different individuals at different points throughout their lives. For those who participated in this study, I argue their identities as swimmers were the most important part of their career development while in college. Swimming was a reason that many of the participants were in that specific college and were choosing the majors they did. Even if swimming

was not at the forefront of their career preparation, some of the traits they gained helped to shape their career development. The swimmers discussed their hard work, dedication, time management skills, and other transferable skills that emerged.

Holding the role of student-athlete, this naturally propelled the role of being a student to the forefront of the participants' lives. During their interviews, they shared experiences of their time on-campus. For some swimmers, they utilized the resources on campus such as attending the career center and getting resume help. Others took advantage of internship and shadowing experiences offered through their courses. Still others picked up part-time jobs, got involved in groups on-campus, and juggled many roles and responsibilities. Some of the other possible roles the swimmers might have held included being a team captain, being on the student-athlete advisory council and more. While these are just a few of the roles that emerged during the interviews, there are likely many other roles that the swimmers likely held during college.

Once the collegiate swimming career was over, the swimmers' core role changed drastically. They no longer spent 20+ hours per week swimming, and they had to find new hobbies and activities as part of their new lives. Other changes took place as well. Their peer groups changed, as they were no longer spending as much time around their teammates. This transition was when full-time roles truly came into focus, and they fully left the identity of swimmer behind and became swimmers. As part of the life-span, life-space theory, these careers were part of a life redesign. Swimming was no longer their primary focus, and they threw themselves into their new roles.

For many of the participants in this study, I argue they all fully redesigned their

lives and threw themselves into their new full-time roles. As had been discussed, many of the roles the participants took on consumed their entire identity and allowed them to fully leave the role of swimmer behind. They became doctors, nurses, administrators, swim coaches and more. Each person devoted themselves fully to their new identities in a different way. For example, Eduardo said his role helped him to fully shape a new identity. Others, like Colleen, happily left her swimming identity behind and focused on becoming the best doctor she could be. In some situations, for participants like Chris, he had an exciting new life and identity waiting for him. He moved to Alaska and began commanding Coast Guard boats and missions.

In some situations, swimming was an initial career that allowed participants to find their true calling. Hans demonstrated this, as he started as a swim coach but is trying to transition to firefighting. Dan and Thomas had similar endeavors. They started off as swim coaches but are now involved in educational non-profits. Regardless of where their careers started, according to the life-span life-space theory, those careers will continue to evolve as their lives continue.

From the angle of the life-span, there are different phases of life that individuals can be in (Brown & Brooks, 1996). According to Super, Savickas and Super, these stages are Growth, which occurs during childhood; Exploration is during the teenage years, while Establishment is during young adulthood; Maintenance then occurs during middle adulthood, and Disengagement occurs in old age (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Based on the conversations and the data, I argue there were two major stages that participants in this

study were a part of. For some of the more recent graduates, especially those in the 24-29 age range, I argue they were in their Exploration phases of their careers.

Exploration is the stage where an actual career is identified, and the people work on their skills to move in the general direction of the selected field (Brown & Brooks, 1996). This is a time where participants take risks, such as Coach Mike discussed. He talked about how he explored different roles after graduation, including fitness instructor and administrative worker before owning his own swim team. Veronica also discussed how she initially went into recruiting and HR work but has now moved to working within higher education to assist others in finding their dream roles. Anne also shared her experience with how she began as an emergency room nurse, but then shifted over to being a nursing faculty. Hans was in the middle of transition during our interview, as he is working to become a full-time firefighter.

Each of these stories and experiences demonstrates the exploration of their new careers. In these examples, the participants started in one job or role, before shifting to another. This is not an example of failure, but rather growth and expansion. Others in the study shared more of how they were in their Establishment phases of life.

The Establishment phase of the theory is throughout adulthood (Brown & Brooks, 1996). During this phase, the person works to secure their careers and build positive work habits. It was clear that several other individuals in the study were in their establishment phases. The younger participants in this study, such as Veronica, Sydney, and Sarah are in this phase as they are in newer careers and still working to establish their long-term career trajectory goals. SwimForeverFast was in a similar role. They own their own

business and coach swimming. While there are still many challenges that SwimForeverFast works to overcome, they feel they have found their calling owning and operating their own business.

Moving onto the Maintenance phase, there were several participants that fell into this category. Dan had worked as a swim coach for a long period of time and was now shifting into an administrative position. He relied heavily on the skills he accumulated over his career to allow him to establish a career off the pool deck. Thomas was in a similar position. He worked as an administrative role for two different companies. He took the skills he already had and applied them to the new challenges that were coming his way.

Donna was also in her Maintenance phase. She worked as an Aquatics Director and swim coach. She had bounced around earlier in her career but found a job that allowed her to pursue her passions. Russell is another participant in the study in this phase. He took the skills from his previous roles and is now able to apply them in a different professional context than in the past. This new role in the education sector allows him to have better work-life balance and a higher job satisfaction. Coach Mike was also in his Maintenance phase, as he is maintaining and growing his swim team business that he has now owned for many years.

The final phase in Super, Savickas and Super's theory is the Disengagement phase (Brown & Brooks, 1996). This phase is when retirement occurs, and the person moves toward different pursuits. Only one individual, Susan, was in this phase. She had retired from her role as a full-time professor. She was still involved in various pursuits,

such as teaching, coaching, and swimming in the master's community. Although the name of this phase might suggest otherwise, Susan did not describe herself as disengaged, and seemed very content with not only what she had accomplished in her life, but what she was currently doing.

There were many different phases that individuals were in within this study. Looking at the model further, there are two additional concepts to consider for this career development theory. The first concept is the vocational identity, and it considers the dreams, interests, talents and goal of the person (Brown & Brooks, 1996).

For those in this study, several picked a career based on their interests outside the pool. Examples include Colleen and Coach Mike. They both loved helping people and having an immediate impact on those around them. Others picked their jobs based on their interests. Sydney loved the concept of being able to help sick people. Anne loved being able to share her knowledge and train the next generation of nurses. Many of the participants had different dreams and goals they still continue to work toward today.

