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Experiences That Impact The Recruitment And Retention Of International (Non-Native Speaker Of English) Student-Athletes In Ncaa Division I Institutions

Evangelos Kontaxakis
Indiana State University

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VITA

Evangelos Kontaxakis

EDUCATION:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| December 2011 | Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana, U.S.A.
PhD, Leadership in Higher Education |
| May 2008 | Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana, U.S.A.
MSc, Recreation and Sport Management |
| May 2002 | Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece
MSc, Sports for Special Populations |
| May 1998 | Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Serres, Greece
BSc, Physical Education and Sports Science |

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 2010-current | Laboratory for the Study of Human Relations, Athens, Greece.
Managing Director |
| 2006-2010 | Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana, U.S.A
Evaluation and Research Support Specialist |
| 2005-2007 | Educational Program “Muscles In Action,” Athens, Greece
Project Manager |
| 2002-2004 | ATHENS 2004 Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Athens, Greece
Communication Administrator |

EXPERIENCES THAT IMPACT THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
OF INTERNATIONAL (NON-NATIVE SPEAKER OF ENGLISH)
STUDENT-ATHLETES IN NCAA DIVISION I
INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Evangelos Kontaxakis

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee Chair: Mary Howard-Hamilton, Ed.D.

Professor, Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Kandace Hinton, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Educational Leadership, Administration and Foundations

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Anastasios Kaburakis, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Management and Sport Business

Saint Louis University

ABSTRACT

International student-athletes as a group are a unique population in any institution because they bring together three characteristics that are challenging through the educational process. Among the challenges for someone who chooses to study in a different country include facing issues such as the language barrier as well as problems in adjusting to the new culture. Moreover, balancing the role as a student and as an athlete is another challenge that international student-athletes face. Earlier research leaves gaps as it is related to international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes and their experiences, which impact their decision to study in the United States and their adjustment in the new environment.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions. More specifically, the student-athlete experiences in high school were examined which influenced their decision to move to the U.S. and the challenges they faced in the new environment. The goal of this study was to create a model that could be helpful for institutions and international student-athletes to be more prepared before making the decision to study as student-athletes in the United States.

This study used a qualitative research design involving narrative, phenomenological, and grounded theory approaches. First, the life stories of the participants were examined, then the essence of these experiences was developed, and finally common themes that built a theory were established.

The findings of this study suggest that the experiences that impact decision-making are (a) the U.S. educational system combines education and sport, (b) the U.S. system supports student-athletes and provides financial security through the scholarship system, and (c) international student-athletes want to live a new experience in life. Moreover, this study suggests that the experiences that impact retention are (a) the difficulties in English language, (b) the adjustment in the cultural differences, (c) homesickness, and (d) the time management involving the balance between the two roles (being a student and athlete).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The character of American sports is unique because it combines education with sports. Intercollegiate sports play a major role for the institutions, cities, and fans, and it is an important part of the institutions' life and pride. A large number of domestic and international students want to be a part of the intercollegiate atmosphere, to compete in various conferences, and to balance between being a student and an athlete. According to Duderstadt (2003), intercollegiate sports "is characterized by diversity among institutions, sporting events and participants" (p. 69), and one can make the separation of distinct stages in the evolution of American college sports. The first stage is the amateur character of sports, which is more a myth than a reality. The second stage is the "exhibition" stage, which involves the strong fan interest. Finally, the third stage is characterized by the "show business" phase, which involves sports such as football and basketball and celebrity coaches and players (Duderstadt, 2003).

As Bale (1991) stated, intercollegiate sports belong in a general sport system that includes three scales: the reality, the ideology, and the experience. Reality includes the agreed set of rules that allow international cooperation in sporting events. Ideology involves the American sports ethos and the perception related to the participation of international student-athletes. Finally, the experience includes the intercollegiate sports and the system that supports student-athletes to perform. Student-athletes have many challenges to face after high school: (a)

to make the right decision by choosing an institution and to adjust to a new environment, where the athletic and the academic roles need to be balanced, and (b) to deal with the “show business” character of collegiate sports.

After high school, students who want to continue to pursue playing competitive sports need to make the right decision for their futures, choose the institution that fits their needs and wants and, once they are accepted, be able to adjust to the environment and balance between the role of being a student and an athlete. The decision to go to college has a major impact on their careers, livelihoods, and lifestyles of individuals and the society as a whole (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). For international students, this decision is more critical because they need to change not only the physical environment by changing countries, but also to adjust and to be successful in a totally different culture. International student-athletes need to have the drive to attend American colleges and to participate in sports while they concurrently prepare themselves to receive their education. Also, international student-athletes need to follow the requirements set by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to retain their amateur status. This process takes time and international student-athletes need to consider all these aspects, years before their graduation from high school.

International student-athletes need to be well prepared and know many different aspects of the new role they want to play in order to make the right decision. Also, once they make the decision to move to the United States, they have to face many other challenges: adjusting to a different culture, being competitive in a system that combines sports and education, and speaking a different language, among others. In the history of intercollegiate athletics, many institutions have recruited international student-athletes from all over the world with the goal to build competitive teams and to win. Many coaches argue that there is a need of international student-

athletes because there are not enough elite American athletes (Wilson & Wolverton, 2008).

Additionally, athletic directors want to win national championships, and they increase the pressure on coaches to find talented athletes from countries outside of the United States.

Therefore, the explanation of international recruiting is sought in a general world system which characterizes sports (Bale, 1991).

Recent statistics from the NCAA show that more than 17,000 student-athletes from countries outside the United States compete for their institutions (NCAA, 2008). These student-athletes present the new face of intercollegiate sports in the United States and according to Rose Greenstein (Wilson & Wolverton, 2008), chief executive in scholarship for athletes, international athletes will become the majority in intercollegiate athletics. In addition, the proportion of international student-athletes in many Division I institutions has doubled since 2000 (Wilson & Wolverton, 2008). In tennis, during the academic year 2005-2006, 30% of the male players were from countries outside the United States. The same situation occurs in other sports, such as ice hockey (23% of male players), golf (14% of female golfers), skiing (13% of all skiers), and soccer (10% of male players). Wilson and Wolverton (2008) also state the number of international student-athletes is growing fast in basketball, swimming, gymnastics, and track.

As a group, international student-athletes are a unique student population with specific characteristics who face challenges and obstacles that are not within the usual set of academic and social pressures faced by their non-athlete or non-international peers. International student athletes combine two major characteristics: (a) the cultural and many times the language barrier (student-athletes from countries except Great Britain, Australia, Canada) as a result of being international non-native speakers of the English language and (b) the role of being a student and an athlete and their effort to successfully satisfy their obligations to their academic unit, family,

coach, team, athletic department, and the policies and regulations of the NCAA (Watt & Moore, 2001).

International student-athletes have to deal with many responsibilities and face many challenges from the time they decide to study in the U.S. until the time they graduate from college. International student-athletes need to adjust to a new, very competitive environment and not only adapt to a new culture and system but also succeed as students and athletes. This causes problems such as identity foreclosure (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000; Nelson, 1983; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988; Watt & Moore, 2001), isolation from other students (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001; Nishimoto, 1977; Parham, 1993; Person & LeNoir, 1977), issues of academic competence and readiness (Ender & Wilkie, 2000), health and injury challenges (Parham, 1993), low level of career maturity (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), and anxiety and fear associated with the sport retirement process (Parham, 1993; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 1996).

Also, at the institutional level, international student-athletes bring a different culture for two reasons. First, they bring their own culture and different experiences from the country of origin, and second, they participate in athletic competitions which are a major event for every community and the results affect an entire campus or even a town, city, or state. This is extremely important for the institutions because they develop a diverse campus, especially these days when globalization is important for new professionals around the world. According to Stomquist and Monkman (2000), educators consider how globalization will affect institutions and the role that the university needs to play. The pursuit of education combined with globalization has brought up several topics such as diversity, culture, environment, and migration. Intercollegiate sports, as a major part of the university's life, have a lot to contribute

to the development of a more diverse campus. Apart from that, the globalization of sports is a fact, and one of the most remarkable features of the twentieth century is the spread of sports and the connection with different cultures (Stoddart, 1994).

Although international student-athletes make the decision to study in the U.S., research is limited related to (a) the experiences that influence this decision and (b) the challenges international student-athletes face once they move to the U.S. Furthermore, there is a lack of literature related to the factors that influence and motivate international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes to come to the United States and to enroll in a program having an athletic scholarship at the same time. Also, there is a lack of literature related to the factors that influence the adjustment of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes to the new culture, language, and educational system.

The knowledge of the factors that influence international student-athletes to come to the U.S. will help administrators build better marketing strategies that will focus on the factors that are important to students and other target groups, such as family and friends. Also, the knowledge of the needs and wants of international student-athletes will help administrators develop better services in order for students to better adjust to their new lives.

Statement of the Problem

The experience international student-athletes face is unique, from the time they begin entertaining the thought of applying to a U.S. institution until the time they have been accepted, studied, and finally graduated. During all these years, international student-athletes prepare themselves to be good students and athletes. In their transition, they have the opportunity to be exposed to a different culture and to speak a different language. They also face challenges and

obstacles, and they need to be prepared emotionally, psychologically, and physically to overcome the difficulties.

On the other hand, institutions need to employ marketing strategies that focus on specific factors that influence international student-athletes' decisions to come to the United States. Also, institutions need to know the factors that influence international student-athletes' adjustment on campus in order to provide specifically designed services for them. By providing such services, institutions may limit any difficulties coming from the cultural difference or the exposure to the new language and system. Then, the international student-athletes will be better prepared and very focused on their goal, which is to be successful as student and athletes.

Yet, little research has been conducted to explain the experiences that affect recruitment and retention of international student-athletes. To fill this gap in literature, a comprehensive research study was conducted that focuses on international student-athletes' experiences related to the factors that influence them to come to the United States and what needs to be done for a better adjustment to the new culture that they might experience.

In this qualitative research study, two theoretical models were used: one related to the decision making process, and the other related to cross-cultural adjustment factors. The theoretical model used for the decision making process is from Bale (1991). The theoretical model used for the adjustment of international student-athletes is that from Ridinger and Pastore (2000). The current study had the aim to oversee qualitatively if there are other experiences that impact recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in Division I institutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because its findings may assist institutions in developing better strategies to recruit the best international student-athletes and to help these student-athletes graduate. Also, this study provides valuable insight for administrators and coaches to investigate the specific characteristics international student-athletes have as a group, to develop better campaigns in order to recruit highly qualified international student-athletes, and to retain them while focusing on the development of their academic and athletic skills, and performance. Additionally, the study adds to the knowledge of the importance of international student-athletes on campus and opportunities for every institution to develop a diverse environment. Moreover, knowing the factors that influence the adjustment of international student-athletes will help administrators provide better services to student-athletes with the aim of minimizing their challenges and to better focus on their academic and athletic performance.

Research Questions

How do experiences of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes impact their decision to come and attend a program in NCAA Division I institutions the U.S.?

How do experiences of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes impact their decision to remain in NCAA Division I institutions?

Definitions

Below is a list of the definitions related to this research.

Recruitment. A process in which students choose the college they want to attend.

Retention. A longitudinal process in which students enroll every semester in classes with the aim to graduate from college.

International (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes. Someone for whom English is not the native language, and he or she has completed high school in a country where the population speaks a language besides English. In addition, the student-athlete should be eligible according to NCAA rules to perform in a sport and at the same time should be a full-time student.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The governing body of intercollegiate athletics for approximately 1200 member colleges and universities. The NCAA establishes policies and procedures related to student-athletes' eligibility, recruitment, financial aid, and other issues related to the membership.

Division I. NCAA consists of three Divisions (Division I, II, and III). According to NCAA rules and regulations, Division I and II institutions offer athletically related scholarships to student-athletes, and Division III institutions may occasionally offer athletic scholarships (NCAA, 2010). In general, larger colleges or universities participate in Division I, and smaller colleges in Division II and III. The current study has been limited to Division I because according to the NCAA (2008), nearly 70% of international student-athletes are enrolled at NCAA Division I institutions.

Researcher's Role and Personal Statement

In August 2006, I left Greece for the U.S. to accomplish one of the biggest dreams in my life, to study abroad and to experience all these challenges that someone faces when living in a

totally different environment, far away from the family or significant others, speaking another language and trying to adjust to a new culture.

In Greece I had the opportunity to pursue some of my educational and professional goals. I received my bachelor's degree in physical education and sports science and my master's degree in physical education for special populations. During these years, I worked in various areas related to sports, such as coaching and teaching, and in journalism. After the end of my master's program I worked for the Olympic Games in Athens, as a communicative administrator in the Paralympic Games, because of my background in sports for special populations and journalism. After the end of the Paralympic Games in November 2004, I developed the educational program "Muscles In Action," which has the goal of educating people with no disability, in order for them to learn more about people with disability.

Before coming to the U.S., I did not expect to face so many problems related to my adjustment in the environment. After the first year, I realized that there were not enough services provided for international students to help them adjust to the new culture. After completing my master's program at Indiana State University in sport management, I wanted to learn more about the international student-athletes who came to the U.S. to study.

Because I have the goal to go back to Greece and help other people make their dream a reality, the experiences of the international student-athletes will help me to understand what is important for them when they decide to come to the U.S. and what are their needs and wants in order to adjust to the new culture. This knowledge will help the institutions to develop better marketing strategies and services focusing on international student-athletes.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized in seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces this qualitative study related to recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions. This chapter emphasizes the importance of understanding the lived experiences of international student-athletes so the colleges and universities can develop campaigns to recruit the best international student-athletes and to retain them until their graduation from college.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review related to the role of intercollegiate sports in the U.S., the role of being a student-athlete, and the differences between domestic and international student-athletes. Also, an overview of international student-athletes in college and universities in the U.S. is presented along with the reasons for institutions to recruit international student-athletes. From there, the chapter moves into a specific focus on the decision-making models that present the factors that influence and motivate international student-athletes to come to the U.S. and to attend a program. In addition, in this chapter the model from Ridinger and Pastore (2000) related to recruitment of international student-athletes is presented.

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative research method used in this study. A combination of three qualitative approaches (narrative, phenomenological, and grounded theory) were used and an analysis of them is presented. Also, in Chapter 3, the selection of the participants, the data collection, and the analysis process are described.

Chapter 4 provides the participants' experiences using their own voices as expressed during the interview. Each story starts with family background information related to education and occupation of parents and siblings and continues with early childhood experiences in

education and sport. Also, each story includes participants' experiences regarding their decision to study in the U.S. and their adjustment in the new environment.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis and interpretation of the interview data. The student-athlete stories are further examined for a broader and deeper understanding of what it means to be an international non-native speaker of English student-athlete. Moreover, Chapter 5 presents the themes and subthemes that emerged as a result of the participants' experiences.

Chapter 6 discusses the themes and subthemes and provides a deeper reflection of the findings as well as the model developed from this study. The model describes the experiences that international student-athletes have in high school and how those experiences influenced their decision-making process and their adjustment in the U.S.

Chapter 7 provides an overview of the findings concerning the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions. Moreover, in Chapter 7 the highlights of the results and the limitations are presented. This chapter concludes with recommendations for (a) institutions of higher education, (b) international student-athletes, and (c) further research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions. In this chapter, the theoretical framework and literature review are presented. The first section includes the analysis of intercollegiate sports in the U.S. and the debate between academics and athletics, the governing bodies that lead intercollegiate sports in the U.S., the divisions in which the institutions are categorized, and an overview of international student-athletes in the U.S. The second section presents the theoretical framework related to the decision making process that international student-athletes follow in order to come to the U.S. and the retention challenges or cross cultural adjustments that international student-athletes face while they study in an institution.

The Role of Intercollegiate Sports and being a Student-Athlete

The precise role of athletics as part of the higher educational institution's mission attracted much attention in economics and sociology literature. The problem of integration of athletics into the total educational mission/process leads to the following debate: On one hand, it is argued that most institutions have a well-defined athletics mission, which is well aligned with the educational purposes of the institution; and on the other hand, it has been contended that

athletics have a negative effect on student-athletes' academic performance and pose problems for faculty members.

One example of society's interest in college athletics is the debate around NCAA propositions 48 and 42, which attempted to maintain certain academic standards for student-athletes (Maloney & McCormick, 1993). In fact, student athletes' participation time in university level sports practice and competition is regulated and generally kept at 20 hours per week. In NCAA's 1991 convention, the member schools cast their votes to limit student-athletes' in-season practice time to 20 hours per week, four hours per day, with at least one day per week to be totally without practice.

Duderstadt (2003) noted that there is an old saying among college presidents that the modern university might be viewed as a fragile academic enterprise, delicately balanced between the medical center at one end of the campus and the athletic department at the other. The former can threaten the institution financially; the latter puts at risk the university's integrity, reputation, and academic priorities.

As stated by Thelin (2004), the "collegiate ideal" stressed the importance of character and teamwork, and university sports prospered as a visible, highly valued section of that idea. Since their inception, intercollegiate athletics were a source of passionate enjoyment and competition among students. In the time elapsed, the games earned a good public response, both in terms of viewers and news reporting. Shortly, Thelin mentioned that baseball obtained great recognition especially during commencement week, where college teams played in front of large alumni crowds.

Around 1880, sport activities had faded from the limelight. Rudolph (1990) stated this situation as "the rise of football" (p. 373). The football teams of universities became the teams

of interest for news reporters and powerful front-page headlines each day. Football also happened to instigate new writing styles and journalistic terminology. These football teams gained good local and national publicity, which amplified attention among alumni, paying readers, and the general population. As Rudolph stated, roughly between 1890 and 1910, the traditional university athletic association underwent an alteration: professionalization of the staff, namely, the hiring of an athletic director and coaching staff.

However, despite the fact that intercollegiate sports attract more than ten times as many live spectators as professional sports in the United States, the NCAA defines itself as an organization that runs amateur sports (Allison, 2001). The general principles of NCAA have shaped the philosophy of intercollegiate sports in the U.S., which promotes the connection between amateurism and sports. According to Glader (1978), the major purposes of amateurism are (a) the social distinction, which separates the so-called gentleman amateur from the lower classes of the society, (b) the special advantage distinction, which separates people who developed skills and strengths in their regular occupations from the people who participate in amateur sports without earning money or having a training during their occupation, and (c) the motivational distinction, which refers to the motive that someone has to participate in athletic competition. The aforementioned major purposes of amateurism are in clear distinction from the purpose of professional sports in which winning is important, training is harder and longer, and professional athletes are more skillful than amateurs (Glader, 1978).

The positive role of college sports. College sports have a multi-faceted impact on the moral and the psychological state of the entire population. Intercollegiate sports for many supply a few of their lifetime memories, whether they might be athletes or the viewers. Additionally, the most lasting life lessons can be learned from athletic competitions: the importance of

discipline, perseverance, and teamwork (Duderstadt, 2003). Athletes can reach their most coveted goals only through effort and sacrifice and at times even these are not sufficient. Also, Duderstadt mentioned that college sports offer a sense of enthusiasm, pride, and involvement for the community of an entire university and in a way they may help the community by developing an imperative emotional bond.

Additionally, success in high-profile intercollegiate sports is an enticing factor among quite a few other factors that are considered by the would-be undergraduates. An institution can gain national notoriety and garner media and sponsors/donors' attention easily when it wins a national championship in one of the two most noticeable sports: football and basketball. And this leads to an increase in applications in the following admission terms (Toma & Cross, 1998).

Research studies by Tucker and Amato (1993) and McCormick and Tinsley (1987) investigated the relationship between athletic success and academic quality. Tucker and Amato concentrated on finding the effects of a high-profile athletic football or basketball team and the effect that it has on the quality of students as measured by average SAT scores. They found that a high-profile football team has good SAT scores, but the basketball team did not. McCormick and Tinsley (1987) examined whether athletic success corrodes academic quality by using SAT scores and found that institutions that participate in major college athletics fare better academically than those that did not participate. Also, athletic participation at varying NCAA levels affects students' choice about the college they will attend (Mixon & Hsing, 1994).

Moreover, Grimes and Chressanthis (1993) examined the effects that athletic success has had on donation and alumni giving, resulting in a positive relationship among overall winning percentages and donations, but they could not find any relationship between championships and

donations. Also, institutions with higher academic quality have an advantage on recruiting athletes that are better students (Selegman, 1995).

The dark side of college sports. A debatable question which has been raised is whether the quasi-professional nature of (certain, essentially football and men's basketball) college sports is consistent/aligned with the academic purpose of U.S. colleges and universities. A number of universities take advantage of student-athletes and their athletic talent for gaining economic and public visibility by lowering academic standards via special admits and enrolling them in worthless degrees such as general studies or recreational life (Duderstadt, 2003).

In addition, the unnecessary commercialization of college sports compromises the academic integrity of the universities that host these programs. Athletic programs moved away from their stated missions and became a place for entertainment business, challenging and striving for public exposure and commercial revenue for success on the playing field rather than providing an essential learning and recreational experience for students and a combined, community-building opportunity for audiences. Many times intercollegiate athletics are seen and assumed by the majority of the public as agitated and uncontrolled (Duderstadt, 2003).

Additionally, non-athletic students perform well when compared to the student-athletes (Maloney & McCormick, 1993). The student-athletes' SAT scores are on an average, 150 points lower than non-student-athletes. Later studies showed that when compared to the non-student-athletes, student-athletes come less prepared to class (Center for the Study of Athletics, 1988; Sellers, Kuperminc, & Waddell, 1991).