This also holds true when looking at the occupational self, the other piece within the theoretical framework (Brown & Brooks, 1996). This concept considers how a person understands their uniqueness and strengths when picking their careers. This was demonstrated by multiple participants in the study. For example, Swim Coach knew she would be involved with swimming, as it was a constant throughout her life. She now influences the next generation and helps them to think outside the box and ask questions. Russell also understood his strengths as well. He picked a career which allows him to use

his swimming and engineering knowledge. Many of the participants in this study forged their own unique paths so they could find and foster the best career for themselves.

The final piece of the life-span, life-space framework is the concept of systems (Brown & Brooks, 1996). This lens allows us to look at the individuals in this study and realize that everyone has different roles, situations, relations, and all of these pieces impact their careers. Many of the participants in this study had family, partners and other important people involved in their lives. For some, they were their support systems, such as in the stories of Eduardo and Veronica. For others, such as Coach Mike and Dan they made career decisions based on what was best for their families or spouses. Still others were at various points in their lives and were working through career changes, such as Hans.

The best part of the systems concept is realizing that everyone is their own unique person and they each handle their careers and career preparation differently. Chris has a profound thought on this topic. He discussed how an important part of maturing was realizing that everyone had assigned different pieces of importance to different parts of their lives. While swimming was important to him, it wasn't the top priority throughout his swimming career. His goal was to do well in the Coast Guard Academy. Swimming was still an important part of his life. However, it wasn't the most important. On this topic, he said:

You start to come to terms with that and understand why there's differences in outcomes. And I think that is like an important maturing process of the sport that you realize we're, we're built different, we've assigned different importance to

swimming and working out and versus social or academic or whatever else we have going in our lives. And like that is a lesson you take moving on in the real world that like everyone's in a different spot. And even though you're both at work today, and you're wearing your business clothes, someone is not at the same level as you. Maybe you need to take a little slack or cut them a little slack. I think that was an important maturing kind of realization.

Indeed, career development is not a straight path. There is no one right way to do it. Everyone has to tackle their own careers in the way they feel is most fit and fits their situation best. Again, no two people in this study had a similar journey. Everyone's path to a career was in its own way, chaotic and unpredictable. While on-campus resources existed and support systems were there to catch them as needed, each of the individuals had to navigate their own unique systems and find their own way.

To conclude this discussion, I turn to what this study has contributed. In many instances, this study supported literature based on support, athletic identity, career development and more. In other cases, this study vastly helped to fill the gap that exists when it comes to career development. It also helped to fill the gap on the lack of studies conducted on swimmers and the sport of swimming. In this next section, I turn to implications for both practice and research I identified after reflecting on this discussion section.

### **Implications for Practice and Research**

In this section, I briefly discuss both implications for further research and practice. These ideas are supported by the literature from Chapter Two and the current



study's findings. To begin, I have identified three different implications for practice. The first is in regard to the support swimmers receives during their transition process from a coach's perspective. The second relates to the resources provided by the NCAA, for both job preparation, the transition process and mental health support. The final implication for practice is related to the introduction of roles and potential careers swimmers are able to transition to in their lives post-sport. Each of these practices will be discussed at length below.

As stated in Chapter One, very few studies have been conducted on swimmers, other than those related to shoulder injuries, physiological issues or eating disorders (Anderson & Petrie, 2012; Beals, 2004; Carbuhn et al., 2018; Harrington et al., 2014). There is a need for more research, both at the qualitative and quantitative levels related to swimmers, especially in the career development and life post-sport realm.

Additionally, there needs to be more research conducted on the support needed during the transition process for swimmers. Since there are little to no opportunities to continue to compete after graduation, this is a pivotal concern. Specific areas of support to look into include support needed on a personal and institutional level, mental health and well-being support, among others.

The next area of research to delve into is identifying the need for policies and procedures to be implemented at the NCAA level. The idea is to identify if there is a need, not only for swimmers, but other NCAA non-revenue athletes could benefit from a policy being put into place for a minimum amount of career preparation required. These

policies could affect career preparation, support, and the swimmer's transitions and ensure the smoothest retirement has taken place.

### ***More Coach Support During the Transition Process***

One of the biggest gaps this study identified was the need for more support for the swimmers, especially during the career preparation phase and the transition from being a swimmer to a swimmer. While it is apparent the amount of pride these swimmers had in figuring out their paths, only 9 of the participants discussed the support they received. This does not mean the swimmers did not receive support during their journeys, but it is clear that more is needed. Literature supported the need for support, as studies showed those having strong support systems reported having less transition difficulties during the period after sport retirement (Alfermann, 1995; Werthner & Orlick, 1986; Young et al., 2006).

It is important to note that as student-athletes, swimmers most likely had a strong sense of social capital, despite not discussing it much in this study. Social capital is defined as quality relationships within a community, and it is generated when building organizations. Further, social capital helps to strengthen the bonds of a group (Clopton, 2012; Putnam, 2000). This social capital often starts with the swim coaches and expands within the athletic community.

As previously discussed, student-athletes and particularly this group of swimmers was a privileged group. They clearly had many avenues from which social capital was generated, such as from their friends, peers, teammates and even the swimming

community. This concept of social capital also ties in with the swimmer's socioeconomic status and ties back to the coaches they then have in a collegiate setting.

Based on the stories the participants told, it was evident that many of them came from a background with a higher socioeconomic status. While this does not mitigate the talent they had, it certainly helped to shape their swimming careers and guide them to successful colleges and universities. This higher socioeconomic status then gave the participants a naturally higher social capital and access to even bigger and better resources, institutions, jobs, and networks once they arrived on their college campuses. In retrospect, this capital started with the large, powerful networks the swimmers had access to from their times on numerous swim teams.

Additionally, those with a higher socioeconomic status could have access to better swim teams, better universities, and overall better experience. This is especially important when related to the coaches and support networks they then built during their time on campus. Socioeconomic data was not gathered for this study, but there is also an opportunity to pursue more on this topic especially related to the support and social capital component. Despite high social capital from their surrounding community, the transitions of the swimmers were nonetheless still very difficult.

Many of the participants reported how they felt the transition from swimmer to a non-athlete was very sudden and traumatic after their final competition. Several participants took it a step further and discussed how they felt their coaches no longer cared about them once they no longer provided value to their team. When it comes to support during the transition, those who had supportive coaches and trainers reported less

difficulties in their transition process (Fernandez et al., 2006; Wippert & Wippert, 2008). When it comes to the role of a coach during the transition process, I turn to a profound quote from David Parkin. He said “Don’t retire from something, retire to something” (Stewart, 2022).

There are different options for collegiate coaches who want to support their athletes during the transition process to retire to something, rather than from something. Some suggestions include developing healthy supportive relationships with their swimmers, give swimmers a space to discuss their feelings openly, offer examples of career options and success stories of their former athletes, and simply asking how they can be a part of their transition and career preparation process (How to Support Athletes Who Transition Out of Sports, 2021).

Other options exist for swim coaches who want to support their swimmers, not only as an athlete but rather as a whole person. Research has shown that student-athletes look to their coach about what to do and how to do it (Rezania & Gurney, 2014). As part of the mentoring process during their transition, coaches can encourage their swimmers to be involved in other activities outside the sport of swimming, learning what their interests are outside of swimming, and can support their involvement in internships, study abroad opportunities and other activities on-campus (Thiessen, 2022). It is crucial that coaches help their swimmers to realize they have life outside of the sport, even though this can be difficult for both the coaches and swimmers to accept (Thiessen, 2022).

Another way a coach can support the swimmers as they transition is fostering relationships with alumni. This can be accomplished by involving the alumni not only

with day-to-day aspects of the team but in the transition process as well. Several of the participants mentioned the need for alumni involvement, and how positive the outcome could be. This involvement starts with the coach building and maintaining the relationships of those who have not only recently graduated from the team, but those from past classes.

When fostered by the coach, alumni support can come in a variety of ways. Some ideas the participants put forward was allowing alumni to come back and speak to the current team's seniors. They could offer insight and advice on how they handled their transition. In some cases, mentorship and guidance could be offered. In others, the alumni could support the team through their careers, such as counseling, internships, and other working opportunities.

This idea of alumni support starts with the coach, the communication they put in to both their current and former athletes and fostering a place for these interactions to take place. Not only does this idea allow support, but the swimmers could also be introduced to a valuable network and meet with positive role models. Engaging alumni creates a sense of belonging to build amongst current and former teammates and allows them to share their own advice on the transition process (Edersheim, 2023).

Since coaches put in countless hours both on and off the pool deck, I suggest the establishment of a relationship with the alumni office on campus. Creating this relationship would allow alumni engagement with oversight from the coach. By utilizing this relationship, this would alleviate some of the workload of fostering the engagement from the coach, while still allowing them to have a say on the engagement being pushed

out to their alumni. Those who specifically work in the alumni offices can also support alumni endeavors on campus, fundraising, outreach and more.

Support is not the only implication for practice that is valuable. More support can come at the institutional level, both from the NCAA itself, as well as the institution the swimmer attends. This support was something discussed by many of the participants, and the need for it.

### ***Support From NCAA and Collegiate Institutions***

Support is also critical for the swimmers in this study from both the NCAA level and the institutional level. When talking to the participants in this study, only six participants used their career centers on campus. Out of the seventeen participants, this is a shockingly low number. Studies demonstrated that simply providing information to collegiate swimmers is not enough to enhance their familiarity with career services (Fouad et al., 2006). Additional steps and efforts must be taken to ensure the career development services are utilized and programming in the career development sector is attended. This echoes the sentiments of Navarro and Malvaso (2016) who also called for more in the career development sector for student-athletes.

When it comes to the idea of support at the institutional level, there are a variety of ways the institutions can support their swimmers and other student-athletes. Some of those suggestions are hiring more staff to support the career development process, creating programming that takes into account the needs of swimmers/ student-athletes, and providing better marketing and awareness to the resources that do exist (Davis et. Al, 2022). I suggest that all institutions require a minimum number of career check-ins per

year. This could be something as simple as attending a workshop, meeting with someone in the career center once a semester or taking a specific 1-2 credit class during their junior or senior year to focus on career development. This also echoes the sentiments of Comeaux and Harrison (2007) who also support offering career preparation specifically geared toward student-athletes.

Support at the institutional level can look different depending on the college the swimmer attends. At the Division I level, for example, Rutgers is one institution that focuses on their student-athletes in a holistic sense and offers an outstanding opportunity for all their student-athletes to take advantage of. An important part of Rutgers programming is understanding that student-athletes have lives after their careers. Athletes were tracked at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months post-graduation to watch their career establishment journey. The Assistant Athletic Director of Student-Athlete Development for the Scarlet Knights for Life Program, Dr. Carissa Liverpool discussed the four buckets she targets when it comes to her student-athletes and alumni (Metsker, 2023).

To support the new student-athletes from the beginning, every year, Rutgers' hosts a freshman resource class, which allows their student-athletes to learn more about campus and opportunities to be involved. Throughout their four years, Rutgers focuses on community engagement, and offers countless ways for their student-athletes to work with different organizations, allowing them to both volunteer and get real-life working experience (Metsker, 2023).

Career development is also a key piece of the experience at Rutgers for their student-athletes (Metsker, 2023). The institution hosts career development opportunities

and engage with their alumni in their community to not only grow networks, but allow their student-athletes to have real, raw conversations. Not only are these opportunities provided, but athletes work on their career development skills, such as interviews, resume building and more. Finally, alumni engagement is a key part of the Rutgers experience. They build relationships with their former student-athletes in hope they will engage, stay in-touch and hire the newly graduated student-athletes.