In conclusion, competitive sports can provide vital educational experiences for students, be it at the intramural, club, or university level. When interrelated with integrity and in concurrence with the educational mission, sports can offer students chances to develop

significant qualities such as dedication, sacrifice, and teamwork. However, intercollegiate sports have polluted the academic culture with profit-making values (Duderstadt, 2003). Intercollegiate sports have imprecise priorities through inconsistent resources. And moreover, they have diverted and weakened the leadership of the academic institutions.

In today's world college sports provide a stage for public entertainment for audiences and generate rewards for those who are in it. Consequently, intercollegiate sports took a diversion from an extracurricular activity into a commercial form of business. As a result, an essential question here is why should this particular form of public entertainment be the responsibility of the university? Universities make available a wide range of public services, such as health care, and this is also a piece of the university's mission (Duderstadt, 2003). Intercollegiate sports are usually conducted as autonomous, highly profitable entertainment business, governed by qualified people with some understanding of the academic programs of the university. For this reason intercollegiate sports have a unique character, where the student-athletes are required to balance themselves and their roles so as to perform well academically and athletically, which is not an easy task.

Domestic vs. International Student-Athletes

The previous section focused on the role of intercollegiate sports and how student-athletes perceive their role and the challenges they face. This section focuses on the differences between the domestic and international student-athletes and how this influences their performance academically and athletically. Many researchers have explored international student-athletes as a group and compared domestic and international student-athletes related to their perception about intercollegiate sports, what motivates them, and how the experiences they have as student-athletes influence their careers after graduation.

A study with the participation of student-athletes from 49 different countries and the U.S. showed that domestic students found college sports to be more about competition than what international student-athletes believe (Pops, Hums, & Greenwell, 2009). In addition, student-athletes feel successful primarily because of their accomplishments in sports (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). However, international student-athletes feel that they have to gain much more from the university experience in the U.S. than just from athletic performance.

Additionally, there are differences in the motivation related to the sports competition between domestic student-athletes and student-athletes from different countries (Guest, 2007). Guest mentioned that his findings support the idea that student-athletes from the U.S. perceive the role of sports in society differently, and for them it is a way to overcome obstacles and to be successful. However, the student-athletes from Malawi who participated in his study mentioned that their motivation to participate in sports is to show and develop their talents and abilities without caring so much about success.

At this point, it is important to mention that there are differences between the systems that support sports in the U.S. and in other countries. Many researchers have studied these differences between the school-based sports system in the U.S. and the club-based system in other countries (Brennan & Bleakley, 1997; Chalip, Johnson, & Stachura, 1996; Rubingh & Broeke, 1998). Because of the differences in these systems the athletes who participate in sport competitions perceive their role as athletes differently, and some of them focus more on how to win, others on how to participate and develop their skills and abilities.

Also, in a different study from Pops, Hums, and Greenwell (2009), which focused on how participation in intercollegiate sports enriches career status, both domestic and international student-athletes mentioned that their participation in sports plays a very important role to their

careers and that employers also value this experience as important. Also, student-athletes learn much from their experience in sports and that makes them more attractive to employers (Argent & Robinson, 2005). Furthermore, Pops et al. (2009) supported the belief that international student-athletes have about the importance of the intercollegiate sport experience for their career. A possible explanation is that employers in their countries know how the NCAA works, especially for Division I institutions, and therefore employers value the experience international student-athletes had.

NCAA and other Governing Bodies of Intercollegiate Sports in the U.S.

NCAA owed its establishment to President Theodore Roosevelt's invitation to representatives from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to the White House in order to bring peace to football (Crowley 2010). In October 1905, 18 Americans died playing football, and President Roosevelt invited coaches and physical directors from the "big three" institutions to charge them with responsibility to find a solution to the problem football was facing (Rudolph, 1990). Some months later, President Roosevelt proposed the formation of a committee to draft a constitution and bylaws for a new organization responsible for more than one sport. The drafts were approved in March 1906 (Crowley, 2010). Thus, in 1906 the Intercollegiate Athletic Association was born, an organization that changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association four years later.

NCAA consists of three divisions (Divisions I, II, and III). These divisions were established in August 1973. According to NCAA rules and regulations, Division I and II institutions offer scholarships to student-athletes, and Division III institutions offer occasionally and rarely athletic scholarships (<http://www.ncaa.com>). In general, larger colleges or universities participate in Division I and smaller colleges in Division II and III. In addition, in

1980 NCAA began developing women's athletic programs and then in 1982, the 75th Convention established a governance plan that included women's athletic programs and services.

In addition to the NCAA, in 1940, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) was established. First, it was established as the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball of the United States, but in 1952, was transformed into the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and the first all-encompassing set of rules and standards was adopted (NAIA, 2010). NAIA's membership consisted of smaller colleges, which were not members of the NCAA. NAIA provides opportunities to over 45,000 student-athletes from smaller institutions to perform in academics and athletics. Institutions that belong to NAIA also offer scholarships. NAIA member institutions award millions of dollars through athletic aid to eligible student-athletes and create an environment where competitive athletics, academic excellence, and champions of character walk hand-in-hand (Bale, 1991).

In this study, NCAA Division I institutions are the focus because this division includes the majority of institutions that participate in intercollegiate sports and recruit the highest numbers of domestic or international student-athletes. Also, the NCAA is the main entity that governs intercollegiate sports in the U.S. and has its principles in the amateurism character of sports connected to education (Crowley, 2010).

Moreover, the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I Institutions. The decision to explore Division I instead of Divisions II and III is the fact that according to NCAA (2008) nearly 70% of international student-athletes are enrolled at NCAA Division I institutions. Also, several professional players in the National Basketball Association, in the National Hockey League, and in professional golf are former

NCAA Division I international student-athletes (Pops et al., 2009). In addition, the challenges student-athletes in Division I face are greater and the training is heavier because the competition is much higher than in Divisions II and III.

Overview of International Athletes in the Colleges and Universities in the U.S.

The way the community and the students showed interest in sports was clearly noticed by college recruiters, who thus recruit students from all U.S. regions, nations, and now all over the world. Demand to create high-quality sports programs led to the demand to recruit internationally (Bale, 1991). The first international student-athletes who participated in intercollegiate sports were a small number of Canadian track and field athletes in the early 1900s (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000a). In the 1950s, recruiting of students was primarily local, followed by regional, which later slowly took a turn to international students (Bale, 1991).

It was in 1952 when the Sanity Code of the NCAA was revoked, which permitted the policy of giving full scholarships to students solely based on their athletic ability (NCAA, 2010). Subsequent to the Sanity Code's repeal, recruiting of international student athletes and their interest to come to the United States increased. There was a significant increase in the number of international student-athletes coming to the U.S. (Bale 1991). Some institutions that had sports as a central component of their mission started consistently recruiting international student-athletes in the 1960s and 1970s (Stidwell, 1984). Recruiters started searching for athletes in several countries, especially in Africa where track and field talent was abundant, and many of these prospects won many medals in world championships and Olympic Games. By 1978, 35% of the NCAA track and field athletes were from Africa (Hollander, 1980).

Recent statistics from the NCAA show that more than 17,000 student-athletes from countries outside of the United States compete for NCAA member institutions (NCAA, 2008).

These student-athletes present the new face of intercollegiate sports in the United States. Since 2000, the number of international student-athletes in many Division I institutions has doubled (Wilson & Wolverton, 2008).

Moreover, the percentage of male and female international student-athletes has increased since 1999-2000 from 1.8 to 4%, and 1.5 to 4.5%, respectively (DeHass, 2008). At the divisional level, the percentages of international student-athletes in Division I were increased by 2.4% in 1999-2000 and by 6.3 and 7.5% respectively in 2006 and 2007. Also, the percentage of international basketball student-athletes has doubled in Division I and II between 1999-2000 and 2006-2007. In Division I, the percentage of male international basketball players jumped to 8.7%, up 5.7%, while the percentage of female international basketball student-athletes rose to 7.3%, up from 2.4% eight years ago.

Reasons for Institutions to Recruit International Student-Athletes

International student-athletes have strong motives to come to the U.S. and attend a program and are more mature and work harder than domestic student-athletes (Asher, 1994). Also, Asher mentioned that international student-athletes have experiences from a club-oriented system, which is more competitive than intercollegiate sports, and therefore international students can help their teams to be more competitive.

Other times colleges or universities choose to recruit international student-athletes because they do not have enough domestic student-athletes. For instance, as Bale (1991) mentioned, "Basketball is the major US college sport but the interstate variations in 'production' of good high-school basketball players range from states like Illinois and New York, which each produce over 2000 percent of the needs of in-state institutions" (p. 30). Thus, the variance

between the supply and the demand curve showed different patterns of inter-regional migration of sport talents.

Additionally, international student-athletes can add to the quality of competition and they can contribute to the system of intercollegiate sports and the campus life. Also, the experience of attending a college in the U.S. can be beneficial to international student-athletes, not only because they will receive an education while they participate in intercollegiate sports but also because they will build a stronger career (Weston, 2006).

On the other hand, there is an argument related to the participation of international student-athletes in intercollegiate sports. Some claim that international student-athletes take athletic scholarships from domestic students and in select cases, such as in tennis, 30% of the athletic scholarships go to international student-athletes (Grevskes, 2004). Also, another argument is the fact that in many cases international student-athletes have competed on the professional level and that causes them to allegedly be in a higher performance level than domestic students who compete in intercollegiate sports. This is a thorn for the NCAA, which tries to develop limits and regulations (Ridinger & Pastore, 2001).

Also, some difficulties the NCAA faces when institutions recruit international student-athletes are the academic eligibility and the amateur athletic standing. These two factors are extremely important for the rules and regulations of NCAA in order to do the clearance for an international student-athlete (Weston, 2006). Because of the different educational systems around the world, it is difficult for the NCAA to verify if an international student-athlete meets the academic criteria. In addition, because of the fact that in many countries there is a club-based system, it is difficult for NCAA to confirm if the international student-athletes have any kind of professional contracts that make them immediately not eligible to participate in

intercollegiate sports in the U.S. According to Wieberg (2008), out of 542 cases in two years in which incoming athletes were found violating amateurism guidelines, 472 involved foreign athletes. This situation has presented new challenges for the NCAA.

Decision-Making Models

Many researchers have conducted studies presenting the factors that influence student-athletes in their decision to select a specific college. Dickie (1980) conducted a study by using the *individual attribute evaluation* (IAE) model in which student-athletes list the importance of attributes one at a time, and the decision maker evaluates separately each attribute on a scale from 1 to 10. However, the research was unable to evaluate the relative importance of attributes. Hopkins (1982) improved the methodology related to an institution's selection process technique by using different scenarios and student-athletes who had to choose the scenario and their responses. Also, Hopkins used phrases to characterize attributes rather than single terms.

In another study, student-athletes were asked to compare three universities as they were choosing which university to attend by using *information integration theory* (IIT), (Doyle & Gaeth, 1990). The most important attribute was the amount of scholarship and that was in contrast with the aforementioned studies in which *academics* was the most important attribute. Also, four basic types of factors that influence the college choice process of student-athletes are (a) the reputation of academic programs, (b) social climate, (c) cost and location, and (d) influence of others (Martin & Dixon, 1991). Other factors are also important, such as (a) financial aid, (b) availability of major, and (c) the advice of a religious leader (Sevier, 1993).

In addition, Gabert, Hale, and Montvalo (1999) conducted a study in order to find the differences in college factors among freshmen student-athletes. The study surveyed 246 subjects from NCAA Divisions I and II and NAIA by using a 30-item Student-Athlete College Choice

Profile Scale to measure the differences on college choice factors. The results indicated that the most important factor was the advice from the head coach. Also, Division I student-athletes defined academic support as one of the most important influential factors, while Division II student-athletes mentioned the location of the school as the most important factor.

Furthermore, Goss, Jubenvill, and Orejan (2006) used the same scale to measure the factors that influence the decision of student-athletes in small colleges. The 229 freshman student-athletes who participated in this research study mentioned that athletic, academic, and campus related factors influenced them in their college decision. Specifically, the top 10 factors were degree programs, opportunity to play, head coach, academic support services, spiritual guidance, athletic facilities, on-campus dorms, social climate, athletic traditions, and size. In another study in which 196 softball student-athletes participated, the most influential factors were the availability of a major or academic program, head coach, career opportunities after graduation, social atmosphere of the team, and the amount of financial aid (Kanley, 2007).

Related to the differences between male and female student-athletes about their decision to attend college, a study from Judson, James, and Aurand (2004) showed that female student-athletes value their academic opportunities more in comparison with the male student-athletes who value the athletic opportunities more. Also, another study from Mathes and Gurney (1985) underscored the importance of the academic opportunities in the decision making process for student-athletes, and the researchers concluded that female student-athletes value this factor more than male student-athletes. Overall, Mathes and Gurney showed that the three most important attributes for student-athletes in university selection are (a) the level of athletic competition, (b) academic reputation of the university's faculty, and (c) the desired major.

Moreover, on differences in the selection-making process between student-athletes and non-athletes, a study showed that although student-athletes have different factors that influence college choice, non-athletic related factors are as important as athletic related factors (Letawaky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003). Also, academic factors are important for student-athletes when they select a college (Mathes & Gurney, 1985).

The aforementioned studies present factors that influence the decision-making process of students-athletes. However, these studies have focused only on domestic student-athletes. Jones, Koo, Kim, Andrew, and Hardin (2009) explored the motives of international student-athletes who came to the U.S. to participate in intercollegiate sports. The authors used a survey that consisted of 29 items that contributed to their decision to come to the U.S. Each item featured a Likert scale assessment, and the 212 international student-athletes who participated in the study from Europe, America, Oceania, Africa, and Asia evaluated the significance of each item by answering *not important at all* to *extremely important*. The findings revealed four motivation factors athletic attractiveness, institution attractiveness, desire for independency, and environmental attractiveness. Also, there were differences in motives depending on the type of sport and region of world origin.

These findings were similar with previous studies, such as Berry's (1999), who indicated the importance of academic and athletic achievement as an important factor for international student-athletes to come to the U.S. The unique characteristics of the U.S. educational system attract international student-athletes to the U.S. and combine education with sports.

In a study related to the factors that influence decision making for international student-athletes, it was found that international student-athletes want to come to the U.S. because they have limited access to sport facilities compared with those in U.S. institutions (Bale, 1987).

Also, international student-athletes found difficulties in their countries in combining training with a full time job or school, compared to the U.S. system that combines athletics with academics. In addition, international student-athletes claimed that they had limited access to higher education in their countries, and that makes them explore alternative solutions in the U.S. In addition, there are several factors of stress that make international student-athletes make the decision to leave their countries and come to the U.S. in order to study and to participate in collegiate sports as athletes, such as lack of facilities, lack of time, and lack of coaching (Bale, 1991).

Lack of proper facilities and infrastructure causes athletes to think beyond their home countries. International student-athletes often complain about the poor domestic training facilities with which they are not satisfied. Inappropriate medical facilities are also another reason that makes athletes look toward other countries. In addition, inadequate preparation and lack of immediate access to the requirements for training are factors influencing international student-athletes' decisions. Hearing the stories of international student-athletes studying in the United States, we can learn that the lack of time for practice is also an important aspect, which makes them think of the need for better coaching. Finally, lack of coaching shows considerable impact on the results from the athlete (Bale, 1991).

All the aforementioned studies have analyzed the factors that influence international student-athletes' decision to come to the U.S.; however, these studies have not paid much attention to qualitative data. Also, the studies that analyze factors that impact international student-athletes' decisions toward coming to study in the U.S. do not take under consideration the language barrier, and they include in their sample international student-athletes from Great

Britain, Australia, and Canada. The current study takes language under consideration and explores how international student-athletes made the decision to come to the U.S.

Retention and Cross-Cultural Adjustment Models

Because of the increased internationalization of sports, sport teams and institutions need to consider the services they provide to their international team members for a better adjustment to a new environment. For that reason, researchers have conducted studies with the aim to analyze cross-cultural adjustment and to provide a theoretical framework related to retention. In this section, studies are presented with a focus on cultural adjustment, and the theoretical framework by Ridinger and Pastore (2000) related to college adjustment for international student-athletes is applied.

Whereas most of the literature has focused on training and selection, there is little research about the mechanisms that influence the adjustment to living and working in a foreign country (Tung, 1988). Cross-cultural adjustment has been defined as “the adaptation to living and working in a foreign culture” (Palthe, 2004, p. 39), and the degree of a person’s psychological comfort with the aspects of the new environment (Black, 1988; Nicholson, 1984; Oberg, 1960).

Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991) mentioned that there are three specific facets of cross-cultural adjustment, which are (a) work adjustment, which includes adaptation to new roles and tasks, and new environment; (b) interaction adjustment, which includes adaptation to interact with people in and out of the working environment; and (c) general adjustment, which includes adaptation in every aspect of living in the foreign culture. However, cross-cultural adjustment may have a different impact on the person who experiences it in each facet of life (work, interaction, and in general), (Palthe, 2004).

Also, people with higher self-efficacy and self-monitoring had better adjustment in the three aforementioned factors (general, interactions, and work adjustment, Harrison, Chadwick, & Scales, 1996). The authors suggest training techniques such as work simulations, assessment techniques and center counseling, and on-the-job training in order to change self-efficacy and self-monitoring, and for people to have better adjustment in the new environment.

The shocks that someone faces when they enter a new country and culture are cultural shock, language shock, and shock of self-discovery (Wilcox, 1994). According to Black and Gregersen (1991), the theoretical framework for cross-cultural adjustment comes from the research on culture shock that was conducted by Oberg (1960), Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962), and Torbiorn (1982). These researchers presented results that when people enter into a new country and culture they realize that behaviors that are appropriate in their home country may not be acceptable in the new host country.

Culture shock has been defined “as the period of transition and adjustment during which a person who has been relocated experiences some degree of anxiety, confusion, and disruption related to living in the new culture” (Befus, 1988, p. 381). Also, culture shock starts “in a foreign environment where the cultural norms and cues are different from those at home” (Wilcox 1994, p. 438). Generally, the culture shock varies from person to person related to the intensity and duration, and it is more severe in unprepared people and when the distance between the home country and the new country becomes greater. The lack of cultural awareness is the main factor why that culture shock occurs and affects people intellectually, emotionally, behaviorally, and physiologically (Befus, 1988).

When one enters a new country, one experiences the “honeymoon phase,” which occurs the first two months and is characterized by the happiness of experiencing a new place and a new

culture without seriously facing day-to-day problems (Black & Gregersen, 1991). After the honeymoon phase is the adjustment phase, which takes time and is different from person to person. However, the adjustment phase might be shorter in duration if the newcomers have had the chance to socialize with people from the host country (Chatman, 1991).

Also, Wilcox (1994) provided a definition for language shock. He mentioned that when an individual who enters a new country faces problems with the language, he or she feels stressed and that reflects on his or her ability to communicate effectively. Also, if someone cannot understand the language at all, it is very hard for someone else to understand the person's intelligence or knowledge. Therefore, in many cases people who experience language shock need to re-learn how to communicate. The international student-athletes whose first language is not English are likely to face difficulties, which are considered as technical incompetency. Studies (Church, 1982; Hishida, 1985) have found considerable positive correlations between language proficiency and effective adaptations of sojourners, which might sometimes result in frustration, alienation, and a lack of adjustment.

Finally, Wilcox (1994), on the shock of self-discovery, mentioned that many individuals start discovering themselves more when they experience new things, behaviors, and cultures. This self-discovery makes them realize that they have biases that they never thought of before or that they are not so flexible, open-minded, and tolerant as they thought they were. It is a fact that most individuals are unaware about their own values, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus, the transition from one environment to another brings cultural predisposition into perception and conflict (Alder, 1975).

The value of cross-cultural preparation. Foreigners (or the visitors) are the ones who mostly act as a bridge between two cultures and are responsible in bringing in the change

(Wilcox, 1994). The person who is traveling must learn how and what to say in terms of expectations and predispositions of those listening, in a way that the host nation understands. To achieve this skill, training is very essential. While training on pre-departure and post-arrival, the following topics also should be included interpersonal skills, cross-cultural interactions/adjustment and culture shock, professional and communication competencies, problem areas and barriers and personal qualities, and other considerations that are vital. Also, Wilcox (1994) stated that foreigners who receive cross-cultural training before going abroad are less affected from the culture shock.

Also, Befus (1988) explored treatments specifically designed for the needs of a group of 64 international students from North America who went to Costa Rica to study Spanish. The treatment design combined both intercultural and psychotherapeutic training method techniques. The aim of those techniques was to reduce physiological and emotional stress. Students after the treatment had fewer numbers of symptoms of psychological distress in comparison with the control group. Thus, the recommendation of the study encouraged organizations or agencies to provide training to their personnel in order to eliminate the effects of culture shock.

All the characteristics of cross-cultural effectiveness should be considered throughout the stages of searching, short-listing, interviewing, and selecting coaches, managers, or athletes (Wilcox, 1994). Before making the short-listing of candidates or while taking up the references for candidates with equal coaching abilities or athletic proficiencies, candidates' interpersonal skills and cross-cultural interactions should be taken as the major criteria while making the final selection. The main intention of the selection process is to recognize and select individuals who have the potential of being able to live, work, and perform effectively in a foreign environment.

Their conduct must be able to balance the demands and differences between the self, home, and the foreign nation.