My call to action is that colleges should implement strategies to holistically support their student-athletes and swimmers. This can be done regardless of whether the institution is Division I, II or III. Specifically, this can take place in the athletic department at the level of the athletic academic advisors. While advising and supporting their swimmers, these staff members can take that holistic approach. Other options include promoting more swimmers and student-athletes to take advantage of the resources for regular students. This would allow the swimmer to be treated as a student first, rather than an athlete. Taking a holistic approach is critical to Rutgers success and something that can be echoed at a variety of other institutions, even if not at the level of this example institution. This means institutions treating their student-athletes as a whole person with lives outside of sports.

Support can also be improved at the NCAA level. While more resources are becoming available as time goes on, the awareness is minimal. For example, the NCAA now has a community dedicated to former student-athletes. This community boasts resources, networking opportunities, engagement and promotion of well-being and lifelong commitment to sports (About after the game, n.d.). After glancing through this



resource, it seems certain aspects of it are highly used, while others have fallen by the wayside. Continuing to grow this resource and promoting it more is one way the NCAA can support both its former swimmers and former student-athletes.

One of the biggest ways to increase the support of the NCAA is the awareness of its resources. Park et al. (2013) note that student-athletes have little time to devote to their career development. It is imperative the NCAA make marketing efforts and engagement efforts are undertaken. From a swimmer perspective, these efforts can be something as simple as mandating an athletic advisor stop in to speak at a swim practice. There could also be a requirement to take student-athletes on a tour of the career resources on campus during the first few weeks in the semester. Marketing can also take place in the apps that are available to students on-campus. Many resources are available to both NCAA student-athletes and to those who have retired, but it appears very few know exactly what resources are available or where.

Currently, the NCAA also offers support for career exploration via Support for Sport. Together, they have created a workshop which offers opportunities to identify transferable skills and complete a career exploration process (*Career Self-Exploration for Student-Athletes*, n.d.). This workshop is only meant to kick off the career development process and is meant to be supplemented with other resources. The NCAA can continue to promote this resource and continue to develop more workshops to further supplement this introductory course.

One final implication for practice is promoting and making internships, part-time jobs and other career development experiences more accessible while the swimmers are

still in the collegiate setting. This goes hand-in-hand with the previous two topics of support, as it needs buy-in from both the coach and the institution to accomplish this goal.

### ***Promoting Careers Within Sports***

One final suggestion for practice is the concept of building careers in life post-sport. Many of the swimmers were hesitant about the idea of implementing a NCAA policy in regard to career development. However, one participant mentioned a concept worth bringing forward, which is the idea of keeping swimmers involved in the sport in ways other than swimming or coaching. When looking at the literature, career development is tackled in similar ways. Mentoring, resume building, internships, experiential learning and more are typically advertised by career centers (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Different institutions offered different experiences, such as career closets, places to hang out, and micro internships (Bodnar, 2022; Career Network. Career Network | Ohio University, n.d.; Rubin, 2021).

When it comes to the career development of not only swimmers, but other athletes, there could be better introduction to careers that involve sports. This echoes the results of Parietti, Lower and McCray (2016) that discussed how student-athletes needed more exposure to careers. When it comes to career development, there is a focus on identifying the transferable traits and skills a swimmer gains, such as coachability, ability to multitask, ambition, strong work ethic, hardworking and many more (Duderstadt, 2009; Henderson et al., 2006; Long & Caudill, 1991; *Marketing Your Athletic Skills: How Playing Collegiate Sports Can Help You Land a Job*, n.d.; Ryan, 1989; Soshnick,

2013; Vidal, 2022; Williams, 2013). But there seems to be a gap in identifying careers within the sports realm.

Sarah, a participant in the study lamented she did not know how she could apply accounting in a career in sports. One way to ensure this does not happen to others is by exposing swimmers to a broad range of roles, both inside and outside of the sports industry. An example of success is the CareerHQ Compass which exists abroad. This tool introduces student-athletes to over 1000 careers and allows them to hone in on 6-8 preferred fields (Mumm, 2018). Not only are student-athletes exposed to careers within sport, but outside of it as well. Similar to the above ideas of support, CareerHQ also promotes the idea of using alumni bases to support current student-athletes. Not only does it allow more introduction to different career opportunities but allows student-athletes to grow their network as well (Mumms, 2018).

Other options exist to support athletes and allow them to be introduced to more careers. GamePlan is a platform and app that can be utilized not only for educational purposes, but for career development as well. This platform exists and is implemented at a variety of collegiate institutions across the United States. Some of its features include a mentoring program, job board, virtual events and activities geared toward current and former student-athletes, personality assessments and much more (GamePlan, n.d.). There are solutions that exist to expose swimmers and student-athletes to more careers within sports. However, visibility and awareness need to improve so these opportunities and solutions can be utilized. One of the further implications for swimmers is the need for more research on the sport, which I will now delve into.

### ***More Research Needed on Swimmers and Swimming***

When it comes to furthering the knowledge of the sport of swimming, more research should be conducted from a social science perspective. Some of the studies existing on swimmers are generally older, from the 1970s and 1980s and focus on stroke mechanics and physiology (Cook & Brynteson, 1973; Vaccaro et al. 1980; Wade, 1976. More recently, the studies conducted look specifically at shoulder injuries, physiology and eating disorders (Anderson & Petrie, 2012; Beals, 2004; Carbuhn et al., 2018; Harrington et al., 2014). Swimmers and swimming can be studied from a qualitative and quantitative perspective.

When it comes to learning more on this topic, further research should be conducted on what resources and support could be given to those who retired from the sport of swimming. To garner more data, this could be accomplished via a quantitative angle so that more far-reaching results could be gathered. To address all divisions, this research should be conducted at Divisions I, II and III. Further consideration could also be given to the gender differences within the sport to understand if there is more need for different resources for different genders.

The likelihood of competing in swimming after college is marginal. There are only 94 swimmers on the USA Swimming National Team, and only a fraction of those will go on to compete at the Olympics (Keith, 2023). Other professional opportunities such as the ISL have been postponed, further reducing the likelihood of further swimming competition (ISL season 4 postponed to 2023, 2022). Due to this lack of opportunities, further research can also be conducted other ways to support collegiate

swimmers in handling the transition and loss of their swimming identity as over 99% of those competing at the collegiate level will not move on to pursue swimming professionally.

Countless studies have been conducted on how student-athletes lose their identity and how difficult the transition can be (Grove et al., 1997; Lavalley et al., 1997; Leonard & Schimmel, 2016; Rubin & Moses, 1997; Saxe et al., 2017). However, more studies could be conducted specifically focusing on those losing their identity as swimmers. This goes hand-in-hand with the next recommend for research, which is identifying ways to support swimmers and their mental health as they transition and leave the sport.

#### ***More Research on Support and Mental Health/ Well-Being of Swimmers***

Swimming is a unique sport, with many of its athletes being involved for long periods of time. On average, participants in this study reported their average time of involvement within swimming being 30 years. Some of the participants reported how important swimming was for their mental health or how they wished more support could have been given to them for their mental health. While Gallup (2017) conducted studies on well-being and life-post sport, they put all sports into a generic category of non-revenue. Further research could be done on both a qualitative and quantitative level on swimmers, their mental health and well-being.

Studies have been conducted on how participation in swimming improves mental health (Adnan et al., 2019; Overbury et al., 2023; Silva et al., 2020). However, these studies approach swimming involvement at the recreational level, rather than at the collegiate level. Further, they do not take into consideration the mass amount of time and

commitment swimmers at the collegiate level dedicate. Qualitative studies could be conducted more on swimmers retiring from the sport to learn more about what support would be beneficial to this population. Quantitative studies could also be conducted on a similar topic, determining if needs are different for the genders of the swimmers or the Division they competed in. Further analysis of policies and procedures that could be implemented to support swimmers as they complete their career development and find activities outside of the sport.

### ***More Research on Policies and Procedures for Swimmer's Career Development***

The final implication for research is the need for the NCAA to conduct research on if more policies and procedures to be implemented in regard to career development. The NCAA is constantly conducting its own internal research on a variety of topics. Some of the most recent studies include the probability of going pro, demographics, finances of intercollegiate athletics, graduation rates, college experiences and more (Research, n.d.). This research can focus on career development through several lens. First, there should be an investigation as to the adherence of the 20-hour practice policy. Many colleges are constantly finding loopholes or misreporting their hours, which results in their athletes spending much more time on their sports (Ayers et al., 2012; Jacobs, 2017). If these 20-hour rules were more adhered to, would this give not only swimmers, but all athletes the opportunity to spend more time on career development.

Second, more research can be done to see if there should be a policy enforced at the NCAA level for career development. Again, this would be a change that would not only affect swimming, but all sports. This could be as simple as mandating a class or

setting a number of hours a student-athlete should put toward preparing for their lives post-sport. Institutionally, career development varies, and participation level is not mandated. However, special attention could be given to non-revenue sports, as many of those sports end when their collegiate competition does.

The NCAA should also focus on what the outcomes are of their athletes and their lives post-sport. This study was the beginning of data collection on what swimmers are accomplishing in their lives post-sport. Further studies should be done both at a qualitative and quantitative level to give more insight within each Division. This would give the NCAA more data on not only the career preparation experiences of their student-athletes but would shine more light onto what their student-athletes are achieving in life post-sport. While it is a start to look at the well-being of student-athletes after graduation, there is still much more that can be accomplished (Gallup, 2017). To conclude this section, I now turn to a personal reflection on this study, what I have learned and considering my own experiences.

### **Personal Reflection**

Swimming has been a part of my life for the past 23 years. While each of the participants had their own experiences in this study, I saw parts of my own journey reflected throughout the different stories. I was a competitive swimmer for 15 years and earned a scholarship to swim for Ohio University. The four years of my swimming career were tough, and I struggled both academically and in the pool.

I had a deeply entrenched swimming identity. Everyone knew me as Ariel in the grey sweatpants, who always smelled like chlorine and had wet hair. When I left

swimming, I was very bitter and angry, like Andie. After my final competition, I stood on the pool deck and felt I was robbed of reaching my potential in my senior year. During the last two years of my swimming career, I had a cruel, sadistic coach who emphasized the importance of swimming and took pride in creating a hostile, negative atmosphere for the team. Academics were left by the wayside, and her only priority was to make herself look good to the administration by the performance of her athletes.

My own journey with career development was a chaotic one. During my undergraduate years, I fought to remain academically eligible, forsaking the original major I yearned for. I had part-time jobs and did not consider what would happen after I graduated college. Luckily for me, I found a professor who became one of my greatest mentors. She helped me through dark periods of life both personally, academically and during my swimming career. She helped me to come up with a plan to apply for a master's degree. Luckily for me, she recognized my talents and traits, setting me on the path which has now led to today.

My career development journey is far from over. I spent the past 12 years studying at Ohio University, obtaining five different degrees. I have only been in a full-time career for the past 3 years, and while I enjoy the role I am in, I hope to continue to grow and evolve over the coming years. I consider myself to still be in my Exploration phase and hope to move into Establishing more of my career once I graduate this spring.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this study was conducted to learn more about former collegiate swimmers, their career preparation, and their lives post-sport. As someone who was a



former collegiate swimmer, this topic is something I wanted to learn more about on an academic level. The findings in this study both confirmed and refuted the literature, and added to the gap I identified in Chapter 2. Swimming is a vastly under researched sport from the social sciences perspective. This study added knowledge both on the front of career preparation and what swimmers are achieving after graduation.