All the aforementioned studies have analyzed the cross-cultural adjustment of students or individuals who experienced culture shock. However, little research has been conducted related to international student-athletes. In the following section a study from Ridinger and Pastore (2000) is presented and it was the theoretical framework of the current study because it analyzed the factors that influence cross-cultural adjustment of international student-athletes.

The Ridinger and Pastore adjustment model for international student-athletes. To understand the phenomenon of adjustment of international student-athletes to college, a framework was developed by Ridinger and Pastore (2000). This hypothesized framework was prepared after a wide-range evaluation of literature. This framework was primarily developed to explore and examine the relationships between the antecedents and their outcomes, which are most of the time connected with adjustment to college for international student-athletes.

This framework consists of three components: (a) antecedents of adjustment, (b) adjustment to college, and (c) outcomes that may be associated with the antecedents and/or adjustment to college. Ridinger and Pastore (2000) suggested that there is a need for further research on this framework in a variety of other settings. The outcomes and relationships among the antecedents, fluctuate, depending on the variable demographics such as student athlete's home nation, gender, athletic association, or type of sport.

After reviewing literature, concepts, and ideas of various studies on cross-cultural adjustment, four dimensions came into sight, which served as antecedents or predictors of international student-athlete adjustment. These are personal, interpersonal, perceptual, and cultural distance dimensions.

Personal dimensions of the model include self-efficacy, which consists of both academic and athletic components, and technical competencies. These can be further classified into academic aptitude, athletic aptitude, and English language proficiency. Interpersonal dimension comprise activities and attributes that boost a student-athlete's ability to interact efficiently with teammates, coaches, faculty, and staff. Perceptual dimension focuses on aspects that may influence international student-athletes' insight on the university or the environment. Finally, the cultural distance dimension is often referred to as cultural novelty or cultural toughness and this can be explained as the extent of cultural variance between the campus and the student athlete's home nation.

In this current study, the theoretical model by Ridinger and Pastore (2000) was explored in connection with the lived experiences of international student-athletes. The purpose was to oversee if the factors the authors describe are the best predictors and if there are others that the model does not include.

Summary of the Literature Review

Chapter 2 presented a literature review related to the role of intercollegiate sports in the U.S., the role of being a student-athlete, and the differences between domestic and international student-athletes. Also, an overview of international student-athletes in college and universities in the U.S. and the reasons for institutions to recruit international student-athletes were presented. The chapter moved into a specific focus on the decision-making models that presented the factors that influence and motivate international student-athletes to come to the U.S. and to attend a program. In Chapter 2, two theoretical models were presented related to recruitment (decision making) and retention of international student-athletes. Regarding recruitment, Bale (1991) mentioned that the lack of facilities, the lack of time, and the lack of coaching are the

factors that lead international student-athletes to make the decision to leave their country and come to the U.S. in order to study and participate in collegiate sports as athletes. Related to retention, Ridinger and Pastore (2000) found that personal, interpersonal, perceptual, and cultural distance dimension factors are important for international student-athletes to remain in a program. The following chapter explains the research method, the criteria for participant selection, data collection, and the analysis process.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter identifies the research design method and the methodological approaches that were used in conducting this study. The first section of this chapter includes a review of the qualitative research method. The second section includes a discussion of the methodological approaches and the research design. The applications of the narrative, phenomenological, and grounded theory approaches are examined with the purpose of analyzing the experiences of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes. Finally, the third section includes the selection of the participants, the data collection, and the analysis process.

Qualitative Research Method

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions. In this study a qualitative research method was used because a problem or issue needed to be explored. Qualitative research “locates the observer of the world” and “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world.

Qualitative data is a tool that allows researchers to investigate the depth, patterns, and understanding of an issue (McLean, Jensen, & Hurd, 2004). It is mainly concerned with the

properties, the state, and the character (i.e., the nature) of phenomena (Labuschagne, 2003).

Qualitative research generally uses the natural environment and acknowledges the researcher as the instrument in the interaction (Handerson, 1991; Patton 1990). Also, Patton (1990) noted that “qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail” (p. 13).

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers cited two major purposes of a study: to describe and explore and to describe and explain. Furthermore, qualitative researchers approach a question without a hypothesis or a question to prove or disprove, rather they choose to focus on understanding the phenomena and potentially creating new knowledge (McLean, Jensen, & Hurd, 2004). Additionally, according to Patton (1990),

The task of the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or the part of the world about which they are talking. (p. 24)

According to Creswell (2007), to study a problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Qualitative research was used in this study because it is helpful in explaining the phenomena of interest and investigating the factors that influence recruitment and retention of international student-athletes. Handerson (1991) suggested qualitative methods for researchers interested in sports because qualitative approaches enable one to depict the participants’ experiences and identify complex behaviors. A qualitative approach is particularly effective for

exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive studies. Furthermore, Maxwell (1996) pointed to five particular purposes for which qualitative research is especially suited for sports. These are as follows: (a) understanding the particular context within which participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions; (b) identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new grounded theories about the latter; (c) understanding the process in which events and action take place; and (d) developing causal explanations.

In addition, a qualitative research method is the appropriate one for investigating psychosocial development, especially for diverse populations (Evans, Forney, Guido, Renn, & Patton, 2010). In this study, international student-athletes as a group was a diverse population that included people from different countries, having different cultures, speaking different languages, and experiencing different phenomena. The investigation of their experiences helped to understand the factors that influence their decision-making process to come to the U.S. and the factors that influence their adjustment in the new environment. Therefore, the outcome of the qualitative research method in the current study was the presentation of the voices of participants and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, extending the literature and signaling a call for action (Creswell, 2007).

According to Creswell (2007) and Devers (1994), there are five approaches in qualitative research method: (a) narrative, (b) phenomenology, (c) grounded theory, (d) ethnography, and (e) case study. In narrative the focus is on life of an individual. The focus of phenomenology is a concept of phenomenon and the essence of the lived experiences of persons about the phenomenon. Grounded theory refers to theory that has derived from data. The focus of ethnography is to describe a culture-sharing group, and finally, the focus of case study is to examine a specific case with the aim to illustrate the complexity of the issue.

Creswell (2007) presented a series of questions that researchers need to answer before choosing the appropriate approach. These are (a) what is the approach attempting to accomplish? (e.g., the study of an individual, the examination of the meaning of experiences toward a phenomenon, the generation of a theory, the description and interpretation of a culture-sharing group, the in-depth study of a single case); (b) what approach is frequently used by gatekeepers in the field? (e.g., Committee members, advisers, editorial boards or journals); (c) what training does the researcher have in the inquiry approach?; (d) what is needed most as contributing to the scholarly literature in the field? (e.g., a study of an individual, an exploration of the meaning of a concept, a theory, a portrait of a culture-sharing group, an in-depth case study); and (e) is the researcher more comfortable with a more structured approach to research, a storytelling approach (e.g., narrative research, ethnography), a firmer, more well-defined approach, or with a flexible approach (e.g., grounded theory, case study, phenomenology)?

In this study, combined qualitative research approaches were used that included narrative, phenomenology, and grounded theory. Narrative helped me to develop participants' stories. Phenomenology allowed me to explore the phenomenon and to understand the lived experiences of the international student-athletes. Listening to participants' experiences helped to understand the essence of their stories and make meaning of their lived experiences. Also, since there are no theories for recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker) student-athletes, the grounded theory approach provided the framework for developing a theory based on the lived experiences of the interviewed international student-athletes in this study.

Research Design: Narrative Analysis Approach

Narrative approach in qualitative research method is a fairly recent movement; however, the beginning of narrative analysis has its roots in the hermeneutic studies of the Bible, Talmud, and Koran (Czarniawska, 2004). By the 1990s, narrative analysis had become a common approach in political science, psychology, sociology, and education (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Curtis, 1994; Fisher, 1987; McCloskey, 1990a; Polkinghorne, 1987; Richardson, 1990; Silvers, 1995).

Narrative analysis describes life experiences and involves story telling (narratives). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative “is the best way of representing and understanding experience” (p. 18). Experience happens narratively and therefore narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. People must value the experiences they live and it is important to learn from them (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). The authors suggested that by paying attention to everyday experiences, people develop problem solving skills, though they are not completely fruitful without organized analysis. Evaluating experiences sometimes comprises validating and appreciating that particular experience.

Many authors, such as Greertz, Batenson, Coles, Czarniawska, and Polkinghorne (as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), used narrative to analyze experiences in their work. Every author has added a new view about narrative inquiry as a method to describe experiences. These views are (a) it is impossible to look at one event once without seeing the event as a whole, (b) what we write is always open to revision, (c) researchers need to have trust in life and the stories they teach or tell, and (d) it is possible to borrow theories, metaphors, and terms from other disciplines as a way to connect research with practice.

Why narrative approach. Experience is the key and the researcher needs to transform it into an inquiry term that helps to understand it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly mentioned that when a researcher studies experiences that people have about a phenomenon, narrative inquiry is the best method because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and the most appropriate way of thinking and writing about it. In addition, “engaging stories can help us understand what life is like for others, and invite the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 41). Preskill and Brookfield (2009) mentioned that some people learn from their experiences as well as from others’ experiences.

However, one criterion of experience is continuity, which means that “experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). That leads to personal knowledge, which is important for leaders in any organization and is related to problem-solving skills (Northouse, 2010). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) pointed out, narrative focuses on personal practical knowledge. One way of understanding subjects’ knowledge was an inquiry into the nature of their experiences. Therefore, “the narrative mode of knowing consists in organizing experience with the help of a scheme assuming the intentionality of human action” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 7).

Because the aim of the current study is to influence policy making by leaders at U.S. institutions, narrative inquiry can be a useful approach to analyze the experiences of international (non-native speaker) student-athletes. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) referred to the narrative side of lawyering that can make lawyers achieve a better outcome in courts. That can be an important metaphor related to the current study. The stories that international student-athletes shared could develop new policies to help them adjust easier to the new environment. Despite this, law has been slowly moving in the direction of recognizing the legitimacy and power of

narrative. “Children and certain other witnesses are permitted to testify in the form of a narrative, rather than through question-and-answer examination” (2001, p. 45).

Furthermore, Preskill and Brookfield (2009) pointed out that when personal experiences are analyzed they can bring to society an understanding of how power works and how people use power. This fact will be important in the current study, because analysis of the experiences international student-athletes face will help people who have the power at U.S. institutions to develop better services for international student-athletes. For that reason, narrative unity can give a way “to think in a more detailed and informative way about the general construct of continuity in individuals’ lives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), “powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity” (p. 43).

The different types of narrative studies and the power of storytelling. Creswell (2007) presented the different types of narrative, which are biographical study, autobiography, life history, oral history, and storytelling. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), writers use storytelling to challenge beliefs related many times to cultural issues. “Stories also serve a powerful psychic function for minority communities. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences” (2001, p. 43).

The power of storytelling is the fact that readers can connect their worlds and views with those of others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). However, it is also important to be mentioned that “people live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 47). For Bateson (1994) change is one of the characteristics of lives. Change comes from learning. For Bateson, learning is change.

Continuity results because people improvise and adapt; that is, they learn (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In summary, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative becomes a way of understanding experience. A researcher's excitement and interest in narrative has its origins in the researcher's interest in experience. In the current study, listening to the stories of international student-athletes helped to provide a better understanding and meaning of their experiences. Also, the view of their opinions became clear related to the factors that influenced their decision to come to the U.S. and their adjustment on campus. In addition, as Czarniawska (2004) advocated, narration is a common mode of communication, so by asking international student-athletes to tell their stories a better communication with them was developed.

Research Design: Phenomenological Research Approach

Phenomenology was introduced into the social sciences by Alfred Schutz and his pupils, Peter Burger and Thomas Luckmann (Czarniawska, 2004). It describes the meaning of a phenomenon and the lived experiences of individuals, with the aim to learn and explore it (Creswell, 2007). In addition, Creswell mentioned that "phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also seen as an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences" (p. 59).

According to van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994) there are two major approaches of phenomenology: hermeneutic phenomenology and empirical or psychological phenomenology. The differences between the two approaches have to do with the source of data and the method of gathering it. Van Manen (1990) described the hermeneutic approach as an effort to study lived experiences, to describe them, and to explain the phenomena.

Moustakas (1994) pointed out the empirical or psychological phenomenology, which focuses more on the experiences of the participants and less on the interpretation from the researcher. For that reason, data needs to be gathered from people who have lived the phenomenon. Later on, the researcher analyzes the data by using themes and then develops a textural description of what people lived and a structural description in which he or she describes how people lived these experiences (condition, context).

In this study, empirical or psychological phenomenology was used. Data were collected by asking international student-athletes about their experiences before coming to the U.S., what made them choose to study in the U.S., and how was their adjustment to the new environment. The interaction with participants focused on shedding light onto hidden truths from the experiences they lived.

Research Design: Grounded Theory

Grounded theory aims to provide further description and to generate a theory from the data that the phenomenology approach gathers (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) claimed; “A grounded theory should explain as well as describe” (p. 5). The idea is that participants share their experiences in order to explain a phenomenon (phenomenology) and that leads to a development of a theory by using the grounded theory in qualitative research methods. Geertz (1995) mentioned that understanding the changing world is critical, Bateson (1994) focused on understanding “how one understands the changing world” (p. 8), and Strauss and Corbin (1998) pointed out that an important component of grounded theory is to build change, because phenomena are not static. Also, Batenson (1994) said that the change comes from learning and learning is change. Therefore, “grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant

conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 5).

Grounded theory as a qualitative approach was developed in sociology in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss (Creswell, 2007); however, they had an argument related to the meaning and procedures of grounded theory. Glaser (1992) mentioned that Strauss’s approach is extremely prescribed and structured. The two researchers’ work led to the grounded approach becoming popular in various fields such as sociology, education, and psychology.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) used two standard questions to examine the data: “What is happening in the data? And what action does each particular happening, incident, event or idea represent?” (p. 62). These questions aim to identify categories and the relationship between them and the core category, which is the most important. Also, grounded theory presents connections between categories and that helps researchers to develop theories (Charmaz, 2006). Theory can be built from data by asking general questions and leaving participants to express their views about a phenomenon that is being studied.

Chiovitti and Piran (2003) presented four methods for enhancing credibility in the grounded theory research approach:

Let participants guide the inquiry process, check the theoretical construction generated against participants’ meanings of the phenomenon, use participants’ actual words in the theory, and articulate the researcher’s personal views and insights about the phenomenon, specify the criteria built into the researcher’s thinking, specify how and why participants in the study were selected, delineate the scope of the research, and describe how the literature relates to each category which emerged in the theory. (p. 430)

In the current study, grounded theory helped me to develop a theory related to the factors that influence international (non-native speaker) student-athletes (a) to make the decision to come to the U.S. to study and (b) to adjust to college life. From the literature review, as it was described in Chapter 2, there is one theory from Bale (1991) that focuses on the factors that influence international student-athletes to come to the U.S. Also, Ridinger and Pastore (2000) have developed a theory related to the adjustment of international student-athletes.

However, these two research studies do not take into consideration the language barrier as a factor. The current study focused on developing a theory after the interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants. Theory, according to DiCaprio (1974), “has four increasingly powerful uses: description, explanation, prediction, and control” (as cited in Evans et al., 2010, p. 23). Also, Walsh (1973) (as cited in Evans et al., 2010) mentioned that theory in order to be useful

must exhibit the following qualities: (a) comprehensiveness: a theory should make predictions that account for a wide range of behavior; (b) clarity and explicitness: concepts and relationships should be defined precisely; (c) consistency: a theory should allow inclusion of findings within a logical framework; (d) parsimony: explanations should be concise, simple, and easy to follow; and (e) heurism: a theory should generate ideas for research. (p. 24)

Finally, it is important to mention that, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the aim of grounded theory is not always to generalize findings to broader population but to build a theoretical explanation about the phenomena and the experiences participants lived.

Participants

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) “representativeness of concepts, not of persons is crucial” (p. 9). In grounded theory sampling proceeds in terms of concepts and not in terms of drawing samples from specific groups of individuals. Patton (1990) said, “Qualitative research method typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, selected purposefully” (p. 169). Also, according to Patton, “qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases” (p. 11), so there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. The validity of qualitative research methods is connected with the richness of the information from the participants selected rather than the sample size.

The logic and power of purposeful sampling has its explanation in the depth that qualitative research method provides to the researcher. Therefore, the researcher needs to select participants who have rich and in-depth information and knowledge of the phenomenon that is investigated. Patton (1990) proposed different strategies for choosing a purposeful sample: extreme or deviant case sampling, intensity sampling, maximum variation sampling, homogeneous samples, typical case sampling, stratified purposeful sampling, and critical case sampling, snowball or chain sampling, criterion sampling, theory-based or operational construct sampling, purposeful random sampling, sampling politically important cases, and convenience sampling.

In the current study, a combination of sampling strategies was utilized to select the participants, and included maximum variation sampling, criterion sampling, and stratified purposeful sampling. By using stratified purposeful sampling and maximum variation sampling, major variation was captured, according to Patton (1990). Variation in this study was important because the population consisted of international student-athletes coming from different

countries, having different genders, and playing different sports. Patton (1990) pointed out that with four small samples heterogeneity can be a problem, and therefore maximum variation sampling strategy turns this weakness to a strength by following the logic: “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program” (p. 172).

In addition, criterion sampling was used to ensure participants in this study were not from countries where English is a native language and who did not have any education in English. These two parameters affect students’ adjustment at U.S. colleges because they do not have to face the language barrier. Also, criterion sampling helped to choose international student-athletes who were eligible to participate in basketball or in one of the individual sports such as track and field or tennis and that they were sophomores, juniors, or seniors.

Therefore, the selection of interviewees was restricted to colleges and universities in the state of Indiana. To be an eligible participant, the interviewee needed to be born in a country besides the United States, Canada, Australia, Great Britain or any other country where English is a native language and to have lived there until his or her graduation of high school. An international (non-native speaker of English) student was defined as someone whose use of the English language is not the native language and he/she had completed high school in a country where the population speaks a native language other than English. In addition, the interviewees needed be eligible according to NCAA rules and regulations as international student-athletes in one of two sports: basketball or an individual sport such as track and field or tennis. The selection of those sports were made on the basis of the data provided from NCAA, which indicates that basketball, track and field, and tennis are the sports that recruit the majority of the international student-athletes (NCAA 2008). The third criterion was that participants needed to

be sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Finally, the last criterion was that interviewees needed to have the appropriate level of English competency (TOEFL score more than 213-computer based) in order to be able to express their experiences and to communicate during the interview.

The process used included sending an email to the athletic directors of NCAA Division I institutions in the state of Indiana (Appendix A). The four criteria for choosing the sample were mentioned. After the received answers from the athletic directors, an email was sent to the international student-athletes and the letter of invitation (Appendix B). Some of the international student-athletes replied by saying that they did not want to participate and some others mentioned the opposite. To those international student-athletes who had the willingness to participate the informed consent was sent (Appendix C) and the interview was scheduled.

Therefore, in the current study, six interviewees participated. The sample consisted of one female basketball player, one male track and field athlete and four female tennis players from three Division I institutions from the State of Indiana. The six participants were from three countries: two from Greece, one from France, and three from Russia.

Table 1

Participants' Profile.

Name	Gender	Year at school	Country	Major	Sport	Father's education	Mother's Education
Bolt	M	Senior	Greece	Criminology	Track & Field	BSc (Police Academy)	BSc (Nursing)
Mary	F	Junior	France	Business	Tennis	MBA	MBA
Andrea	F	Sophomore	Russia	Economics	Tennis	Ph.D.	BSc
Georgia	F	Senior	Greece	Sociology	Basketball	High School	High School
Jennifer	F	Senior	Russia	Sport Management	Tennis	BSc (Medicine)	BSc (Physical Education)
Jessica	F	Sophomore	Russia	Undecided	Tennis	No information	BSc (Finance)

Data Collection

A variety of techniques, such as focus groups, the Delphi approach, in-depth interviews and observations can be used in order to obtain useful data concerning this study (Labuschagne, 2003; Weinstein, 1994).

In the current study semi-structured interviews were used in order to give the opportunity to the participants to express their experiences. Interviewing is the best method for pursuing a subject in depth, operating in a discovery mode, and creating interactions with individuals (Handerson, 1991). The purpose of interviewing is to allow the researcher to understand the respondent's perspective. Patton (1990) reinforced this idea by saying, "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 341). Interviewing can be expensive, time consuming, biased, and sometimes inefficient, however the method also provides some of the richest data that researchers can find.

Additionally, interviewing offers many advantages in allowing the researcher to have a greater understanding of the complexities of social reality from a number of perspectives (Handerson, 1991). Also, Preskill and Brookfield (2009) advocated that raising quality questions through interviews to people in relation to their stories will help make them think intensely about them. Usually questions are asked about the concerns common to the group being interviewed. As a result, interviewing is the best way to identify the experiences of international student-athletes related to their decision-making process and their adjustment in the U.S.

Also, one important aspect in interviews is for both the researcher and participants to become comfortable with one another. This is extremely important because "in qualitative inquiry the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 1990, p. 14). During the collection of the data the researcher needs to come close to the participants and to understand not only in depth the

details of their experiences, but also the perceived facts. In addition, the researcher needs to include what was actually mentioned by using the direct quotation that participants used (Lofland, 1971).