Four different themes arose from the data to answer the two research questions. The first two themes answered how swimmers tackled career preparation. The first theme is how each of the swimmers forged their own unique path to career preparation. On-campus resources were utilized, and many additional steps, such as picking up internships, shadowing and part-time jobs occurred. While maneuvering this preparation, the second theme arose, which was the support systems these swimmers relied on. Many relied on their families, friends, peers, coaches, and athletic staff to support them both inside and outside the pool. The support was evident not only during the career preparation process, but throughout other aspects of the swimmers journeys.

The next two themes answered research question two. This question sought to understand what swimmers accomplished in their lives post-sport. The third theme I identified was how the swimmers transitioned into active roles that allowed them to have an immediate impact and effect on those around them. Even those who were in administrative roles still affected those around them through educational endeavors, and almost everyone in this study found a role which allowed them, in their words, to make a difference. The final theme I identified was how swimming was still a prominent part of

many of the participants lives. The level of involvement varied from person to person, however, each credited the affect swimming had on them, even until today.

In the discussion section, I identified how the theoretical perspectives shaped the experiences the participants described. Schlossberg's 4S system walked through different components of the participants transitions and how they dealt with them in various ways (Anderson et al., 2022). Conversely, the life-span life-space approach looked at career development in a different manner (Brown & Brenner, 1996). This theory showed how individuals have their own unique lives, roles, interests, hopes and dreams. Their careers can be different based on their own situations and where they are within their lives. This theory helped to understand that while chaos can ensue, everyone copes and handles their lives in their own ways.

There were several implications for practice that I suggested. I advise coaches to be further involved in supporting the transition process. I also advise the NCAA and institutions to make their swimmers and other student-athletes more aware of the resources available to them at no cost. Finally, I advised more exposure to roles inside of sports besides coaching. This can allow the swimmers to be involved with the sport they dedicated so many of their lives to without having to put their bodies on the line.

When it comes to implications for research, it is evident that more research is needed on the sport of swimming and swimmers themselves. This was a limited study with only 17 participants. While the data from this study sheds light on swimmers, their career preparation and their lives post-sport, there is a need for more. Other ways to support future research include performing more studies on how to better support

swimmers during their transition and better options to help them support their mental health as they lose their swimming identities. Finally, more research should be done to determine if a blanket policy and procedure should be implemented for swimmers during their collegiate years.

The swimmers I interviewed in this study represented 17 unique journeys across career development and what their lives looked like post-sport. This study confirmed literature that related to other student-athletes, but also filled the gap in the lack of research on swimming and swimmers. Across the board, these swimmers had an inspiring journey as they navigated their career development and transition into full-time careers. If the participants in this study are any indicator of the future, then many swimmers will benefit from them and their experiences both directly and indirectly. For the foreseeable future, swimming will continue to be a NCAA sport and swimmers will continue to undergo transitions from their swimming careers. With this study and the help of more research, perhaps more swimmers will have smoother transitions, and continue to lead successful post-sport lives.

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### Appendix A: IRB Approval

Project Number: 23-X-76

Project Status: Approved

Committee: Social/ Behavioral IRB

Compliance Contact: Lori Miller [lorimiller@ohio.edu](mailto:lorimiller@ohio.edu)

Primary Investigator: Ariel Hodges

Project Title: From Start to Splash: Exploring Retirement Preparation and Career Development for Retired College Swimmers

Level of Review: EXPEDITED

The Social/Behavioral IRB reviewed and approved by expedited review the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

IRB Approved: 09/25/2023 2:36:26 PM

Expiration: 9/21/2024

Review Category 6,7

**Waivers: No waivers are granted with this approval.**

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. In addition, FERPA, PPRA, and other authorizations / agreements must be obtained, if needed. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Any changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers,

etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Periodic Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of the IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. All records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least three (3) years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the Office of Research Compliance / IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under the Ohio University OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00000095. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Compliance staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

The approval will no longer be in effect when the Primary Investigator is no longer under the auspices of Ohio University, e.g., graduation or departure from Ohio University.

## Appendix B: Study Solicitation

YouTube: [https://youtu.be/nS-Kf4IPDPc?si=BRH\\_4v1IESWD1ufc](https://youtu.be/nS-Kf4IPDPc?si=BRH_4v1IESWD1ufc)

Script for a video that was posted on social media.

Hey Everyone,

This is Ariel at ASCA and you might not have known it, but I am a doctoral student in Higher Education at Ohio University. To finish my degree, I am currently conducting research for my dissertation on the career development and life outcomes of former collegiate swimmers.

I'm looking for former collegiate swimmers who graduated at least X years ago to share their experiences and insights. Your participation is invaluable to my research and is greatly appreciated. To participate, all you have to do is fill out a pre-screening questionnaire and complete a 90-minute interview with me. All interviews will be conducted virtually, and you can have an access code to an ASCA certification course upon completion! Your participation is entirely voluntary and all information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to review and approve any quotations or findings from the interview before they are used in my dissertation. Help me to help the sport of swimming!

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [ahodges@swimmingcoach.org](mailto:ahodges@swimmingcoach.org). Don't be afraid to share this with your former swimmers, colleagues or anyone else in the sport of swimming who would be interested in participating!

Thank you for your consideration!

Artwork for subsequent calls on social media.





### Appendix C: Pre-Screening Survey

Thank you for taking the time to show your interest in completing my interview. To ensure you meet the criteria, please take a few moments to fill out this brief questionnaire. Upon completing this questionnaire, you will receive an email or text to book a time to complete the interviews with Ariel.

Researcher: Ariel Hodges

Full Name:

Email:

Phone:

Prefer: Texts Emails Calls All of the Above

University/ College Attended:

Year of Graduation from College:

What majors/minors did you graduate with:

What is your current role?

What NCAA Division did you compete in the sport of swimming? I II III

Did you obtain schooling after your bachelors: Y/N

If yes, what schooling did you obtain?

Did you exhaust all four years of your NCAA eligibility? Y/N

Are you interested in getting a course coupon code from ASCA for your participation?

Y/N

Please specify your age:

- 25-29
- 30-35
- 36-40
- 41-45

- 46-50
- 51-55
- 55-59
- 60+

Please specify your Race/Ethnicity:

- White
  - Black or African American
  - Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish Origin •
  - Native American or Alaskan Native •
  - Hawaiian Native or other Pacific Islander •
  - Some other race, ethnicity, or origin (identify below)
- 
- I prefer not to respond

Please specify what represents your gender:

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Other – identify here:
- I prefer not to respond

What is your preferred pseudonym? (A pseudonym is a name that will be used as a replacement for your real name in the study so you cannot be easily identified. Only you and I will be aware of your real name and the pseudonym if you choose to use one.)

## **Appendix D: Informed Consent**

Title of Research: From Start to Splash: Exploring Retirement Preparation and Career Development for Retired College Swimmers

Researchers: Ariel Hodges

IRB number: 23-X-76

You are being asked by an Ohio University researcher to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of the research project. It also explains how your personal information/biospecimens will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

### **Summary of Study**

*This study seeks to learn more about former Division I, II and III swimmers do for their career preparation and their outcomes in life post-sport retirement.*

### **Explanation of Study**

This study is being done because *swimmers are an under researched population and this study seeks to understand more about the lives of former swimmers and their experiences with career development during their collegiate swimming days.*

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a pre-screening questionnaire and a one-hour interview with the researcher. Your answers from the pre-screening questionnaire will be correlated with your interview responses and both will be used in the study. A brief follow-up call may be scheduled for follow up if the researcher deems it necessary needed.

You should not participate in this study if you have graduated after 2018.

Your participation in the study will last no more than one hour. If additional follow up is needed, a brief follow up call may be scheduled.

### **Risks and Discomforts**

No risks or discomforts are anticipated.

### **Benefits**

Individually, you may benefit by having the opportunity to share your stories and experiences surrounding the sport of swimming. Additionally, you will have the

opportunity to be a part of changing the outcome for future swimmers, especially related to career development and preparation and swimmers' lives post-sport.

You may also benefit by contributing your experiences to improve the current landscape for swimmers. Swimming is an underresearched sport and you will be contributing to the academic literature on this topic. Having an organized study on the sport of swimming shifts the focus to a non-revenue sport and allows the community to learn more about the career preparation and development as well as the lives post-sport of collegiate swimmers.

### **Confidentiality and Records**

Your study information will be kept confidential by keeping the information in a secure Ohio University One Drive folder, with the data only be accessible by the researcher. You will also be choosing a pseudonym in the pre-screening questionnaire to keep your identity confidential, if you so choose.

For maximum confidentiality, please clear your browser history and close the browser before leaving the computer.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- \* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- \* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

### **Compensation**

As compensation for your time/effort, you will receive either an American Swim Coaches Association Certification Course or be entered to win (1) \$100 Amazon Gift card. Odds of winning are 1/18. In order to be eligible for the course or gift card entry, you must complete all portions of the interview questions and all the questions in the pre-screening questionnaire.

### **Future Use Statement**

Data collected as part of this research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used for future research studies.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator [*Ariel Hodges, [ah602011@ohio.edu](mailto:ah602011@ohio.edu), 5863811673*] or the advisor [*Pete Mather [matherp@ohio.edu](mailto:matherp@ohio.edu) 740-593-4454*].

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or [compliance@ohio.edu](mailto:compliance@ohio.edu).

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Version Date: [8/22/23]

### Appendix E: Interview Questions

Question	Theoretical Framework Mapping
<p>1. Thank you for agreeing to do this. What is your current career and can you describe what you do? How do you like your work/job?</p>	<p>The question relates back to Super, Savickas and Super (Brown &amp; Brooks, 1996) and their life-span life-space theory. The swimmers in this study are in the Establishment phase of their lives, and should be working toward stabilizing and advancing their careers. This is also a foundational question for the rest of the study.</p>
<p>2. Can you discuss how long have you been in this role, and can you talk about the journey that got you here? Did you ever feel any pressure to go toward a certain career or to choose a certain major? (Prompt: Academic experience + social/ swimming experience, challenges, successes, people, positive or negative, crossroads)</p>	<p>This question ties back to multiple pieces of Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al. 2016). First, it covers the anticipated transition and how the swimmers prepared for their transition out of sport and into a job. It can also cover their unanticipated transitions they experienced. This also ties in the 4S's in Schlossberg's Theory of Transition. These 4S are situation, self and support and strategies concepts of this transition. This question seeks to understand the many ways the swimmer is undergoing their transition and making their way through it.</p> <p>Additionally, this question looks at the life-structure from Super, Savitkas and Super's Life-span, Life-space theory (Brown &amp; Brooks, 1996).. This question seeks to understand how a variety of roles and situations influenced career choices of the swimmers.</p>
<p>3. Think back to your collegiate swimming days – can you tell me about an experience that shaped how you described yourself when you were a college swimmer and college student? Can you tell me more about what the context of the story that made</p>	<p>The question relates back to the role interactions concept of Super, Savitkas and Super (Brown &amp; Brooks, 1996). Everyone has multiple roles and this question seeks to explore how roles in the swimmers life have an impact on their career choices.</p>