Furthermore, because of the fact that bias may occur in the data collection and in the integrity of the investigation, careful consideration must be paid to the necessity of allowing trust and rapport to build before delving into the experiences, perceptions, and knowledge of the participants. Hatch (1995) stated the following with respect to the importance of rapport building between the researcher and the participants:

Individuals who are unwilling or unable to share their perspectives in open-ended interviews or who are unwilling or unable to act naturally while being closely observed do not make good participants. An essential element in any study that attempts to get at participants perspectives is the development of trust and rapport between researcher and participant. (p. 125)

Moreover, Riley (1996) added to the above statement that interview questions should be of an orienting nature and should avoid specifics so that the informants can speak about what is important to them. Also, interviews should be conducted at a time and place convenient for the participants (Devers, 1994). The data were analyzed immediately after the completion of each interview as Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested, because “data collection and analysis are interrelated processes” (p. 6), and the first interview and its analysis directs the next interview and observation.

In the current study, semi-structured, audio taped interviews lasted 45 minutes for each participant. The interviews were face-to-face. The interview started with demographic questions of each participant. This approach allowed me to probe the participant’s background. During

the interview, participants were encouraged to discuss their experiences. The spoken language during the interview was English. As Patton (1990) pointed out, intercultural interactions are always subject to misunderstanding, and because the data from interviews are words the researcher needs to be aware of concerns that may arise: “Cross-cultural interviewing is intriguing, challenging, rewarding, and not a little precarious” (p. 338). In order to eliminate the possibility of misunderstandings and misinterpretations, any information that was not clear enough was discussed immediately after each interview.

To ensure data integrity and credibility to the conclusion of the current study, triangulation methods were used. According to Cohen and Manion (2000) triangulation is an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (p. 254). Also, triangulation method studies a particular phenomenon using more than one method to gather data, multiple types of analysis, and different theoretical perspectives (Chenail, 1997). As a result, a more detailed and balanced picture of the phenomenon is attained (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch & Somekh, 2008).

In the current study, different perspectives were used to have a better understanding of the participants’ experiences. First, the interviews were conducted in the place where the participants played the sport. Also, besides the interview with the participants, I had the chance to spend three hours with four of the participants and to see them perform in the field. During the observations notes were taken of participants’ performance, their reactions, their overall attitude, and their interactions with the coach, their teammates, and other members of the team. According to Patton (1990), “there is a limitation to how much can be learned from what people say. To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method” (p. 25).

In addition, after the interviews, participants were asked to address any points that needed clarification. Finally, the themes and subthemes were sent to the participants, and they were asked to confirm that the analyses reflected the experiences they expressed.

Data recording. Riley (1996) suggested audio-taping as the preferred method for accurately recording interview conversations. The main benefit of audio taping interviews is to have an exact reproduction of the research data (Handerson, 1991).

Handwritten note taking can be selected when transcribing conversations and researchers have oftentimes found written records to be incomplete (Douglas, 1991). However, taking notes in tandem with audio-taping can be helpful in pointing out the main interview points. Furthermore, field notes were taken after each interview to highlight particular responses given by the participants.

Interview Protocol

A set of open-ended questions was developed to organize the semi-structured interviews. The questions covered seven main areas of the participants' personal and academic life experiences (Appendix D). These were (a) family background, (b) academic background, (c) athletic background, (d) educational and sport system in country of origin, (e) transition to the U.S., (f) experience in the U.S., and (g) challenges and opportunities of participants related to education and sports.

Some examples of questions were the following: What influenced your decision to come to the U.S.? What were the goals you set for yourself in coming to the U.S.? How can you describe the transition from the country of origin to the U.S.? What influences your adjustment in the U.S.? What are the challenges you have faced being in the U.S.? What are the opportunities you have because of your decision to come to the U.S.? Do you have any regrets related to your

decision to come to the U.S.? How do you describe the experience you live related to education you receive? How do you describe the experience you live related to your sports performance? What are the services that an institution needs to provide for international student-athletes to be more prepared when they come to the U.S.? What are the services that an institution needs to provide for international student-athletes to have a better adjustment in college life?

Informed Consent

Before the interview, each potential participant was faxed or emailed a consent form that described the purpose of the study, the expected time required, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality and compensation information, and statements re-affirming that the participation would be voluntary and the participants could withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequence. Each participant was given time to read the consent form and the opportunity to ask questions or address concerns. If the person decided to consent, he or she needed to sign the form and to return it back (by fax or email) to me. Then, the time for the interview would be scheduled.

Ethical Considerations

Approval to conduct this research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Indiana State University. The interviewees were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary. Also, it was stated that their participation would not harm them psychologically.

Potential Risks and Benefits

There were no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. Potential benefits were ideas or the facts they would reflect about what they had experienced so far in life and were related to their choice to come to the U.S. and to study. Participants could request a copy of the final results after completing the study.

Confidentiality

The data were confidential. Each participant's name was not associated with any information he or she provided. Each participant selected a pseudonym, and it was assigned and used within all transcripts and reports. The audio (digital recorded) interviews were kept in a file in my computer and I did the transcriptions of the interviews. Individuals from Institutional Review Board inspected these records. Research data were not shared with any other individual and destroyed after the analysis and the written outcomes of the current study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in five phases. The first phase included the transcription of the data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by me and were sent to the interviewees in order to verify that the transcriptions were correct and to avoid misunderstandings. The second phase of the analysis involved the detailed reviews and documentation of the experiences. In this phase each participant's story was developed as each participant expressed it. The third phase incorporated the cross-analysis of the data, the interpretation, and the creation of themes and subthemes by me. During this phase the qualitative computer software program (QSR NVivo) was used in order to manage codes. The process followed was to read carefully each sentence and to give it a theme. Then, each statement was transferred into the software and a "tree" was created with all the themes and subthemes. The software by following this process was able to manage the sentences and to group them under a specific theme or subtheme. The fourth phase included the use of two debriefers who independently reviewed the data. Finally, the fifth phase involved the discussion of the interpretation and the themes and subthemes with the two debriefers who critically analyzed my interpretation and findings.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with the aim to become more experienced in data collection and analysis. Also, the pilot study helped me to make changes to the list of semi-structured questions developed. The chosen participant for the pilot study, Georgia, was an international (non-native speaker of English) student-athlete in a NCAA Division I institution. A faculty member introduced Georgia to me and she was willing to participate in the pilot study. The open-ended questions I used were

1. What is your age and nationality?
2. Tell me about your family. What were the occupations and education of your parents?
Do you have siblings? What level of education and occupation have your siblings attained?
3. Tell me about your education. What level of education did you have before coming to the United States?
4. From which country did you obtain your degree?
5. Tell me about your athletic performance in your country
6. What influenced your decision to come to the United States?
7. How long have you lived in the United States?
8. Have you ever traveled in the U.S. before coming to study?
9. Tell me the impression you have about the U.S., the people and the culture when you first arrived.
10. What were the first problems that you faced when you first arrived in the United States?

11. What were the goals you set for yourself in coming in the U.S.? Have the goals been met?
12. Who has supported you financially to come to the U.S.?
13. How did you find the institution you are in?
14. How was the process? Tell me the steps you followed in order to come to the U.S.
15. Who supported your idea to come to the U.S.?
16. Describe your perception about the intercollegiate sports you had before coming to the U.S. Is it still the same?
17. Are you satisfied from the level of education?
18. Tell me about the challenges you face as an international student-athlete
19. How could you compare your social life in the U.S. with the life you had before?
20. Can you say the international student-athletes are fully adjusted to the U.S. culture?
If not, please explain.
21. Have you ever been made to feel uncomfortable as an international student-athlete in the team or in classroom?
22. How do you think your teammates perceive you?
23. How do you think your classmates perceive you?
24. How do you think your family, relatives and friends perceive what you are doing in the U.S.?
25. How could you compare the educational system in the U.S. and in your country?
26. Tell me about the first year experience as an international student-athlete? How did or do you overcome the challenges? What keeps you going?
27. What do you wish you knew before leaving your country to come to the U.S?

28. If you had to do it again, would you make the decision to come to the United States and become a student-athlete?
29. What does the institution need to do in order for your adjustment to be easier?
30. Are there any services that you want to be provided by the institution in order to feel more integrated on campus?
31. What other experiences, suggestions and input would you like to share about your role as international student-athlete in the U.S.?

Once the interview was completed I transcribed the recording. Then, the transcription was sent to Georgia and she was asked to add extra information that might be important and she forgot to mention during the interview. After her feedback her story was developed, which included only her voice without my questions.

Summary of Study Design and Methodology

This chapter described the qualitative research method that was used in this study. A combination of three qualitative approaches (narrative, phenomenology, and grounded theory) was used and an analysis of them was presented. Also, in this chapter was described the selection of the participants, the data collection, and the analysis process. The results and the analysis of the study are included in chapters four to six. Chapter 4 includes participants' stories. Chapter 5 presents the themes and subthemes that emerged from the cross-case analysis, and Chapter 6 a deeper discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 4

Results I

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in Division I institutions. Using participants' voices, this chapter presents their experiences as expressed during the interview. Each story starts with family background information related to education and occupation of parents and siblings and continues with early childhood experiences in education and sport. Also, each story includes participants' experiences regarding their decision to study in the U.S. and their adjustment in the new environment.

The preparation of this study made me think about the experiences of the six participants and through them I saw my own life and experiences when I was an athlete in long jump in Greece and at the same time I tried to complete my bachelor's degree. While preparing to meet the first participant, I realized that participants' experiences are like long jump. This metaphor represents participants' passion to run fast and to prepare themselves for a huge jump far away from their country with the goal to achieve as many things as they can, to have a good control on the air when they have to balance their roles as students and athletes and finally to prepare themselves for a safe landing which can help them for a successful future.

Georgia's Story

Georgia was the first who participated in this study. As I mentioned previously a faculty member introduced Georgia to me in order to conduct the interview for the pilot study. Georgia was an international student-athlete at the University of New Horizons (UNH). UNH is a public research university with approximately 20,500 students (18,000 undergraduate and 2,500 postgraduate). In regards to academics, UNH is organized into four academic colleges (Liberal Arts College, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, and College of Engineering), two professional schools, and several interdisciplinary divisions. These colleges provide 81 majors and minors, 48 master's degree programs, and 42 doctor of philosophy programs. UNH operates under a \$435 million budget. In regards to athletics, UNH's sport teams play in NCAA Division I. Programs include men and women's soccer, cross country, basketball, track and field, baseball, softball, tennis, golf, and women's volleyball. UNH has built a great history in sports.

UNL is located many hours drive from the place I live. Thus, I chose to conduct the interview via Skype, using a camera and a microphone. We agreed to meet at noon. Georgia was on campus wearing her athletic shorts and t-shirt with the name of UNH. I welcomed her and I was ready to start the journey to a new world of knowledge with the hope to open new horizons in my mind and to be able to help international student-athletes in the future.

Due to the fact that Georgia is from Greece, we talked for a couple of minutes in Greek, sharing our common experiences from Greece. We laughed a lot about some cultural issues that represent the Greek culture and we compared them with the U.S. culture. I think that this conversation helped us to break the ice and to feel much more relaxed. Later on, I explained to

her that the purpose of the interview was to conduct a pilot study and to make adjustments in the interview guide. So, it would be very helpful to have her feedback after the end of the interview.

Georgia's day from early in the morning until noon was busy. She woke up and she started preparing a journal, she went to class for two hours, and she had a meeting with one of her professors to discuss a project. When I saw her via Skype she was anxious if she would make it to a meeting two hours after our discussion. I told her not to worry and we started the interview.

Family and background. Georgia was born in a small town on a Greek island. The island is in a central position in the Mediterranean Sea and it is located at the crossroads of traffic between Europe, Asia, and Africa. The town has about 2,500 inhabitants who enjoy the nature, the beaches, and the nice weather. According to the history, people from this small town produced archers for the army of Alexander the Great, built the ships for the Venetian merchants, and survived the collapsing Byzantine Empire.

Georgia's parents graduated from high school and they own a small bookkeeping service. She described her parents as loving and caring with a mentality that is related to the mentality and the culture of the place she was born. This mentality has a connection with values that support strong relations among the members of the family. Also, religion played an important role in her parents' beliefs and values which, in general, Georgia acknowledged as conservative.

Georgia is the fourth child of the family. She has three brothers; two of them have bachelor's degrees in accounting and marketing and work in the family business. The third brother is a professional basketball player. Georgia said that she is really connected with her family and especially with her grandmother. Georgia was taught traditional values.

Early education and sport career. Georgia followed the Greek educational system, which includes elementary education for six years and then six years of high school. She mentioned that she was a good student in high school and she liked to read books and to prepare the assignments for school. Before her graduation from high school she had concerns about her future. Her parents wanted to support her education, and one of her brothers who had connections in the U.S. as a basketball player influenced her to start thinking to apply at a college in the U.S. Her decision to study in the U.S. was made when she was in the last year of high school. She applied to a junior college, and after two years of studies she got her associate degree in education. Then, she transferred to a four-year university to get her bachelor's degree in communication

Georgia started playing basketball when she was 13 and she participated in different leagues. She also played at a professional level. Georgia was a member of the national team and she participated in many tournaments in Europe and in European championships. However, she was not satisfied with the level of the Greek women basketball. Georgia said: "Greek basketball is not great, especially for women and I did not think there were enough opportunities for me to get better and to be able to play at a competitive level."

Decision to study in the U.S. and steps to transition. Georgia's brother played an important role in her decision to study in the U.S. Her brother was a professional basketball player and he had contacts from the U.S. Moreover, Georgia was a member of the Greek national team and recruiters from U.S. institutions were able to see her performing on the field. Also, Georgia had another connection through an American teammate while she was in Greece. Her teammate knew the assistant coach of the institution (junior college) to which she finally

applied and was accepted. Then the coach from the second institution (four-year institution) heard about her, he saw some tapes with matches, and he told her to apply.

Georgia in the beginning was not sure if it was better to start at a four-year university or at a junior college. As she mentioned, “I was advised by a friend that it would be better for me to start from a junior college because that would make my transition easier.” Because she was not sure, she missed the first deadline to apply for fall semester, so she did not start the year directly after high school. Instead Georgia started in January at the junior college and she immediately received a full scholarship. Also, her family supported her financially with all the procedures while she was in Greece as well as her transition to the U.S.

While Georgia was in Greece her impression of intercollegiate sports was very limited and she did not expect the business part and “the politics part that was going on behind the scenes in the NCAA,” as she said. Also, she realized that most coaches worry about winning and not so much about helping athletes getting better for themselves. “And now I know that’s part of the process,” she added.

Living in the U.S. Georgia’s first impression of U.S life and culture was totally different from what she expected it to be based on the information she had through movies and other forms of media that portrayed the U.S. culture. As she described, “It was a matter of adjustment to a different environment and way of learning the social norms.” One of the major problems she faced was the language, and she found it hard to communicate with people. Also, when she started playing basketball with the team she realized that the basketball game in the U.S. is different in comparison with Greece. “It was more based on physicality and quickness and not so much in structure and organization like it was in Greece,” Georgia said. Moreover, there were some other little things that were different such as greeting people or things to do for fun.

Georgia remarked that as an international student-athlete she faced some difficulties from most of her teammates because they had never had any interaction with international students before meeting her. “I was completely new to them,” Georgia said. Sometimes they were curious and interested to get to know her better, but the majority of the time she had a hard time with them because they did not know how to react to her. As a result Georgia had difficulties making connections.

Also, Georgia pointed out that coaches or schools in general do not have any mechanism to support international students with their transition. Furthermore, she added,

There’s this NCAA rule that says coaches are not supposed to give rides to athletes, but for me that just made my life so much more difficult because I did not have a car when I moved here and I, some of my team mates did, but not all of them. They weren’t always there or available when I needed. And every summer when I wanted to go home it was difficult for one to find someone to get me at the airport sometimes. Or even going to the grocery store, um, especially my first year. I had to ask my teammates and they would ask me for money for giving me a five minute trip, they would ask me for \$10.00. So financially too, it cost me. Um, and so also, I felt especially in my junior college, where my coach did not have the same attitude, like it was the case in the second college, uh, I felt like the coach did not, um, always understand the cultural differences that we had. I was punished for giving attitude when I was simply asking a question to, uh, understand better what the coach was saying. Um, so I feel like coaches should be more trained to deal with student-athletes.

Life in the U.S. was a challenge for Georgia because the social life was different. “People in the U.S. have different ways of entertaining themselves,” she said. For example, in Greece people go out and have a drink and talk. But in the U.S. people can refer to drinking all day and they talk about having a lot of drinks. Also they can get extremely drunk, which is not what she liked to do most of the time. “So I feel more isolated of drinking here,” she said.

Jessica’s Story

Jessica was introduced to me by the athletic director from Line University. The athletic director noted that Jessica is very shy and she needed more information about the study I wanted to conduct. With this in mind, I called her to talk more about my study and what I wanted from her. In order to make her feel relaxed I proposed her to meet at the library whenever she had a break from her busy schedule. Jessica replied that during her lunch break would be a good time to meet and I agreed.

The day before our interview I searched on the Internet for information about the institution that Jessica enrolled in as an international student-athlete in tennis. Line University is a public institution with approximately 11,500 students (9,400 undergraduates and 2,100 postgraduates). Line University is a diverse university with 3.8% international students and 19.5% of students belong in a minority. Related to academics, Line University is organized into six academic colleges (College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business, College of Education, College of Graduate and Professional Studies, College of Nursing, Health, and Human Services, and College of Technology) and offers more than 100 majors. In regards to athletics, Line University has a long tradition in NCAA Division I. Programs include men’s and women’s basketball, football, cross country, women’s soccer, track and field, volleyball, softball, and golf.

The next day I set up my GPS and I followed the road instructions. After two hours I was close to campus. I realized that when I saw the football field with the name of the university and the colors that represent the pride of the institution. There were no people there apart from a guy running. I asked him to give me directions to the library. From his accent I realized that he was from a different country. I asked him and he replied that he was from India and he was an international student at Line University. Suddenly, one question came to my mind. What makes somebody travel so many miles far away from home and to live the challenge of a new life? I closed the window and I started driving again looking forward to the interview with Jessica.

Family and background. Jessica is from Russia. She was raised in Moscow and during her early years she lived with her mother and her grandmother. “I do not have a father,” Jessica remarked and I realized that she did not want to talk about this. I turned the discussion to the occupations of her mother and grandmother. Jessica mentioned that her mother has a bachelor’s degree in finance and she works in an organization in Russia. Jessica’s grandmother is retired.

Early education and sport career. Jessica finished high school in Moscow. She was a good student and she had concerns about her future and how to combine education with sports after high school. From her answers and reactions I realized that she was really shy and introverted and she did not want to provide more information about her early education. However, she was more open when I asked her about her athletic performance.

Jessica noted that she started playing tennis when she was seven, but she did not participate in any tournaments. When she turned eight year old, she started practicing more seriously and then she started playing tournaments at 10. The tournaments were in Russia, but she participated in few tournaments in Europe. She described her experience as follows:

Well, I would say if I could played more tournaments, then I would play better.

Not necessarily I hit great shots or whatever I just feel more confident and I'm getting used to this routine. And once I start playing, like two months, then I have to go back in shape, so it's all about mentality.

Jessica said that when she was in Russia her schedule was very busy and playing tennis was time consuming. The tennis club was an hour away from home so she wasted much time traveling and it was not beneficial. Her mother drove her and, as she admitted, "my mom had to sacrifice time and money for me."

Jessica's first coach (from 7 years old until 11) was good and taught her a lot. However, after the age of 11 she had to change coaches. Jessica described that changing coaches was a big issue. Moreover, her family needed to pay the court time and the expenses for traveling.

Decision to study in the U.S. and steps to transition. Jessica started thinking about study in the U.S. when some of the players in the tennis club decided to go to the U.S. for their bachelor's degree. Moreover, Jessica's decision was influenced by the experience she had already in high school:

My family knew that if I stayed home and I go to college there, first of all, tennis is very expensive sport, so we could barely afford it, and then, we have to pay for college and I mean, I would have to choose either one.

Also, Jessica mentioned that in Russia there were no scholarship programs such as in the U.S. At the time she was trying to find the way to study in the U.S., her thought was "If they will provide me an athletic scholarship then I will be able to study and to play without paying money." Thus, she decided to try.

Jessica's goals were to play tennis, to have a good education, and to improve her English speaking skills. The last one was always a concern for her. "I was always scared about my speaking skills," she admitted. One day, during the last year of high school, Jessica saw an advertisement in the newspaper about a private company that prepares high school students who play a sport to become international student-athletes in the U.S. Jessica thought that it was the time to search more the possibility to move to the U.S. That time she realized that she wanted to live the experience of studying in the U.S and speaking the English language.

Jessica discussed with her mother and they decided to go and ask the owner of the company. Jessica described the first reaction after the meeting with Jason, the owner of the company. "I got very excited because if I am able to play tennis consistently there [in the U.S] and study with getting a full scholarship it will be easier for my mother and I. So we decided to work on that."

Jason asked Jessica about her English skills and if she had taken the SAT and TOEFL tests. Jessica replied that her SAT score was very good but not the TOEFL. Jason replied that most schools required both tests, however if the SAT score is good and the TOEFL bad the coach can make the decision to accept the athletes in the program. Jessica was anxious about this issue and asked Jason to meet with coaches in various institutions and to clarify it. Jason three days later shared with Jessica the good news. "You have a good SAT score so you don't need to retake the TOEFL," Jason said. The next couple of months Jessica and Jason worked with the application process that the institution and the NCAA requires and finally Jessica was accepted in Line University as an international student-athlete in tennis. During this process her family was a tremendous supporter of her financially and psychologically.