<p>you identify that way and did it shape your life or career planning at all? (Prompt – how would you describe yourself to someone? Are there ways in which other pieces of your identity fed into your career path?)</p>	
<p>4. When it came to career preparation, did you use any on campus resources when you were in school? Were there any external resources for career preparation that you used? Did you complete any internships or have any part-time jobs? Can you talk about how those experiences shaped your career path?</p>	<p>This question delves into the strategies employed for career development as they swimmer prepared for the transition process. This again relates to the 4<sup>th</sup> S in Schlossberg’s theory of transition, strategies (Anderson et al. 2016). It also takes into account the Self, and how the resources, jobs, etc had an effect on the swimmer.</p>
<p>5. Based on all the stories you have told me, please take a moment to reflect on your collegiate career preparation and swimming career. Is there anything you would have done differently to better prepare yourself for life post-sport? Is there anything specific that you were glad you did? (Prompt: advice for those in your position)</p>	<p>The question relates back to the self in Schlossberg’s 4S system – it takes into account the concept of the Self (Anderson et al. 2016). This question pertains to what the swimmer has done during the transition to better prepare themselves for life post-sport.</p>
<p>6. If a policy and practice were put into place regarding career development for student- athletes/swimmers, what would you propose it would be? Imagine that you had the ability to enforce a new policy or practice for collegiate swimmers at the NCAA level, which would effect all collegiate swimmers.</p>	<p>This question relates back to Schlossberg and the theory of transition (Anderson et al. 2016) – specifically, it hones in on the situation of the transition for others and seeks to assist with support for future swimmers undergoing their transition from sport. Policies and practices will have an effect on the transitions and the career decisions that those in the future will undergo. This question seeks to understand more about the swimmers ideas to help transition, and can potentially address all of the 4S’s.</p>
<p>7. After everything you have learned throughout your journey, what advice would you give a collegiate swimmer today to do for their career preparation? How did your own experiences shape this advice.</p>	<p>This question seeks to understand more about the advice these swimmers can give to someone who is in transition, which falls under Schlossberg’s Theory of Transition (Anderson et al., 2016). Alternatively, this advice could have an</p>

<p>8. Is there anything else I should know related to the shaping of your career that I haven't asked about or is related to a person, event, etc?</p> <p>9. To conclude the interviews: Thank you again for agreeing to do this interview. To complete our time together, I wanted to briefly go over your pre-questionnaire and ensure all the contact information is accurate. As part of the process, I could be following up for clarifications, so please ensure the information I have from you pre-questionnaire is correct. As a further reminder, I will keep your data for two years and only myself and my chair will have access to it, with it being stored on a password protected MacBook Pro. Your identity will be protected by using the pseudonym you supplied in the pre-questionnaire. Thank you again for completing this study and do not hesitate to reach out with further questions or concerns!</p>	<p>effect on those who are in one of the various life spans or is undergoing a role transition, both of which fall under Super, Savitkas and Super's Life-span, Life-space theory (Brown &amp; Brooks, 1996).</p> <p>Leaves space for the participant to discuss anything else they believe is pertinent to the study and gives them a chance to bring up anything I might have overlooked, or bring to light something they think is worthwhile and important.</p>
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## Appendix F: Coding Themes

### Process/ In Vivo Codes

Explaining Job  
 Explaining Job: Active Job Responsibilities  
 Explaining Job: Doesn't enjoy job  
 Explaining Job: Loving Job  
 Explaining Job: Non-active job  
 Explaining Job: Switching Jobs  
 Impacting Others  
 Impacting Others: Negative Impact  
 Impacting Others: Positive Impact  
 Receiving Support and guidance  
 Receiving Support and guidance: From God  
 Receiving Support and guidance: Mental Health Support  
 Receiving Support and guidance: Outside of Swimming Community  
 Receiving Support and guidance: Support and Guidance Needed  
 Receiving Support and guidance: Support from Athletic Advisors/ Athletics  
 Receiving Support and guidance: Support from Swimming Community  
 Swimming Identity  
 Swimming Identity: Don't make swimming your entire identity  
 Swimming Identity: Experience related to Swimming  
 Swimming Identity: Hardworking  
 Swimming Identity: Lifelong Swimmer  
 Swimming Identity: Strong Swimming Identity  
 Swimming Identity: Weak Swimming Identity  
 Swimming Impact  
 Swimming Impact: Negative Experience  
 Swimming Impact: Positive Experience  
 Swimming Impact: Sharing the love of the sport  
 Swimming Impact: Swimming Came First  
 Transitioning to Career  
 Transitioning to Career: Ability to be coachable  
 Transitioning to Career: Balancing Act - too much to balance  
 Transitioning to Career: Career Formation  
 Transitioning to Career: Career Preparation Perception  
 Transitioning to Career: Eligibility Issues  
 Transitioning to Career: Flexibility  
 Transitioning to Career: Forging own path/ trail blazing  
 Transitioning to Career: Internship  
 Transitioning to Career: Lack of Technical Knowledge

Transitioning to Career: Life post-sport  
Transitioning to Career: Negative Office/Job Experience  
Transitioning to Career: Networking  
Transitioning to Career: No use of on-campus career prep  
Transitioning to Career: Non-emotional reactions  
Transitioning to Career: Part Time Job/ Shadowing  
Transitioning to Career: Put career first  
Transitioning to Career: Spouse / Family Takes Priority  
Transitioning to Career: Stress/ Pressure  
Transitioning to Career: Struggle to find career  
Transitioning to Career: Study Tables  
Transitioning to Career: Transition to Post-Sport Careers  
Transitioning to Career: Tutoring/Academic Support  
Transitioning to Career: Used career center  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Academics First  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Additional Education  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Alumni Involvement  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Better Self Care  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Financial Course  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Finding new activities  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Getting Women Involved in Sport  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Identity loss  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Loss of Structure  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Mandatory Internship  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: More time for academics at competitions  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Prepare differently  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Professional Prep (Elevator Pitch, Career Center Stuff)  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Programming/Class needed  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Resources from NCAA  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Resume Writing  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Score Card for Coaches  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Self-Grace  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Social outlet  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Transferable Skills  
Transitioning to Life Post-Sport: Work hard to get places  
Varying Perception of Support and Guidance  
Varying Perception of Support and Guidance: Coach  
Varying Perception of Support and Guidance: Coworkers  
Varying Perception of Support and Guidance: Family  
Varying Perception of Support and Guidance: Friends

**Pattern Codes**

Active Jobs  
Career Development  
Support  
Swimming Identity



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