Living in the U.S. Jessica's first semester was difficult mainly because of the language barrier. However, she felt that it was easier from what she expected to communicate with people because in the U.S. people are more open and talkative compared to Russia:

When I came here, I was like, well I don't have any choice. I either talk or I just keep my mouth shut and I look stupid. So I decided, well I just have to communicate with people, and I was very surprised because it was so much than I thought.

Jessica mentioned that she was not scared to ask questions and that helped her to communicate with people, to practice the language and to find answers to the problems she faced. "I try to get help from somebody, not just solve things on my own," she added.

Also, Jessica in the beginning had difficulties finding friends. "It is really hard to find a true friend like at home it's harder to build a connection," she said. The first semester Jessica had a few people to share problems or concerns, but she realized this connection was not deep and after the end of the semester stopped talking to each other, which was frustrating for her. Something that was totally different from what she experienced in her country was that in the U.S. somebody the one-day can have a normal conversation and the other day the same person does not talk to you or does not even see you anymore. "It's easy to meet people in the U.S., but if you want to have a serious friendship it becomes more complicated," Jessica added.

Moreover, Jessica expressed her problems in adjusting to the transportation system and everyday life. She said

I had to pay this, I had to do that, to arrange my room, I don't have a car, that's a problem, so I had to find someone to drive me to the store and get food or any other things for school so that's the biggest problem

Furthermore, Jessica expressed her opinion about the challenges in balancing the two roles: being a student and an athlete. She said that her schedule was busy because she had to take classes and to play tournaments. “You stay focused, if you have tournaments and you study on the road,” Jessica mentioned. Her coach was supportive and her attitude helped her to balance the two roles. His belief was that student-athletes need to have fun in what they are doing and winning is not everything. Playing the best tennis the athletes can play is the goal.

Finally, Jessica pointed out the different mentality of people in the town in which she lives. People do not accept international students so much. “People here are close minded. They do not know anything else that is happening in the world except this place, so if they see somebody else from another place they do not want to talk to you,” she said. However, this does not happen in the team or class. Her teammates and classmates make her feel equal and they respect each other. Many of them get really excited that she is from a different country and they ask her questions to learn more about her country and culture.

Bolt’s Story

I met Bolt two years ago and I chose to have an interview with him for three reasons. First, I know his deep knowledge about issues related to education and sports. Second, Bolt had the willingness to share his experiences with others in order to change things for the good. Third, Bolt is the only international student-athlete on the track and field team at his institution and I was curious to know how he feels about this.

For scheduling the interview I followed the process I described in the methodology chapter. Initially, I sent the letter to the athletic director of Line University. Then I called Bolt

for scheduling the interview and we agreed to meet at his apartment. Bolt lives on campus in an area where many international students live.

Family and background. Bolt was born in 1987 in a small village close to a city of approximately 40,000 inhabitants in the north part from Greece. Bolt's father graduated from the police academy and he works as a police officer. His mother graduated from a three-year nursing college in Greece and works as a nurse. Bolt has one sister who studies economics and political science in Greece. Bolt described his family as liberal and their relations to each other are very good. They are closely connected to each other and his father has a major influence on him.

Early education and sport career. Bolt followed the Greek educational system (six years elementary, three years middle, and three years high school) and then he took exams for college. He was admitted in the sports science department in Athens and he moved to Athens from the city he was born. He lived in Athens for three years and then he realized that he wanted to change his pathway, so he did not graduate. When he was in high school his goal was to do something close to sports such as to become a coach, but then after high school he started thinking about changing majors. At that time he started thinking about the option to study in the U.S. because at the same time he was a middle distance runner in a Greek club and his goal was to combine education with sports.

Bolt started his career as an athlete at the age of 11. His goal was to improve his time and to join the national team. He wanted to participate as a member of the national team in the European Championship. Bolt joined a club because in Greece there is a club-based system and not a school-based system as it is in the U.S. "In order to compete you have to belong in a club

and you start competing, representing the club. In the beginning you represent yourself,” Bolt noted.

Decision to study in the U.S. and steps to transition. Bolt was raised by his parents with the belief that if you are able to travel and get out of your comfort zone that opens your mind. Moreover, the experience that Bolt had during the years in high school and then at the college of sport science made him think more about his options for the future.

Bolt explained that the educational system in Greece is problematic and this is a concern for students who want to graduate on time. When Bolt expressed these experiences from the past, I observed his anger about the bad situation of the educational system in his country, which makes students leave the country and study abroad. Bolt explained by moving his hands fast:

Back home was like, it was messed up. The system doesn’t work properly, so it holds you back a little bit. It makes it like foggy, you don’t know where you’re gonna, when you’re gonna finish school. So I came here just to know that in four years I’m going to have a good degree and I can find a better job.

Bolt continued talking about his experience in Greece before moving to the U.S. The first year, when he was in Athens, was good because he was by himself for the first time. Bolt described Athens as a pretty and tough city because the living cost is high. “In order to find money you need a job and if you have not finished school it is not easy to get a job,” Bolt analyzed. Also, Bolt explained, “you know, you were walking in to uncertainty. You didn’t know when you were going to finish.” The second year Bolt realized “I am not doing good here.” He had 15 classes, 15 credit hours per year and it was not his fault when he was not able to pass the classes. Sometimes the class did not have a professor and other times there were strikes and therefore the university was closed, so Bolt realized that this situation would force

him to finish later than what he expected. “And thank God I realized that early. I need to do something drastic,” Bolt added.

Bolt started talking about his concerns with many people, but especially with a few friends from Cyprus who were ready to move to the U.S. to study. He received some contacts from coaches in the U.S. and then he started searching several institutions and the possibility to move to the U.S. First, he found a coach from Boise and he contacted him. The coach explained the criteria that a student-athlete needs to meet in order to get admission from the institution and how it offers an athletic scholarship.

While Bolt explained his experience, he suddenly stopped, and then he added with his voice becoming louder, “The only thing I had in mind at that point was to go away, just to find a better system, go somewhere, go to a better place, I mean that’s subjective, better place according to me. Better place for track and education.”

Moreover, Bolt said that the biggest reason for his decision was that the U.S educational system provides security. Bolt explained in detail:

I needed something secure and structured, I needed to be done. I needed to get in school and know that in four years, I will have a degree in my hand, and then I can move on, and I can find a job.

Then, Bolt explained the process he followed in order for the NCAA to provide admission to him as a student-athlete at Line University. Bolt mentioned that the coach from Boise did not know enough because he was in his second year as a coach. However, the coach gave him a few basic guidelines to follow and then Bolt did the research by himself. Bolt explained the process in detail:

I got on the website and read all the requirements and how the system works and how it goes, and uh, I started step by step completing the requirements. Like, they wanted, for instance, the certificate from your high school that you graduated from there, and I did that, and then they wanted verified and evaluated by the U.S. and I sent it there, and then it was the next step, uh, which was, uh, I think amateur status, if you ever got money in order to have a scholarship and I contacted my club, and step by step, one at a day, pretty much when I gathered all of them I just called that coach again and said, “Okay, here it is.” There was like 10 requirements and I think I’m meeting all of them.

Then, the coach mentioned that according to Bolt’s time and performance in 800 meters, he could have received a scholarship in their school. Bolt followed the same process to three other institutions and then he had to wait “to be cleared” from NCAA. Line University was one of the institutions that accepted him with a scholarship. Bolt, without knowing and basically without caring where exactly he was moving, decided to move to the U.S. and the city where Line University is located. This decision, as Bolt explained, was made because he was able to combine sport and education. “I like track and field, so I can do track and field and actually I have an award for that, and I can have a more structured education,” Bolt added.

Living in the U.S. Bolt mentioned that he did not have any kind of expectations or knowledge about the place he was moving. The only information he had in his mind was the East and West coasts as media present them. Therefore, he did not have any knowledge about the Midwest and how it is to live there.

In the beginning, Bolt's biggest challenge was that he had to deal with people who had no idea where he was coming from, and there was a lack of diversity. His knowledge about the U.S. while he was in Greece included what the media presents and that made him believe that there were no significant differences between Greece and the U.S. apart from the language. However, when he first came to the city where Line University is located, he realized that there are huge differences between the coasts and Midwest. Bolt described how he felt in the beginning and his impression about the city he moved. "The start was rough. Coming here was like being in a totally different world," Bolt explained.

Another challenge for Bolt was the fact that he was the only international student-athlete the track team, and that was hard for his teammates to accept as he described. So, Bolt tried to make himself acceptable. The problem, as Bolt analyzed it, was that his teammates did not have any kind of interaction with anybody outside of the U.S. and "they did not know to handle it," as Bolt said. Moreover, Bolt had difficulties adjusting to the different sports system. In Greece the athlete joins a club and mainly the athlete competes for himself. In the U.S. the student-athlete competes for the team. As Bolt mentioned,

I didn't have any idea how team works here. I believed it would be the same as back home. Obviously it's not. Here the institution puts the athlete under the team and they don't treat you as an individual. An that makes you lose the role that you want to have or the role that you had before coming here. My suggestion is, if you see people that are not flexible because they have experiences a different system, give them the opportunity to do something different, because you don't want to waste them."

In class, the situation was different mainly because there were a larger variety of people. During the classes Bolt felt more integrated because the faculty members helped him to adjust easier. The way Bolt interacted with the professors made him feel better and that was something important, which helped him to eliminate the culture shock. Bolt explained the different mentality between his classmates and his teammates by saying. “In class you find a larger variety of people. You find more narrow-minded and more worthy people, and also you find other internationals which I wasn’t able to find on the team.” Later Bolt added, “so I believe that being in the class was better than being in the team.”

Bolt during the interview mentioned that he expected that the institution would be more organized about the services needed for international students for better and faster adjustment to the new environment. He pointed out that the international affairs center does not help international students. Bolt mentioned,

There is an international affair center and they don’t do anything, I mean honestly, they don’t do anything. They’re supposed to get more involved directly with the students. They need to answer the question: How can we make them feel like home, or at least not making them feel strangers? Because I have talked with many international students, they say that these things make them feel like a minority than they’re, because they were in classes among other people, I mean Americans, whatever, but this fact, what the international affair center does make them feel like really minority because it was a place with only foreigners. And it was like they isolated them on purpose and everybody felt awkward.

He suggested that the institution needs to advance its services in many areas, but especially in issues related to international students. Bolt underlined that even if you are a student or an athlete and you are from a different country, the institution needs to provide support. The reason that Bolt addressed was that if you are just a student you pay more (because of the out of state tuition) and if you are an athlete you receive a scholarship.

Apart from the challenges Bolt faced, he mentioned that his decision to live and study in a different country helped him to see how a different system works and how people with a different culture work, react, and think. Moreover, he believed that his degree would help him in the future to find a good graduate program.

Jennifer's Story.

Jennifer was introduced to me by a faculty member named Victor at Court State University. Court State University (CSU) is a two hour drive from the city where I lived and it is a public research university with approximately 42,500 students (32,500 undergraduates and 10,000 postgraduates). In regards to academics, CSU is organized into 11 colleges (College of Arts and Science, School of Law, School of Library and Information Science, School of Music, School of Business, Division of Labor Studies, School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, School of Education, School of Public and Environmental Affairs, School of Journalism, School of Informatics and Computing) and offers more than 120 academic programs and majors. In regards to athletics, CSU has a long tradition in NCAA Division I in several sports. Programs include more than 600 male and female student-athletes on 24 varsity teams such as football, men and women's basketball, cross country and track and field, baseball, golf, tennis, rowing, volleyball, swimming and diving among others.

I met Victor when I asked a friend to suggest somebody who could help me to contact the athletic director at CSU. My friend Steve told me that there was a faculty member, Victor, who knew the athletic director. Victor was very active with sports and apart from playing tennis, he helped the tennis team at CSU. After our discussion with Steve, I called Victor and I told him about my study. I mentioned to him that I would like to interview international student-athletes. Victor showed his interest in my study and he told me that he would call the athletic director the next day. At the same time he shared with me that there were three international student-athletes who played tennis. Victor proposed to schedule a meeting with him and to discuss further how we could manage the process. After three days, I visited him at his office. I was really happy that I had someone to help me during the process of finding the participants in my study. Moreover, Victor shared with me that he had already received a positive answer from the athletic director to start the interviews.

Victor immediately called Jennifer, a senior student-athlete in tennis, and told her about my study. Jennifer mentioned that if the athletic director could approve the project she would be more than willing to make the interview and to ask two other international student-athletes to participate. Victor gave me her phone number to call her in order to schedule the interviews. The next day, I called Jennifer and she told me that after talking with the other international student-athletes she would be able to schedule the three interviews at the office of the tennis department. I agreed and I waited for her phone call.

After three days, Jennifer called and she told me that she had scheduled the interviews with two other international student-athletes, Andrea and Mary (the interviews are following). The location was on the tennis court. I mentioned to Jennifer that this was helpful because I

would be able to see them performing on court as well. I thanked her and I said that on Wednesday at 5pm I would be on the tennis court.

On Wednesday morning, while I started organizing my schedule, I realized how excited I was because I had the interviews with Jennifer, Andrea, and Mary. At 3pm, I started driving and after passing two hours in the car, I stopped outside of the interview place. Actually, I was not sure if that was the tennis court, but two racket bags and the noise from the ball made me realize that I was in the right place. I parked my car, I took my bag, and I got into the tennis building. At the front desk there was a lady who welcomed me. I gave her my name and immediately, possibly because of the strange Greek name, she told me to wait for Jennifer. In the tennis building, there were four tennis courts, a big hallway, and a silent place with two couches and a table. I sat there and I awaited Jennifer. On my left there was a child, maybe six-seven years old, learning the basic skills for tennis. The racket was bigger than him.

After five minutes, a tall beautiful girl came wearing the colors of the institution. Her blond hair was wet because she had just finished her shower after the practice. She walked towards me and she welcomed me. I thanked her for organizing the interviews and I asked if she was ready to start the interview. Jennifer mentioned that she was ready to share her experiences as an international student-athlete. I left the recorder on the table and when I saw the red light I took a deep breath. I was ready for the first question.

Family and background. Jennifer was born in Russia, in a town three hours away from Moscow. It is a very old town. This September the town celebrates 1000 years. Jennifer mentioned that her town is famous for the churches, and many tourists visit it. Her parents raised Jennifer in this town and she is the only child of the family.

Her parents were both involved with sports. Her father was a basketball player and member of the junior Russian team. Her mother was on the Russian national team in gymnastics. Jennifer started laughing when she explained how her parents met. Her mom was taking classes on a tennis court some years ago, and the basketball court was just next door to it. Since she was a child, her parents wanted to play tennis so she was raised on the tennis court. As Jennifer said, “I have been around tennis like all my life.”

Jennifer’s parents both received their bachelor’s degrees from universities in Russia. Her mom graduated from the physical education department and works as a director for the tennis club in her town. Her father graduated from the medicine department and works as a consultant.

Early education and sport career. Jennifer graduated from a public high school. When she was in high school, she started playing piano in a music school and actually graduated with seven years’ experience in piano. She received her certificate, but she did not have the chance to use it. During her experience in high school, Jennifer spent a lot of time reading and having fun with her classmates. Jennifer mentioned that the duration of high school in Russia is ten years. The student starts in the first grade and graduates in the eleventh grade. The educational system in Russia does not separate elementary and high school. It is just one thing. Moreover, Jennifer pointed out that schools have classes in common subjects from the first until the ninth grade and then the last three years they separate students in four groups. Jennifer chose the economics section and she graduated in May 2007. Immediately after graduation, Jennifer chose to move to the U.S. to study.

Jennifer started playing tennis from the age of five. In the beginning of ninth grade, Jennifer realized that she had a problem to solve: how to combine education with sports. If Jennifer decided to stay in Russia, she needed to give all her time in school. However, at that

time she did not want to make that decision. On the other hand, Jennifer did not want to play professional tennis. Jennifer mentioned how she felt at that time:

I think everybody tries to go professional, but by the age of probably 15, you can already say if you will go professional or not. A lot of kids at the age of 12 give up school. Instead of going to school they practice for seven hours a day. I wanted to go professional, but I didn't want to give up education, so I, I just didn't really like, I wanted to, but I decided that I would rather make sure I have an education and have a degree, than I'll go professional and then one day, I don't know, break my ankle and that's it. That time my goal was to receive an education and to play sport and just, you know, just find out what I want to do, go to a university or something else.

Decision to study in the U.S. and steps to transition. Jennifer mentioned that in the beginning of ninth grade she figured that it could be a good idea to go the U.S. to study and possibly get an athletic scholarship in tennis. Jennifer mentioned the reasons for her decision,

It's really a good opportunity to combine both education and sport in the U.S. You're never ever going to find in Russia, maybe a couple places in Europe, but I don't think they give scholarships for that. Like you never, there's not any other place where you can go to school, where you can get scholarship for being an athlete, where you can like participate, like this system in general, there is nothing like that anywhere.

Then, Jennifer explained how she managed the process in order to get admission from the institution in the U.S. with a scholarship in tennis. One of her mother's friends was a teacher in high school and her daughter moved to the U.S. to study as a student-athlete. Jennifer asked her

to provide guidance about the process she needed to follow to become a student-athlete. Jennifer and her family got the information and started looking for universities. They just found the e-mails of head coaches of each school and they composed an e-mail saying that Jennifer wanted to get an athletic scholarship and to study. Later on, they sent the email to probably 20 institutions and Jennifer received answers from 15. Jennifer did some research on those 15 institutions and she realized that a few provided scholarships. So, she sent pictures and videos to 10 of them. After that, all of them said, “yes,” and Jennifer chose five. Then, Jennifer searched their websites and tried to find more information about the institutions, the academic programs, the athletic department, and the city where they were located. Finally, she chose Court State University.

Living in the U.S. Jennifer started telling her experience when she first came to the U.S. Language barrier was the biggest challenge and she had a hard time meeting new people. Moreover, Jennifer explained that dorms were something new for her. She remembered that when she went to the bathroom for the first time, she had difficulty turning on the water. Also, food was a big thing in the beginning. For the first month, Jennifer mentioned that almost every day she ate pizza because that was the only food she knew. Jennifer explained more that the problem she had with the food was not for the food itself, but the difficulty of asking what she wanted because of the language.

Jennifer pointed out the role that people played, especially in the beginning. She had to meet new people and that was challenging. “It is different, people have different views, different attitudes,” Jennifer said. The biggest difference between people in Russia and in the U.S. was that in the U.S. people are friendlier and more willing to help. “That was really nice,” Jennifer said. And many people helped her to find solutions to many different things from the classroom

to the tennis court. Furthermore, talking with people in the U.S. made Jennifer change herself. “I was pretty close in myself,” she pointed out, “because I guess of the culture in Russia. America is really a social world place,” she added.

Also, Jennifer mentioned that the different educational system in the U.S. was a challenge. “In Russia students are more focused on just going to lectures. You don’t comprehend information or anything like that, even though the teacher is pretty good, but he likes focusing on studying,” Jennifer said. Another issue was the strict policies that the U.S. system has related to the exams. Jennifer mentioned that in Russia it is easy to cheat, to open the book, or to talk with a classmate during the exams. In the U.S., this is inappropriate and can cause many problems for a student. “I was scared to open a book,” Jennifer said.

Finally, Jennifer expressed the biggest challenge she faced, which was to balance the two roles of being a student and an athlete. She pointed out,

Obviously combining things is probably the biggest challenge. And it was even harder my freshman year just because I didn’t know the language neither. So, basically, not knowing the language, you have nothing to communicate, uh, not knowing the level of tennis I’m going to have among the girls not knowing what’s going in school, and not knowing how to be able to go to classes, go play tennis, and do homework after all that. That was probably the biggest frustration I ever had in my life so far.

Also, time management was an issue because Jennifer could not find the middle point between the classroom and the tennis court. “I wanted to find the middle where I didn’t have to be perfect on the court. I didn’t have to be perfect at school,” Jennifer said. However, in her

sophomore year she realized that she did not have to be perfect on the court or in the classroom. She needed to have a better balance and then she started enjoying the whole experience.

During our conversation, Jennifer expressed also that her adjustment could have been easier if the institution was able to provide help in advising her about managing time and solving problems, among others. Moreover, Jennifer said that there were many times she thought, “I would love to be somewhere that there would be Russian people,” she said. Furthermore, for the first semester it could be better for Jennifer to have a person next to her speaking fluent English and Russian and to help her out in many things, such as doing homework, or explaining general things about U.S. life. However, Jennifer addressed the fact that difficulties and challenges are a part of the experience and you have to fail in the beginning, because then you have to think and to improve yourself. “Falling down and getting up is important until the point where you will get it,” Jennifer explained.

Finally, Jennifer expressed her belief that this experience would be very valuable in the future. First, she is able to speak fluently a language that is universal. Second, and most important for her, passing through disappointments, happiness, difficulties, and challenges she has become more confident in herself. “I have confidence in myself, I know how to solve problems, I know how not to be robbed, I have gain knowledge, I have improved my skills,” Jennifer said. Third, Jennifer mentioned that the degree is important, however she believes that an international student gains more from the experience living in the U.S. “I think for me, the degree is just the name, for me it’s more about skills, the experience I’m going to get out of it,” Jennifer added.

Mary's Story

After the interview with Jennifer, I asked Jennifer to guide me to the court where Mary and Andrea were practicing. We walked, we stopped near the court, and we started observing them. Their ability to play tennis was obvious from the first hit I saw. They showed confidence and they were really happy with what they were doing. Nearby, their coach talked to them while practicing. "Run faster, hit the ball with the forehand, look on the court not the ball," were some of the guidelines among others. I looked at him with the aim to observe his style. He looked at me knowing that I was there for the interview. Suddenly, he said, "ok, good practice today let's go for the interview." I realized that it was my time. Andrea stayed on the court and started a conversation with the coach. Mary and I went back to the same place, I turned on my recorder, and I was ready for the interview. Mary seemed very shy and introverted.

Family and background. Mary was born in France in a city close to Paris. Her parents were educated, holding MBAs. Mary's mother stopped working when Mary was five years old and she started being a manager (as a volunteer) in a tennis club. Her father worked in a company in France. Mary has one brother, 16 years old, who plays tennis too.

Early education and sport career. Mary followed the regular educational system in France and graduated from a public high school. She was a good student, but she did not know exactly what she wanted to do after graduation. Suddenly, she realized that she had to decide what was best for her future and how she was able to combine school with tennis, her main hobby from the age of four.

Mary mentioned that she had a pretty good ranking in France. She was in the top 15 and she won a couple of national tournaments, especially in doubles. At the same time she was an athlete in skiing and she won the French Championship. However, she preferred to practice

more in tennis, even though she did not want to become a professional athlete. Her goals were to become as good as she could be. She did not want to become a professional athlete because she thought that she was not good enough for that level and she did not have enough motivation. Mary knew that she needed to practice all day and she did not want that. However, at the same time she did not want to quit tennis for college. After the end of high school, she realized that it was not possible to get admitted to a good university and to play tennis at the same time. Many of her friends quit tennis in order to study. So, she had to make a decision or to find another way to combine education with tennis.

Decision to study in the U.S. and steps to transition. Mary mentioned that many of her friends decided to study in the U.S. and their comments were like, “it’s amazing here, you can study and play tennis.” Mary realized that this could be an option. “U.S. is the only country where you can be a student-athlete, so do both,” Mary said. Another important factor for her to decide to study in the U.S. was the athletic scholarship she received from the institution. Mary pointed out,

It covers pretty much everything. Tuition, books, I don’t know. We have money for food, to pay the rent, they give us a check and you do whatever you want with the check. Basically we don’t have to pay anything. That was something as well, because when you get a scholarship and you can go to a very good school and get a good education.

Moreover, Mary explained the process she followed in order to move to the U.S. The summer before the last year of high school, she traveled to New York with her family. Mary realized that she could live in the U.S. and when she went back to France she e-mailed an organization that helps athletes to get an athletic scholarship in the U.S. Mary remembered, “I

knew the guy and I was like yeah I want to go, can you help me? And so we talked a lot and I had to decide where I wanted to go, if school matters a lot, or if it was more the question of tennis.” Then, the representative from the organization sent emails to coaches in Division I institutions and Mary chose three of them. The next step was to visit the institutions. In March, Mary traveled from France to the U.S. and she visited the three schools, which offered officially an athletic scholarship. She was able to meet the coaches and to talk about many issues related to her decision to study in the U.S. After that visit, Mary had to decide at which school to study and then she started filling a lot of papers and took the required tests (TOEFL and SAT). The organization helped her during this process.

Living in the U.S. Mary pointed out that especially the first semester living in the U.S. was a big challenge. The main reason was the language barrier. Mary said, “I understood very well, but I was just too shy to speak I guess.” Another challenge was the fact that she was far away from her family. “I was homesick as well because before coming in the U.S. I did not leave the country at all, or my family for more than two, three weeks, so that was something.” However, the support she received from her classmates and teammates helped her to adjust easier and faster to the new culture. “I feel that they’re friendlier than at home, no there was nothing wrong with the people, just I don’t know, just have to get used to it,” Mary said.

Also, Mary mentioned that it was hard to balance the two roles of student and athlete. Time management was difficult. “You are busy, you are very busy,” Mary said. In the fall semester, it was easier because Mary did not play so many tournaments, but in spring, she played matches every other weekend. She did not have a free weekend, so her schedule was very busy.

Mary, after the first semester, adjusted to the new environment and she became happy. It was a great experience for her moving to the U.S., and she believed that she made the right

decision for her future. As she mentioned, living in the U.S. would help her in the future, not only because of the degree, but also because of the skills she developed out of this experience, such as living alone and speaking another language. Mary mentioned that she did not want to live in the U.S. for her entire life, but an internship could be a good opportunity for her to see how life is outside of the university.

Moreover, Mary pointed out that in the U.S. was the first time that she felt like a member of a team while playing tennis, although tennis is an individual sport. Mary said, “I think it’s good as a tennis player coming from another country; we had the chance to do that in the U.S. I mean, they gave us a scholarship, they give us a good education, I think it’s really good. And I think it’s been a good experience. I’ve met so many people from different countries.”

Andrea’s Story

Once I finished the interview with Mary, I took a ten minute break to relax. I left the place where I was and I asked Jennifer to tell me from where I could buy a coffee. Jennifer guided me to a coffee shop near the tennis court. After ten minutes, I was ready for the last interview. Andrea was waiting for me. I sat on the couch and I turned on my recorder.

Family and background. Andrea seemed like a very extroverted person. She was wearing the colors of the institution and her wet t-shirt told me that she had a difficult match with Jennifer on the tennis court. She agreed and laughed. Then, Andrea started talking about herself. Andrea was born in a small city in Russia. Both her parents live in Russia and have earned a higher education diploma. Her mom was a professor of finance at the university and her father graduated from tech school as an engineer and he worked in a furniture company. Andrea did not have any siblings. She was the only child in the family.

Early education and sport career. Andrea graduated from high school in Russia.

During the years of high school, Andrea used to skip a lot of classes because she traveled to play tournaments in tennis. Andrea mentioned, “It was hard to combine. I had to practice every day, and at the same time I went to school.” Also, the educational system in Russia does not help athletes. Andrea said, “They don’t understand if I ask for them to postpone some exams or make exams, or make up some homeworks, they don’t care.” Andrea’s parents pushed her to get an education. However, Andrea was concerned more about getting better in tennis and playing some professional tournaments. From the time she started until the age of 16 she made tremendous progress. Andrea mentioned a few things from that period:

I started in first grade, so I was seven or eight years old. And at first, maybe five years, I didn’t compete a lot, I just, uh, played some local Russian tournaments, then I played Russian national championships, um I’ve been third in the country. And then I played for the Russian Junior National Team. I was number three, number four, so we’ve been second in Europe as a team. Then I was second and third in Europe among 16 years old and under. I participated in the Junior Australian Open.

Andrea’s goal was to become a professional athlete. However, the senior year of high school, Andrea started thinking that if something happened in tennis, such as an injury, that could be a problem. Therefore, she started thinking of getting a degree from a university.

Decision to study in the U.S. and steps to transition. Andrea, a year before graduating from high school, was at a crossroad. She had to decide what she wanted more: tennis or education. As she described, the Russian educational system is not supportive of athletes who want to study at a university. The club-based system in Russia does not help

athletes to continue their education. Also, the financial aspect, and tennis is an expensive sport, is always an issue for families who do not have the economic status to afford the expenses.

Andrea mentioned that she had to pay for the coach and the other members of the staff in order to be able to accomplish her goals. Moreover, the government does not provide any kind of scholarship, except from an amount of money if you manage to be in the top four players of the year. Andrea said, “When I was third in the country, I received some kind of scholarship, but of course it was not enough. It was a scholarship from the President. They give you a check or some gift. It’s for the four players in each age category.” Because of all the aforementioned reasons Andrea started thinking to continue her education and practice in tennis in a totally different educational system:

Here [in the U.S.] I have an opportunity to practice, I will not be worrying about if I have practice tomorrow or not, because here, everything is already organized. You have a coach, you have a team, you have people to practice, you have great conditions here. And opportunities to still play tennis and to combine it with education. I wouldn’t have this opportunity at home. I had to decide, either just to study, either just to do everything to keep playing.

Andrea had some friends who had already moved to the U.S. She spoke to them and asked how they did the whole process. Andrea gathered information from her friends and from the internet. Then she started contacting a few coaches for more information. She did the whole process by herself and by asking her friends and coaches from several institutions and the NCAA.

Living in the U.S. Andrea moved to the U.S. and she described how the language barrier was the major problem the first semester. However, “as soon as you start talking to

people and you hear all the time English, you get used to it” Andrea remarked. Another challenge was the new culture, “how people treat you,” as Andrea mentioned. People in the U.S. are more open and friendlier. However, it takes time to get used to the new culture, Andrea said. The only thing that especially the first year was a problem was the fact that she missed her home, her family, and her friends. As Andrea said using her own words, “you feel lonely, and you just want to go back, but as time goes by you meet new people, you want to be here.”

Moreover, being a student-athlete was a challenge in the beginning. “You have to give all yourself to everything, to school, to your team, basically you have to devote, you cannot just let it go something,” Andrea said. The spring semester was much more difficult because Andrea had to participate in tournaments and at the same time to be in class. Andrea mentioned,

During the spring semester especially, we used to travel a lot during the weekends so we don’t have a day off from everything. Even if we have a day off, one day off per week, but it happens on Monday or Tuesday, so you have to go to school and do some other work.

Also, Andrea pointed out that faculty members understood the busy schedule she had. They understood that Andrea competed for the institution and at the same time she was a student. “So they try to be flexible, if you have a really good excuse that you’re competing, you’re playing tennis, you’re working all the time hard, so they understand that,” Andrea admitted.

Andrea believed that the experience to live in the U.S. and to be a student-athlete was important because she had the chance to live by herself. Also, speaking English would help her in the future. She thought that it could be a good decision to stay in the U.S. after graduation. Her concern was that because of the economic crisis all over the world, it seemed hard especially for an international student to find a job. However, she would like to try to find a job. She had

heard that a lot of employers think that being a student-athlete is an advantage, because you develop leadership skills that are important for every job.

Summary of Participants' Stories

In sum, Georgia grew up in a small town in a Greek island and she spent her early childhood in her family house. Her athletic abilities and talent in basketball drove her to follow her path and to participate on local basketball teams. From a very young age she started participating in European Championships, as a member of the Greek national team. However, Georgia realized very early that “Greek basketball is not great.” Also, she had in mind that education is important and that it was difficult in Greece to combine both. The influence of one of her teammates and the opportunity to combine education with basketball having an athletic scholarship, made her to decide to study in the U.S. Living in the U.S. was a challenge. The language barrier and the cultural differences were the main difficulties for Georgia during her stay in the U.S.

Jessica, a Russian student-athlete in tennis, grew up in Moscow with her mother and grandmother. From the age of seven, Jessica showed commitment to school and tennis. However, it was difficult to combine both, especially because the tennis club was four hours’ drive in distance from her home. When a few of her older teammates left Russia to study in the U.S., she started thinking about this option. Her thought was, “If they will provide me an athletic scholarship then I will be able to study and to play without paying.” One day, when she saw an advertisement of a company that prepared high school students to study in the U.S. as student-athletes, she decided to go. After following the process needed, Jessica accepted the offer from the institution and moved to the U.S. Living in the U.S., especially the first semester, was difficult. The difficulties with the language and the problems because of the different culture

were the main challenges for her. Also, the busy schedule and the challenge to balance the two roles were difficult for her. Finally, some practical issues, such as adjusting to the transportation system and everyday life was a challenge.

Bolt remarked about his lovely early childhood with her parents and sister in a small town in the north part of Greece. Bolt followed the Greek educational system and he took exams to get admission to college. His effort was successful and Bolt was admitted at the college of sports science in Athens. After three years of studying and being an athlete in 800meters, Bolt started thinking about other opportunities because he was frustrated with the Greek educational system. The support of the family helped him to change his way and make the decision to study in the U.S. While he was at the college in Athens, he started web searching U.S. institutions. He contacted coaches, he expressed the desire to study in the U.S. and he sent them his academic and athletic records. After checking the offers from institutions, he decided to move. The security that the U.S. system provides and the opportunity to combine sports with education were the main reasons for Bolt to study in the U.S. However, living in the U.S., was not easy especially in the beginning. The language barrier and the cultural differences were the main challenges. Also, Bolt critiqued the lack of professionalism from the institution related to the services for international students. However, apart from the challenges, Bolt expressed his enthusiasm for the experience he lived, because he had the opportunity to see how a different system works and how people with a different culture work, think, and react.

Jennifer, a senior student-athlete in tennis was born in a very old town in Russia, three hours' drive from Moscow. Her parents inspired and influenced her to start playing tennis. When she was in ninth grade at school, she had a critical decision to make: how to combine tennis with education. One of her teachers provided important information about the U.S.

educational system and how she could be able to receive an athletic scholarship. Jennifer conducted coaches and sent the information needed. After six months, an institution admitted her and she was ready to leave Russia. Living in the U.S. was a challenge. The language barrier and dealing with new people from a different culture were the major difficulties in the beginning. However, people in the U.S. helped her to adjust easier to the new environment. Also, the different educational system in the U.S. and the two roles she had to balance were challenging and she needed efficient time management. Jennifer emphasized that the experience to live and study in the U.S. was very valuable and, apart from the degree she received, she gained self-confidence.

Mary grew up in a city close to Paris, France. She was a good student, but she did not know what she wanted to study after high school. At the same time, she was a tennis player with good ranking in France, but she did not want to become a professional athlete. When she saw many of her friends in France quitting tennis in order to study, she realized that she needed to find a different pathway. Mary knew that the U.S. educational system provides the opportunity to combine education with sports, and student-athletes receive an athletic scholarship. Mary, with the support of her family, contacted an organization who prepares students to study in the U.S. The organization helped her with the process and after six months Mary was ready to leave France and to live her new experience. Mary remarked the language barrier as the first challenge she faced when she moved to the U.S. However, the support from her classmates and teammates helped her to adjust easier to the new environment. Mary illustrated the value of the education she received and the whole experience to live in a different country.

The final stop of this process was the interview with Andrea. Andrea, a very extroverted person from a small city in Russia, showed commitment to tennis from her early

childhood. Many times she had to skip classes for tennis and that made her realize that after high school she had to decide between education and tennis. Also, the financial aspect of tennis and the money her family needed to spend made her think for other options. The influence of some friends who had already moved to the U.S. made her think to begin the process of finding an institution in the U.S. She did the whole process by herself and after a year she was ready to live the new experience. Living in the U.S. was a challenge because of the communication problems. The different language and the culture in the U.S. made her feeling frustrated. Also, she missed her family, friends, and culture. Finally, being a student-athlete was challenging but the overall experience was valuable for her. The experiences of the six international student-athletes were diverse. Participants were from different countries, grew up with parents who had different backgrounds in education and sports, and found different ways to follow their lives by moving to the U.S. to study and play their sport. While the participants were diverse, I looked for some common themes in their experience.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis and interpretation of the interview data. Participants' stories are further examined for a broader and deeper understanding of what it means to be an international (non-native speaker of English) student-athlete. Moreover, Chapter 5 presents the themes and subthemes that emerged as a result of the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER 5

Results II

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions. In this chapter the analysis of the results from the six participants are presented. All the experiences illustrated by the participants were examined for demographic similarities, universal themes, and subthemes. Interpretation of the data resulted in the following themes: (a) comparison of educational systems, (b) factors that influenced decision, (c) steps to transition, (d) challenges of being an international (non-native speaker of English) student-athlete, and (e) opportunities after graduation. The themes and the subthemes are discussed using participants' own words and sentences that were included in their interviews.

Social and Demographic Similarities

The participants in this study were from three countries. Bolt and Georgia were from Greece; Jessica, Andrea, and Jennifer were from Russia; and Mary was from France. Participants were student-athletes and had a variety of majors such as criminology (Bolt), sociology (Georgia), sport management (Jennifer), economics (Andrea), and business (Mary). Jessica was at the sophomore year and she did not have the chance to choose a major at the time of the interview. Also, four participants were tennis athletes (Jessica, Jennifer, Andrea, and Mary), one basketball player (Georgia), and one track and field athlete (Bolt).

All participants described their families as loving and caring in supporting the participants' decision to study in the U.S. Participants' parents had bachelor's degrees, except Georgia's parents who had high school degrees. In one case, Andrea's mother holds a Ph.D. in mathematics. Finally, Jessica's mother had a master's degree in finance and Mary's parents possessed MBAs.

An in-depth analysis of the interviewees' experiences made me realize that student-athletes have in-depth knowledge in terms of issues related to their role as student-athletes, the NCAA policies, and the policies that the institutions implement in order to balance the two roles: being a student and an athlete.

In general most participants focused on their roles as students and athletes. The majority of them were members of their national teams in their respective sports. All international student-athletes mentioned that before graduating from high school, they had to answer a critical question. Which pathway to follow, to become a professional athlete or a college student? Mary mentioned,

I was a good student. Also I played tennis very seriously and it was hard to balance everything. But I never wanted to be like a professional player. I mean I love playing tennis, but I can't play tennis for the whole day.

Jennifer stated,

I wanted to play professionally, but I didn't want to give up education, so I decided that I would rather make sure I have an education and have a degree, than to go professional and then one day, I don't know break my ankle and that's it.

Georgia, who played for the Greek national team realized "that playing basketball professionally makes you feel confident but if something happened such as a injury you can be in

trouble. Education is a better way to achieve things in life.” Finally, Bolt suggested that the time he was in high school he did not want to follow a career as a professional athlete, however he wanted his professional career to have a relation with sports.

Comparison of the Two Educational Systems (U.S. vs. Country of Origin)

This theme focuses on differences between the two educational systems, the one in the U.S. and the other in each participant’s country. Participants explained the differences related to their participation in educational and sports activities.

School-based versus club-based sports systems. The majority of the participants mentioned that the biggest difference between the two educational systems is that sports is a part of the college life in the U.S. and in many colleges the most important part. In participants’ countries, institutions do not provide the opportunity to be an athlete at the same time that you are a student. If one wants to be an athlete, he or she needs to go to a sports club to find a coach and to start participating in competitive activities. Bolt stated,

Athletes want to join the club; however, they do not have the security of a college. In the U.S. you get admitted to a college and for years you are secured that you can do both things you like: to be a student and to be an athlete.

Also, Georgia mentioned that in her country she had to follow two totally different pathways in order to be able to be a student and an athlete at the same time.

Educational system in the U.S. supports student-athletes. All participants mentioned that the U.S. educational system is organized in a way that meets their needs, being simultaneously a student and an athlete. Andrea noted, “I am not worrying if I have practice or class tomorrow, because here [in the U.S.] everything is already organized. You have a coach; you have a team; you have people to practice; you have great conditions.” Mary pointed out, “In

France if you want to go to a good school it is just impossible to play. The system is not organized for same purpose as it is here [in the U.S.].” Jennifer provided a reason of why the system is organized in that way by saying that “in the U.S. sports are more developed. People spend a lot of money on that. We do not have this back in Russia. For instance in Russia we do not have these great facilities.” In addition, Jessica mentioned that the system in the U.S. is well-organized and athletes do not miss classes. In her country, it would be common to miss classes if someone wants to participate in sports activities and in most cases he or she has to choose which pathway to follow: to be an athlete or a student.

Participants mentioned that the system in the U.S provides more financial support and time efficiency. Andrea said that, in her country, “if you are good in tennis and you have some financial support, you can organize, or you can find a good coach or other people to support you. But if you don’t, you have an issue.”

Furthermore, participants suggested that the U.S. system provides time efficiency. Students do not have to waste time because all the facilities (classes and sport venues) are situated in close proximity. In their countries they have to travel an hour or more in order to practice the sport they played. Jessica said,

At home I had my tennis club which was like one hour away from home so basically I was wasting so much time for traveling every time and it wasn’t beneficial whatsoever like conditioning was at other place and then tennis courts were somewhere else, so I had to travel a lot.

Moreover, participants mentioned that the U.S. system, especially during the first two years of college, the focus is on general knowledge and less specialization in comparison with the educational systems in participants’ countries. Bolt alluded to that by stating, “It’s like 60%

of classes in a bachelor's degree are general education. Back home, we don't have general education classes in universities because you're done with your general classes in high school." However, Andrea explained that the fact that a student takes general classes especially the first two years and then he or she chooses a major, which is actually considered to be an advantage for the student. In her home country, before the student goes to college he or she needs to select the major. "So you can do it when you get enrolled, and then you cannot change anything," Andrea noted.

Finally, Jennifer mentioned that "one of the biggest differences between the two systems is that in my country we spend much more time studying. You have to be devoted to education. You cannot be an athlete at the same time." Also, Bolt commented that "coming in the U.S. you see how probably a normal system works, but not necessarily a perfect system, just a normal system."

Factors that Influenced Decision-Making

This theme focuses on the factors that influence participants' decision to leave their country and to travel to the U.S. and attend college. This theme includes also the analysis of the experiences participants had before their decision and how these experiences influence their decision.

U.S. educational system combines education and sports. All participants stated that the most important factor that influenced their decision to choose a U.S. college to study was that they were able to combine education and sports and to receive education at the same time that they are athletes. Mary mentioned, "I think U.S. it's the only country where you can be a student-athlete, so do both." Andrea said that by following the U.S. educational system you can "stay in shape" in both, education and sports:

It's a really good opportunity to combine both education and sport. There's not any other place where you can go to school, where you can get scholarship for being an athlete, where you can like participate, like this system in general, there is nothing like this anywhere.

Georgia also suggested that "U.S. educational system provides the opportunity to do both in a high level. And then you can continue playing professionally and at the same time you have a degree. This is important when to stop your career in sports."

Participants expressed that even when they were in high school, they needed to balance the two roles and basically had to choose which path to follow: to become an athlete or to go to college. Thus, they had to find a way to continue education at a college without ending their athletic career. Jessica said, "I was finishing up high school and some of my players, they would either go to college or they would keep playing. I would have to choose either one." Also, Jessica mentioned that when she was in high school, time was always a problem: "At home my tennis club was an hour away from home so basically I was wasting so much time for traveling every time and it wasn't beneficial." Bolt pointed out the problems in the educational system in Greece as a reason to study in the U.S. "I believe that if I didn't have any problems with education back home, I mean if it wasn't messed up, I would have stayed. In my country you are walking into uncertainty," Bolt said. Georgia also said that the system in both fields (education and sports) in her country is not well organized. She added, "Basketball is not popular in my country, especially for women. And I didn't think at the time I made the decision that there were enough opportunities for me to get better and to be able to play at a competitive level."

All the international student-athletes expressed their concern that before graduating from high school, the most important goal was to combine sports and education after high school.

Jennifer mentioned that she started thinking about her future after high school in the beginning of the ninth grade. She said, “At that time I wanted to receive education and to play sport and just, you know, just find out what I want to do, go to university or something else.”

Security and structured educational system. Participants mentioned that one of the biggest advantages of the U.S. educational system is that it provides security. Bolt said, “You know you’re going to get in the system and you are going to be in the system for four years and you are going to be eligible, you are going to compete, you’re going to run indoor, outdoor.” Furthermore, Andrea pointed out that the U.S system is more structured. “You have a coach, a team, you have people to practice, you have great conditions here [U.S.]. And opportunities to play tennis and to combine it with education,” Andrea said. In the contrary, Bolt said that the system in his country is like “walking in the uncertainty.”

Scholarship system. Participants mentioned that the scholarship system played a pivotal role in making the decision to attend a college in the U.S. Bolt noted “the system in the U.S. provides financial security. I do what I like and the college pays for my education. This is a kind of award for me.” In participants’ countries, in several occasions, students had to pay for tuition or for books and living costs. In the U.S. the scholarship covered tuition, books, and living. Mary pointed out, “We don’t have to pay anything in the U.S. That was something as well I counted when I chose to study here.” Added to this, Jessica replied, “Here they offered me a scholarship, so I could play for a university team which is great and I decided to take this opportunity. So mostly it’s financial probably.”

Steps to Transition

This theme focuses on the process that participants followed from the time they made the decision to study in the U.S. until the time they were admitted to the institution. The process

includes (a) gathering general information, (b) choosing the institution that best fits to participants needs, (c) filling the paperwork with the institution and the NCAA, and (d) receiving acceptance from the institution.

Information gathering. Participants mentioned that they gathered information about the process they needed to follow from the internet, friends, coaches, and private companies that provide services for students who want to study in the U.S. Only Georgia mentioned that an institution recruited her, as she described,

I had a couple different offers; I had a few universities recruiting me because they were able to see me because I was a member of the national team. I was a teenager so they saw me in the European leagues and championships, so I had some visibility and there was some additional interest.

Andrea, Jennifer, and Bolt mentioned that in order to start the searching process they asked a friend who studied in the U.S. and then started searching on the internet to find coaches, and to collect additional information. Andrea said, “I gathered information about the program and the college from my friends, from internet, from coaches, and I when I had a clear picture of what was going on I started contacting some coaches.” Jennifer replied that a friend who had extensive experience in the U.S. provided her with information on how to search for institutions. Then, she searched for emails of head coaches of each school she chose and she started contacting them. Finally, she emailed them videos of her performance and she had to wait for institutions’ replies.

Mary and Jessica chose to gather information from a manager in a private company, which provides services for students who want to study in the U.S. Mary mentioned, “We talked a lot and I had to decide where I wanted to go, if school matters a lot, or if it was more the

question of tennis.” Then, a representative of the company emailed the coaches from various Division I institutions and gave her a list. As a result, Mary chose three schools. Jessica also hired a private company in order to help her in the process to find the institutions in the U.S. She said, “We [family] paid the company money and all they did was to fill out resume, to send it out to schools, and to wait for their replies.” Then, she contacted the coaches who informed her about the next steps that needed to be done in order to enroll her in classes with an athletic scholarship.

Eligibility from NCAA. Participants who did not pay a private company for the process mentioned that they did by themselves the paperwork in order to be eligible from NCAA. For instance, Bolt visited the NCAA website, read all the requirements, and filled out all the papers. However, there were some other things he needed to check. Bolt mentioned, “I had to submit some papers to the school, some to the NCAA clearinghouse, and some other directly to the NCAA. Then, I had to wait. I would say 99% of the paperwork I did it on my own.” Georgia also replied, “I did all the paperwork and it lasted longer than I thought.”

Challenges of Being an International (Non-Native Speaker) Student-Athlete

This theme focuses on the challenges participants face once they came to the U.S. Those challenges are related to the social and cultural issues they anticipated and the challenges due to the two roles they had to balance: functioning simultaneously as a student and an athlete.

Social/cultural challenges. All participants mentioned that the language barrier was the most important challenge they instantly faced. Jennifer said, “I would not understand anything there, what the teacher was saying. I was going to practice; I had no idea what the coach was saying.” Andrea pointed out that the language barrier produces miscommunication, which may lead to frustration. Jessica said that she was always scared about her communication skills but

she had to make a choice. “I either talk or I just keep my mouth shut and I look stupid,” she said. As a result, she decided to be more communicative, and she realized that it was much easier than she had initially thought. “I felt comfortable talking with pretty much anybody,” Jessica added. In addition, Georgia said that language was a challenge especially when some of her teammates were from the South and their accent was difficult for her to comprehend. “I was used to learn British English which was so different, so had a hard time to communicate with them,” Georgia said.

Only Bolt noted that although language was indeed a challenge, it was not the biggest one. Being a student in a Midwest institution was a major challenge for him because there is a myth about U.S., namely, that every place is like being in New York and Los Angeles. Bolt pointed out that he observed huge cultural differences between East and West coast and the Midwest, which made his life more challenging.

In addition, other participants mentioned that cultural differences were a problem at the beginning and they needed time to adjust. Some of those cultural differences apart from the language were food as well as differences on many practical issues such as how to open a bank account or how to rent a house. Georgia replied, “Going to the grocery store the first year was a challenge. I had to ask my teammates and they would ask me for money for giving me a five minute trip, they would ask me for \$10.” Jessica said, “Food is different, transportation is different. But also I was away from my family and being by myself I had to manage some practical things. I had to pay this. I had to do that, to arrange my room, to find someone to drive me to the store.”

Also, Andrea said that “how people treat you is always a challenge. And that was a little bit different in comparison with my country.” Bolt mentioned, “The biggest challenge was to

deal with people that had no idea where I'm coming from, and what or where or what kind of country is Greece. They acted like it's not a real country." Moreover, Georgia said that she felt challenged because the coach did not have the same culture. "I was punished for giving attitude when I was simply asking a question to understand better what the coach was saying," Georgia said. Also, Jennifer said, "The culture is a challenge, different people have different views, different attitudes."

Three participants mentioned that homesickness was a challenge for them. Andrea said, "You feel lonely and you just want to go back, but as time goes by, you meet new people, you kind of get a new family, and you adjust to the new environment." Mary added, "The first year I wanted the college to bring my family here."

Finally, interaction with peers was another challenge for the participants in this study. Bolt said, "I was the only foreigner on the track team. And being the only foreigner on the team it was hard for the other on the team to accept me, not for me to accept them." Also, he called himself a "special freshman," because he needed to adjust to a new educational system not only as a freshman but also as a foreigner. On the contrary, Mary mentioned that her teammates, classmates, and coaches supported her a lot in adjusting to the new environment. "Everyone was so nice," she said. Jessica added, "relationships are always a challenge, but it depends on the person. Some of them get really excited that I'm from another country and they want to talk to me."

Finally, Bolt noted that the international affairs center at his institution did not provide any support to him adjusting to the new environment easier. "They don't do anything," he said. Later Bolt added,

They are supposed to get more involved directly with the students, but they make international students feel like a minority. This is their job and even if they don't have the experience with international students here, this is your job, sit down and find some information.

Challenges as an international student-athlete. Participants mentioned that as international student-athletes faced more challenges, apart from the social, just because they had to balance the two roles. Bolt said that “being in the class was better than being on the team, because in class you can find a larger variety of people.” Also, he added that in class it is easier to find more international students who can understand you easier in comparison with the team. Andrea expressed a different opinion by saying that it was easier for her to adjust in the team than in class. “For me it's a little bit easier because all my teammates are international,” Andrea said.

Also, Andrea mentioned about the busy schedule student-athletes have. She said, “As student-athletes we travel a lot, basically we work seven days a week,” and later she added, “I think you just accept it. This is the system.” Mary added on that

Fall is okay because we did not play that much tournaments, but when we are in season, like in the spring, we played matches every other weekend. We didn't have like a free weekend, or even a Saturday off. And this was tough.

Georgia said, “Another challenge was that I did not think that coaches or schools themselves had the mechanisms to support international students with their transition.” And she added, “I feel like coaches should be more trained to deal with student-athletes.” Andrea opposed that “people in the U.S. understand the sport and how tough it is to be an athlete and to study at the same time.”

Opportunities after Graduation

This theme focuses on the opportunities that participants said they will have after graduating from an institution in the U.S. Participants mentioned that the opportunities for the future are related to the skills they developed through the experience they lived, the degree they received, and the academic accomplishments in general.

Developing skills/life experiences. Many participants mentioned that studying in the U.S. is an opportunity to develop skills through the experiences they live, and this is extremely important in life. Bolt mentioned, “This experience opens your mind and can change you as a person. You find the kind of people here that you’ve never seen before.” Mary pointed out that studying in the U.S. it is a good experience because you are away from home and you can live independently. Jennifer underlined the skills an international student-athlete develops. “It’s more about the skills,” she said. “The experience I am going to get out of it. For me it’s like, I want to learn new material, new information, new skills, which I will be able to have in my future job, for my future things,” Jennifer added. Finally, she noted that she had more confidence in herself because she knows how to solve problems.

In addition, Andrea and Bolt mentioned that being in the U.S. helped them to learn English in a better way, and this is a helpful skill for their professional career. Bolt said, “You are going to learn a second language. This will be very beneficial. And that second language is always English, so I mean, you’re more eloquent in English than any other language.” Andrea added, “Either in the U.S. or in my country learning English as a second language will be good for my future.”

Educational accomplishments. Three participants mentioned that one of the reasons to study in the U.S. was the quality of the degree. Bolt said, “I am going to have a good degree and

I can find a better job.” Georgia also mentioned that for her to get a good degree was an important reason. In addition, the quality of the degree will lead them in specialization in their field by continuing their studies with a master’s or a Ph.D. Jennifer said, “I really do want to do a master degree. I want to go to a grad school about management.”

Also, Andrea mentioned that employers might see the fact that she was a student-athlete as an advantage and they can hire her easier. “I heard that employers see as an advantage if you were a leader of the team because it means that you are organized, you know how to work with people, lead the group, have the ability to communicate,” Andrea said. Mary mentioned, “I would like to get my first job in the U.S., get an internship, to have a good experience. But I don’t really want to live in the U.S. my entire life.

In sum, Chapter 5 provided an analysis and interpretation of the interview data. Participants’ stories were further examined for a broader and deeper understanding of what it means to be an international (non-native speaker of English) student-athlete. Moreover, Chapter 5 presented the themes and subthemes that emerged as a result of the participants’ experiences. These were (a) comparison of the two educational systems (US versus the country of origin), (b) factors that influenced decision-making, (c) steps to transition, (d) challenges as an international student-athlete, and (e) opportunities after graduation.

The following chapter provides discussion and interpretation of the findings in Chapter 5 and provides a deeper reflection of the findings as well as the model developed in this study. The model describes the experiences that international student-athletes have in high school and how those experiences influenced their decision-making process and their adjustment.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions. This chapter provides discussion and interpretation of the findings in Chapter 5. Based on the participants' answers, five themes were developed describing the experiences related to their recruitment and retention processes. These are (a) comparison of the two educational systems (U.S. versus the country of origin), (b) factors that influenced decision-making, (c) steps to transition, (d) challenges as an international student-athlete, and (e) opportunities after graduation.

Each major theme includes sub-themes that give a better understanding of the theme. In this chapter major themes and sub-themes are connected with the theories and models that presented in Chapter 2 (literature review). Finally, a model that focuses on the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions is developed and presented in this chapter.

Discussion of Themes and Subthemes

Comparison of the two educational systems (U.S. versus the country of origin). This theme focuses on the comparison of the two educational systems as expressed by the participants who had the opportunity to experience both systems, one in the U.S. and the other in the country

of origin. Participants were asked to compare the two systems related to both roles they had to be students and athletes at the same time. There were two subthemes that described the main differences between the two systems and how the structure of the two systems affected their performance as students-athletes. These are (a) school-based versus club-based sports system and (b) educational system in the U.S. supports student-athletes.

Factors that influenced decision-making. This theme focuses on the factors that influenced participants to decide to study in the U.S. as student-athletes. Participants expressed their experiences during high school and how they tried to combine sports with education. Also, this theme included the problems participants faced in their country and their concerns about the future. There were three subthemes that described the most important factors that influenced their decision to study in the U.S. as student-athletes, which are (a) education and sports, (b) security and structured educational system, and (c) scholarship system.

Steps to transition. This theme focuses on the process participants followed in order to be admitted to the institution as student-athletes with an athletic scholarship. Participants expressed their experiences on how they gathered information about the institutions, the academic programs and the athletic departments. Also, they mentioned the steps they followed in order to be eligible from NCAA. The subthemes were (a) information gathering and (b) eligibility from NCAA.

Challenges as an international student-athlete. This theme examines the challenges participants faced in the U.S. Participants expressed their experiences of their adjustment and the main problems they handled. Also, they expressed the solutions they found to solve the problems and how the institutions or their classmates/teammates helped them during this

process. Participants faced challenges that can be categorized in two subthemes: (a) the social and cultural challenges and (b) the challenge of being an international student-athlete.

Opportunities after graduation. This theme focuses on participants' opinions about the opportunities for their future because of their decision to study in the U.S. In addition, participants expressed their belief that the experience of living in the U.S. helped them (a) to develop skills important for their life, (b) to accomplish educational goals, and (c) to find a better job. Thus, the two subthemes were (a) developing skills and (b) educational accomplishments such as to have a better job, a specialization in field, or a good degree.

Deeper Reflections of Findings

Comparison of the two educational systems. One of the main comparisons that participants made was the difference between the school-based sport system in the U.S. versus the club-based sport system in the country of origin. Asher (1994) mentioned that international student-athletes have experiences from a club-oriented system, which is more competitive than intercollegiate sports; therefore international students can help their team to be more competitive. Asher has described that international student-athletes have strong motives to come to the U.S. and attend a program and are more mature than and work harder than domestic student-athletes. Therefore, international student-athletes can add to the quality of competition, and they can contribute to the system of intercollegiate sports and the campus life.

Factors that influenced decision making. Participants in this study mentioned as the most important factors that influenced their decision to study in the U.S. (a) the structure of the system that combines education and sports, (b) the scholarship system that provides the opportunity to the student-athletes to receive scholarship for their athletic abilities because they

compete as representatives of the institution, and (c) the security that the system provides to student-athletes.

The unique characteristics of the U.S. educational system attract international student-athletes to the country because it combines education with sports. These findings were similar with previous studies, such as Berry's (1999), which indicated the importance of academic and athletic achievement as an important factor for international student-athletes to come to the U.S. In addition Bale (1987) mentioned that international student-athletes found difficulties in their countries in combining training with a full-time job or school, compared to the U.S. system that combines athletics with academics. In addition, international student-athletes claimed that they had limited access to higher education in their countries, and that makes them explore alternative solutions in the U.S. (Bale, 1987).

However, the current study does not support Bale's (1991) findings that describe factors such as the lack of facilities and the lack of coaching as important for international student-athletes to make the decision to leave their country and to come to the U.S. in order to study and to participate in collegiate sports. Participants in the current study mentioned that facilities were great in the U.S. but it was not the main reason for them to leave their countries. In addition, participants said they were satisfied with their coaches back in their countries. They mentioned that coaches were caring and supportive in their efforts to compete in high level. Only, the lack of time was something that participants mentioned as a problem in their country. Bale (1991) found that the lack of time is an important aspect which makes international student-athletes to choose to study in the U.S.

The current study also shows the differences that were described in the literature review and are related to the studies that focused on the comparison of domestic and international

student-athletes related to the criteria involving their decision to study in the U.S. Goss et al. (2006) demonstrated that athletic, academic, and campus-related factors influenced domestic student-athletes in their college decision. Specifically, the top 10 factors were degree programs, opportunity to play, head coach, academic support services, spiritual guidance, athletic facilities, on-campus dorms, social climate, athletic traditions, and the size of an institution. In addition, Kanley (2007) found that the most influential factors for domestic student-athletes were the availability of a major or academic program, head coach, career opportunities after graduation, social atmosphere of the team, and the amount of financial aid. The comparison of the two cohorts shows that the factors that influence decision making are more generic for international student-athletes versus the domestic students who focus more on the institution, program, coach, and other specific aspects of education.

Additionally, the outcomes in the current study support the findings of other studies and are related to the different criteria that male and females have when they make a decision. Judson et al. (2004) showed that female student-athletes value their academic opportunities more in comparison to the male student-athletes who value the athletic opportunities more. Furthermore, another study from Mathes and Gurney (1985) underscored the importance of the academic opportunities in the decision making process for student-athletes and the researcher concluded that female student-athletes value this factor more than male student-athletes. In the current study five women and only one man participated. Female participants expressed that the academic opportunities were an important factor that played a role in their decision.

Finally, participants in the current study mentioned that the athletic scholarship is an important factor for their decision to study in the U.S. in order to have financial security during the years of study. These findings are similar with the findings from Doyle and Gaeth (1990)

and Bale (1987) On the other hand, there is an argument related to the participation of international student-athletes in intercollegiate sports because of the athletic scholarship they receive. Some claim that international student-athletes take athletic scholarships from domestic students and in select cases, such as in tennis, 30% of the athletic scholarships go to international student-athletes (Greviskes, 2004). Bale (1991) mentioned that at all times there is a constant pressure on the international student-athlete to achieve good results because every year there is approximately 10,000 to 12,000 athletic scholarships offered to them and if they do not perform well there are chances for withdrawing the scholarships by the institution.

Steps to transition. Bale (1991) described the nature of recruitment of European student-athletes as (a) approached by a representative of the university (51.6%), (b) found out from friends or contacts who had been there (39.7%), and (c) answered an advertisement (6.4%). The findings in the current study support that the steps to transition were found out from (a) friends, (b) private companies, and (c) the recruitment process from institutions.

In addition, participants in the current study discussed their experiences during the process that NCAA requires in order to be eligible as student-athletes. All of them expressed their opinion that they had to do all the paperwork by themselves and they needed to follow the procedures of the NCAA. In many cases participants faced some challenges in filling the NCAA official papers because of the differences in the educational systems (U.S. vs. the country of origin).

The restrictions from the NCAA related to international student-athletes were discussed in other studies. Ridinger and Pastore (2001) argued that it is a fact that in many cases international student-athletes have competed on the professional level and that causes them to allegedly be in a higher performance level from domestic students who compete in

intercollegiate sports. This is a thorn for NCAA which tries to develop limits and regulations. Moreover, some difficulties that NCAA faces when institutions recruit international student-athletes are academic eligibility and amateur athletic standing. These two factors are extremely important for the rules and regulations of the NCAA in order to do the clearance for an international student-athlete (Weston, 2006). Because of the different educational systems around the world, it is difficult for the NCAA to verify if an international student-athlete meets the academic criteria. In addition, because of the fact that in many countries there is a club-based system, it is difficult for the NCAA to confirm if the international student-athletes have any kind of professional contract that makes them immediately ineligible to participate in intercollegiate sports in the U.S.

Challenges as an international student-athlete. In the current study, participants expressed the social and cultural challenges as well as the challenges of being international student-athletes. Those challenges were (a) language barrier, (b) cultural issues (e.g. food), and (c) lack of help from the international affairs center.

A language barrier was mentioned by the participants as the most important factor that influenced their adjustment in the U.S. Ridinger and Pastore (2000) included “language barrier” under the personal dimension of their model as a technical competency. Church (1982) claimed that language competency is correlated with the adjustment of international students.

In addition, one participant pointed out the lack of support from the international affairs center. Other participants did not mention anything related to this; however, they did not express anything in favor of the support that their institution provides. These findings support Ridinger and Pastore (2000), who suggested that international student-athletes need additional support services from their institutions to help their adjustment. Moreover, participants mentioned that

they faced difficulties with the culture and how to communicate with people in the U.S. because of the different views and attitudes.

On the contrary, the findings of the current study do not support one of the sub-categories presented by Ridinger and Pastore (2000). Athletic aptitude does seem to be a challenge for participants. Stidwell (1984) claimed that international student-athletes perform in a higher level in comparison with domestic athletes, basically because of the club-based system that other countries use.

Finally, homesickness and the role of the family was one of the factors that was expressed by the participants in the current study. Ridinger and Pastore (2000) did not include family influence in their model, which is important to be mentioned. The impact of family to decision-making and retention is important to be mentioned and to be analyzed in future studies.

Opportunities after graduation. Participants in the current study noted that their experience in the U.S. would be valuable not only because they receive a good degree, but also because they develop skills important for life. Weston (2006) further suggested that the experience of attending a college in the U.S. can be beneficial to international student-athletes because they can build a stronger career. Chickering (1969) pointed out that college years help students to an increased competence in intellectual areas and the interaction with classmates and teammates help to shape a sense of self (Pascarella & Terezini, 2005).

The experiences of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in Division I institutions can be described using the model developed for this study (Figure 1). The model describes the experiences that international student-athletes have in high school and how those experiences influenced their decision-making process and their adjustment.

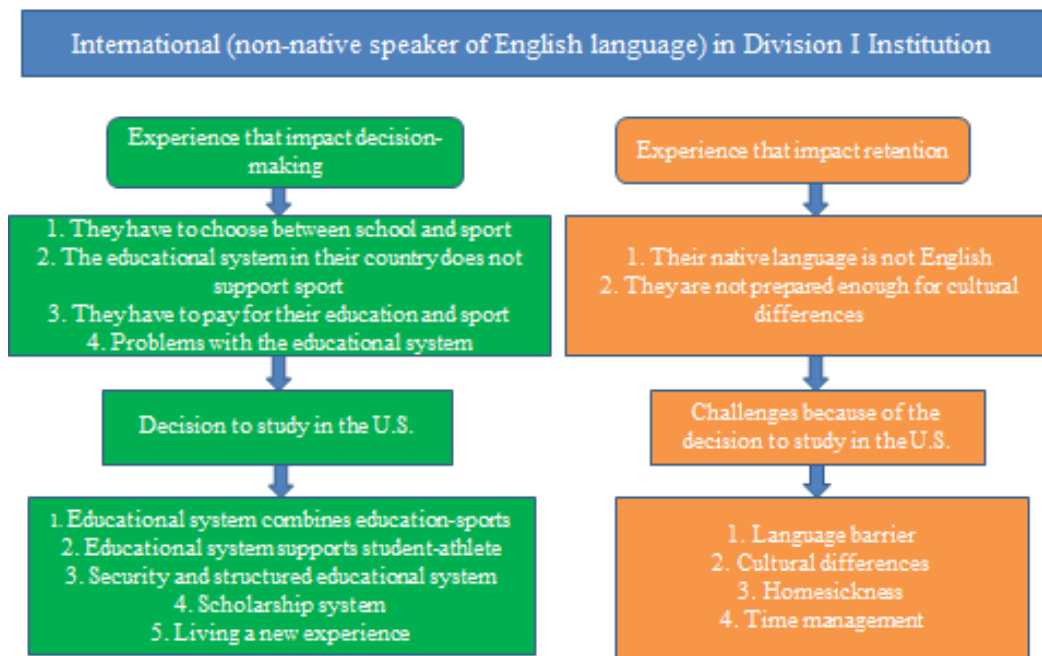


Figure 1. Model related to recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes.

The main problem for international student-athletes in high school is to combine education and sports. For them it seems critical to perform as athletes but simultaneously to be able to graduate from college. In order to accomplish these goals they start thinking of continuing their education in the U.S. which provides this opportunity. Also, the security that the U.S educational system provides with the athletic scholarship system makes international student-athletes to decide to study in the U.S. Finally, the problems the educational system in their countries have make them to think of other options with a more structured and organized educational system such as in the U.S.

Therefore, for all the aforementioned reasons international student-athletes make the decision to study to the U.S. Their decision, it is clear, has been influenced from their previous experiences in high schools. The same happens in regards to their retention in an institution.

Their previous experiences such as the exposure and adaptability to other cultures make international student-athletes adjust easier to the new environment. Also, the technical competence related to the level of English makes them to feel better when they communicate with native speakers of English.

This model shows how the previous experience impacts the recruitment and retention of international student-athletes. It is important for institutions to analyze these findings and to use the model (a) to develop better campaigns to recruit the best international student-athletes and (b) to establish a better support system in order to retain student-athletes and to have a return on their investment.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the findings concerning the experiences that impact the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes in NCAA Division I institutions. Moreover, in this chapter the highlights of the results and the limitations are presented. This chapter concludes with recommendations for (a) the institutions of higher education, (b) the international student-athletes, and (c) further research.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences that impact the decision of international student-athletes to study in the U.S. and the challenges they faced while living in the U.S. The central goal was to use participants' voices and perspectives, to analyze them, and to develop a model that could be helpful for administrative staff and prospective international student-athletes who want to study in the U.S. Therefore, the outcome of the qualitative research in the current study was the presentation of the voices of the participants and the interpretation of the problem, extending the literature and signaling a call for action (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, to achieve this, the research design included a narrative analysis approach, which involves life experiences and storytelling. Through the life story approach, several common themes were developed that included the decision-making process, the transition, and actually living in the U.S. until graduation. The experiences international student-athletes had in early childhood until high school played a significant role in their decision to study in the U.S.

Moreover, the preparation they did before coming to the U.S. helped them to overcome difficulties in their adjustment. Also, their decision to study in the college was critical for their development.

Many theories highlight the impact that colleges have in students' development and change. Development is related to psychological, educational, and moral growth (Perry, 1970). In contrast, change refers only to the cognitive skills, affective characteristics, attitudes, values, or behaviors. In this study, participants showed development according to the seven vectors of student development as stated by Chickering (1969, achieving competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward independence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose and developing integrity). According to Chickering (1969), college years lead individuals and groups to an increased competence in intellectual areas, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal relations. In this study, it became clear that after the first year, participants were able to manage their emotions and to move from autonomy to independence. The freshman year is characterized as "a combination of desocialization, pressures to unlearn certain attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors, and socialization, pressures to learn new attitudes, values and beliefs and participate in a new culture and social order" (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). They were able to realize that their decision was the right one, which led them to self-development. Through the years, participants were able to develop mature interpersonal relationships and to accept the different culture, the ideas, people's backgrounds and values. Participants' interactions with classmates and teammates provided "powerful learning experiences and helped shape the emerging sense of self" (Pascarella & Terezini, 2005, p. 22). According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), developing interpersonal

relationships requires some sense of direction and purpose. In this study, participants developed a better sense of themselves in a context shaped by social and cultural conditions.

The results of the study suggest that the most important factor that influenced participants' decision to study in the U.S. was the opportunity the U.S educational system provides by combining education with sports. The experience participants had when they were in high school was the total separation between the roles of a student and an athlete, which made them consider quitting education or sports in order to be able to succeed in their career. This forced decision made participants feel frustrated and disappointed. On the other hand, few participants who thought to continue balancing the two roles felt that they had to waste too much time driving or that the expenses would be much higher. In this study, participants addressed the fact that the educational system in the U.S. supports student-athletes because it is organized in a way that meets their needs, being simultaneously a student and an athlete.

Moreover, the U.S. educational system provides financial support to student-athletes because of athletic scholarships and time efficiency. The scholarship system played a pivotal role for participants to make the decision to attend a college in the U.S. Also, because of the fact that student-athletes lived on campus and very close to the sport facilities, they did not waste time and money on traveling.

This study also suggests that the participants searched independently to find the process needed to follow in order to get admitted by an institution. None of the participants was recruited by an institution, which shows that administrations need to focus more on this area. Coaches play an important role in the recruiting process, and they are the first people who reply to student-athletes' questions. Moreover, nowadays the internet plays a crucial role for

international student-athletes to gather information about institutions, the cities, and the process they need to follow.

Furthermore, this study suggests that once international student-athletes move to the U.S. they have to face (a) social/cultural challenges and (b) challenges to balance the two roles (student and athlete). Related to the first, the language barrier was the number one factor that influenced participants' adjustment. Participants expressed that in the first year it was difficult to communicate in English, in class, on the sport field, and socially. Communication problems disappeared when participants were able to communicate with classmates and teammates and learned more things about the American culture. Participants pointed out the importance of the help they received from their classmates and teammates in order to adjust easier to the new environment. However, in many cases participants expressed their disappointment that they did not have the same amount of help from administrators, especially from the international affairs center.

Related to the challenges international student-athletes faced in balancing the two roles (being a student and an athlete), participants mentioned that their schedules were busy especially during the spring semester when they had to play more matches. Also, in some cases coaches should be more trained to interact with international student-athletes and to know more about the problems and challenges they face in everyday life. This could be valuable for institutions in order to help international student-athletes adjust faster in the new environment and therefore to achieve a better return on investment through the athletic scholarship institutions provide. According to the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (2010), at many institutions the expenses for athletics are double or triple the expenses for academics: "Median athletics spending per athlete at institutions in each major athletics conference ranges from 4 to nearly 11

times more than the median spending on education-related activities per student” (p. 35). The commission’s recommendation was to strengthen the eligibility standards for participation of student-athletes. Thus, international student-athletes need to focus on their academic preparation before and during their studies in the U.S.

Finally, this study suggests that international student-athletes after graduation believe they will have more opportunities for the future because of the experience studying and competing as athletes in the U.S. Participants expressed the enthusiasm that studying in the U.S. helped them to develop skills for life, to experience a different educational system, to get a degree that is valuable, and to accomplish their goals as students and athletes.

Limitations

Based on the limited resources (money, time) I had to complete this study, only six participants were interviewed. The process I followed to recruit participants was challenging. First, many directors of Division I institutions denied my request to provide contact information for the international student-athletes. Other directors who had the kindness to help me during the recruiting process sent me the contact information. However, a few of the international student-athletes I contacted replied that they did not have the time to participate in this study because of their busy schedules.

Furthermore, due to the fact that I chose to conduct face-to-face interviews, participants were limited to those attending Midwest institutions. As a result, it is possible that the experiences of international student-athletes in a NCAA Division I institution on the East or West coast might be different, especially those related to their adjustment and cultural differences.

Also, another limitation of this study was that only one male student-athlete participated. It would be interesting to have more male international student-athletes. Finally, only one female participant was an athlete in a team sport. Future studies need to be done with the participation of more student-athletes from team sports.

Recommendations for the Future

For institutions/administrative staff. The findings of the current study support the idea that administrative staff needs to focus more on the recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes. For recruitment purposes, it is important for institutions to spend money on supporting their sports programs and to promote the opportunity for students from all over the world to study in the U.S. by combining sports and education. In many cases, institutions have a lack of domestic athletes (such as tennis players or track and field), and international student-athletes can fill this gap. Also, the recruitment of international student-athletes can be beneficial for the institution not only financially, but also academically because their presence adds to the culture of the institution. Midwest institutions especially need to invest in international student-athletes because this adds to a multicultural campus, which helps domestic students as well. Knowing the factors that influence international student-athletes to make the decision to study in the U.S. can help institutions to develop effective campaigns, which can bring the best international student-athletes to their campuses.

In addition, international student-athletes need and many times expect to find support from administrative staff once they come to the U.S. Administrative staff need to be aware of the challenges that international student-athletes face in order to help them adjust to the new environment. This awareness can add to the retention of international student-athletes. International student-athletes have greater chances to succeed if the university personnel help

them in their adjustment and lead them to see their cross-cultural studying experience as a journey (Lin & Pedersen, 2007).

Furthermore, the findings of the current study support the idea of a closer communication between the international affairs center and the athletic department. As it was stated by the participants, international affairs centers provide information to international students, but in many cases act without any kind of communication with the athletic departments or other departments within the institution. The international affairs center needs to be aware of the problems students face, especially the first couple of months, such as how to open an account, visa issues, how to rent a house, and or how to buy a car. According to Cuyjet, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2011), campus officials need to provide discussion forums between international and domestic students and support services for the aforementioned issues.

Moreover, the international affairs centers need to provide help on issues related to language. An advising system that is adapted to the needs of international student-athletes might be a solution to this problem. An experienced advisor can be the person who connects an international affairs center with the athletic department, the members of the team, and the freshman student-athletes. According to Cuyjet et al. (2011), “programs for intercultural exchange have been found to facilitate international students’ adjustment to campus life. These include international coffee hours, talent shows, events forums (in which the entire campus learns about a particular culture), and international film nights” (p. 255). Also, programs that provide interaction between international and American students can be beneficial to social adjustment in academic and athletic performance.

Finally, institutions need to organize orientation programs for all freshman international student-athletes. These programs can even start before the international student-athletes arrive in

the U.S. (Cuyjet et al., 2011). This will help international student-athletes adjust faster in the environment. Better adjustment leads to an elimination of culture shock and, therefore, a return on investment through the scholarship that the institution provides. Dalili (1982) pointed out that the successful adjustment of international students depends on the success of the advising process.

For international student-athletes. International student-athletes as a group face the challenge of balancing two roles and of adjusting to a totally new environment. The decision to study in the U.S. provides an opportunity to have unique experiences that in most cases are valuable for international student-athletes. According to Cuyjet et al. (2011), “international students encounter a host of academic challenges” (p. 245). These challenges are valuable for many reasons. First, international student-athletes live in a totally different environment that makes them independent, adds to their maturity, and make them stronger people. Second, the challenges the international student-athletes face make them develop skills that are important for their lives. However, some of the challenges are so difficult that they make international student-athletes want to change institutions, quit education, or even leave the U.S. Some of the common issues of international students are academic adjustment, English language difficulties and social isolation, pressure from abroad, financial concerns, discrimination, and stereotyping (Cuyjet et al., 2011). Therefore, it is important for international student-athletes to be aware of the circumstances they will face before making the decision to study in the U.S. According to Church (1982), when international student-athletes know what to expect, they have higher satisfaction and their adjustment is easier.

For research. The current study could be the first step towards a broader analysis of the factors that influence international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes to study in

the U.S. and to remain in a program until their graduation. Future research needs to focus on more qualitative studies with a greater number of interviewees from Eastern and Western institutions. Also, interviewees from NCAA Division II and III institutions need to be explored in order to see if there are any differences among the three Divisions.

In addition, after a detailed examination of the findings of the aforementioned qualitative studies, quantitative studies need to be conducted with the use of a broader sample of international student-athletes, which may provide a better and more accurate idea of the factors that influence recruitment and retention of international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes.

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APPENDIX A

Letter to Athletic Directors

(Date)

Dear Mr./Miss (name of the athletic director),

My name is Evangelos Kontaxakis and I am currently in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation through the Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Foundation at Indiana State University. My topic focuses on international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes who participate in NCAA Division I sports. The purpose of this study is to explore their decision processes for coming to study in the United States and participate in intercollegiate athletics as well as to discuss their experiences.

I am writing to request a list of the international student-athletes that have been enrolled at your institutions and contact information (email and phone number). The international student-athletes need to meet the following criteria to participate in this study:

1. They must have been born in a country besides the United States, Canada, Australia, Great Britain or a country where the first language is English. Furthermore, their native language needs to be one other than English and they had lived in their country until graduation from high school or their country's equivalent.
2. They should be eligible according to NCAA rules and regulations for participation in intercollegiate sports as international student-athletes.
3. They should be sophomores, juniors, or seniors as defined for those levels by your institution.
4. They should have a TOEFL score more than 213 (computer based) in order to gauge the appropriate level of English competency

Your list will then enable me to select students to participate in this study. My goal is to interview two students from the list you provide.

If you need any further information, please contact me at Evangelos.Kontaxakis@indstate.edu or by phone (812) 201-1963. You may also contact my faculty sponsor, Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton, Bayh College of Education, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809 by email: mary.howard-hamilton@indstate.edu or by phone at (812) 237-2907.

Thank you, in advance, for your support of my study.

Sincerely,
Evangelos Kontaxakis
Ph.D. Candidate

Leadership, Administration, and Foundations department
Bayh College of Education, Indiana State University

APPENDIX B

Letter of Invitation to Participants

(Date)

Dear (name of student),

My name is Evangelos Kontaxakis and I am doctoral student at Indiana State University working on my dissertation through the Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Foundations. My topic focuses on international (non-native speaker of English) student-athletes who participate in NCAA Division I sports. The purpose of this study is to explore their decision processes for coming to study in the United States and participating in intercollegiate athletics as well as to discuss their experiences.

I am writing to request your participation in the study. If you agree to participate in this study, I will provide you a consent form detailing your rights as a participant in this study for completion and signature at the start of the interview.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me so we can set up an interview. You can contact me at Evangelos.Kontaxakis@indstate.edu or by phone (812) 201-1963. You may also contact my faculty sponsor, Dr. Howard-Hamilton, Bayh College of Education, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809 by email:mary.howard-hamilton@indstate.edu or by phone at (812) 237-2907.

Should you agree to be a participant, I will be visiting you at a location of your convenience to interview you for about 60 to 90 minutes. I believe that your story will bring a unique perspective to my study, and also one that will assist in expanding the literature on an important topic. Thank you, and I anticipate hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Evangelos Kontaxakis
Ph.D. Candidate
Leadership, Administration, and Foundations department
Bayh College of Education
Indiana State University

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study focused on international student athletes participating in NCAA Division I athletics whose native language is not English. The study is being conducted by Evangelos Kontaxakis, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Administration and Foundations department at Indiana State University. Mr. Kontaxakis is conducting this study for his doctoral dissertation. Dr. Howard-Hamilton is the faculty supervisor of the project.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you fulfilled the following requirements:

1. You were born in a country **besides** the United States, Canada, Australia, Great Britain or other country where the first language is English. Furthermore, your native language is not English and you have lived in your country until graduation from high school or your country's equivalent.
2. You are eligible according to NCAA rules and regulations for participation in intercollegiate sports as an international student-athlete.
3. You are a sophomore, junior, or senior as defined by the institution's definition for those categories.
4. You have a TOEFL score more than 213 (computer based) in order to gauge the appropriate level of English competency.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Suggest a private location where I can visit you for an interview. The location can be any place that you feel comfortable but also where an audio recording device can capture the interview without undue distracting background noise.
2. Respond to a series of questions, sharing your thoughts for between 60-90 minutes.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Given that the questions focus on your reasons for coming to the U.S. for study and to play an intercollegiate sport and your experiences as a student-athlete, it is possible that a question or questions may stimulate emotional feelings for you. However, it is not expected that these

would exceed those that are common in everyday life. However, you may chose to not answer any question and withdraw from the study at any time at no penalty to you.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS

The information that will be probed will not benefit you directly beyond those of simple reflection on a topic of relevance to you. However, you may request a copy of the study when completed, which may be of interest and benefit to you and is anticipated to be of benefit for advancing knowledge on an important topic.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This survey is confidential. No one will be able to identify you, your answers, or your institution, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a pseudonym you choose before the interview as well as a pseudonym for the institution. Mr. Kontaxakis will not use your name or the institution where you enrolled in any descriptions of this study or reports generated from the research. The only people who will have access to the list of participants and the research data are the researcher and the dissertation committee. Individuals from the Institutional Review Board may also inspect these records. Should the data be published, no individual information will be disclosed. Audio recordings will not be shared with any other individual other than the dissertation committee members and will be destroyed 3 years after the study is completed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is voluntary. By giving the interview, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason. Also, you have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence. If you do withdraw before completion of the study, research data collected until that time may be used in the study for the period of time you participated, unless you request that you do not wish to have your information used.

Also, there are no costs to you for participating in this study and no compensation will be provided.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Evangelos Kontaxakis, (812) 201-1963, Evangelos.Kontaxakis@indstate.edu or Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton, (812) 237-2907, mary.howard-hamilton@indstate.edu.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or if you feel you've been placed at risk, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN, 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or by e-mail at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research participant with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study and have received a copy of this informed consent form. My questions have also been answered to my satisfaction.

Print name of subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Evangelos Kontaxakis

Ph.D. Candidate

Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations department

Bayh College of Education

Terre Haute, Indiana 47809

(812) 201-1963

Evangelos.Kontaxakis@indstate.edu

APPENDIX D

Semi-structured Interview Protocol*Personal and family background*

- 32. Please tell me about yourself
- 33. Please tell me about your family. What were the occupations and education of your parents? Do you have siblings? What level of education and occupation have your siblings attained?

Academic background

- 34. Please tell me about your education. What level of education did you have before coming to the United States? From which country did you obtain your degree?
- 35. What were your goals when you were a high school student?

Athletic background

- 36. Please tell me about your athletic performance in your country.
- 37. What were your goals when you were an athlete?

Educational and sport system in the country of origin (strengths and weaknesses comparing to the U.S. system)

- 38. How would you compare the educational system in the U.S. and in your country?
- 39. How would you compare the sport system in the U.S. and in your country?
- 40. Why did you choose the U.S. system instead of the system in your country?

Transition to the U.S

- 41. Why did you choose to come to the U.S.?
- 42. What were the first challenges that you faced when you first arrived in the United States?
- 43. How was the process? Tell me the steps you followed in order to come to the U.S.

Experiences in the U.S.

- 44. How would you describe your experiences so far while living in the U.S.?
- 45. Do you think that the experiences you've had in the U.S. will help you in the future? How?

Challenges and opportunities

- 46. Tell me about the challenges you face as an international student-athlete.
- 47. What do you think could have been done to make your adjustment smoother/easier?
- 48. What are the opportunities for you when you graduate? Do you plan to stay in the U.S.?