

# View of Campus Community Members of Division I Athletes in Classroom Settings

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***Abstract:** Despite growing empirical evidence that suggests that faculty and other students harbor prejudicial attitudes toward Division I athletes, it is not clear precisely the extent to which they are affected by these attitudes. This study explored how athletes perceived their treatment by professors, teaching assistants, and their non-athlete peers in classroom settings. Gender, race, and sport differences were explored. The sample included 174 athletes who were surveyed at two large Division I universities. Findings revealed athletes generally had neither positive nor negative views of professors and teaching assistants and somewhat positive perceptions of their non-athlete peers. Evidence that athletes' perceptions differed by their gender, race, and/or sport was minimal. New directions for future work to build on this study are discussed.*

Intercollegiate athletics has been a controversial topic of discussion, not only at some of our most prominent colleges and universities, but also with the popular press. Many critics of college athletics, for instance, have drawn considerable public attention to the extent to which campus

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climate issues affect athlete engagement and involvement in diverse college learning communities (Comeaux, 2011; Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995; Sailes, 1993; Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007). This issue is certainly relevant and desperately requires greater attention. It is particularly important that we gain a greater understanding of how athletes view their relationships and engagement with other members of their campus communities.

We know that involvement in educationally purposeful activities such as student-faculty interactions and collaboration with peers is linked to desirable educational outcomes (Astin, 1993; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). We also know that faculty members and students have more negative perceptions of the academic abilities of male and female athletes than they do of their non-athlete peers (Comeaux, 2011; Engstrom et al., 1995; Sailes, 1993). However, it is not clear whether negative attitudes from members of the campus community affect the learning and personal development of athletes. There is little extant research (e.g., Simons et al., 2007) that examines how athletes feel they are perceived and treated by members of the college community. With this in mind, this study explored how Division I athletes perceived their engagement with members of the campus community. Specifically, this study examined how athletes viewed their treatment by professors, teaching assistants, and their non-athlete peers in classroom settings. In this context, the athletes' gender, race, and sport were explored as confounding variables.

In many ways, athletes experience college in the same ways as their non-athlete peers. They attend classes, work for their grades, and form social connections in the process. But they face additional challenges as a result of their athlete status, and these challenges must be explored in-depth (Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001). This study serves as a basis for understanding the comfort and awareness level among athletes in describing their particular experiences. A greater understanding of athlete perceptions of the broader college community provides us a useful window into this particular academic subculture. Faculty and other students have the greatest number of meaningful interactions with athletes, and are in the best position to help them fulfill their academic potential; we need to assess the quality of the relationships between these individuals in order to understand how athletes fit into the larger academic community. Findings from this study can empower internal

stakeholders in the affairs of intercollegiate athletics to examine athlete campus involvement patterns to determine how they are being translated into discriminating behaviors and undesirable educational outcomes.

Studies devoted entirely to Division I athletes can lead to an understanding of their processes of interaction within the college environment, which research has shown are essential to academic success in higher education (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The failure to fully understand the distinct interaction patterns of college athletes can have a significant impact on the extent to which we understand the need for specific forms of campus assistance.

## **Previous Research on Student Engagement**

Past research has produced an extensive knowledge base on the relationship between student engagement and a broad range of outcome variables (Astin, 1993; Hu & Kuh, 2002, 2003; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). The evidence in general reveals that involvement in educationally sound activities has a direct influence on student learning and personal development. As it relates to this study, purposeful engagement activities include, but are not limited to, preparing for class, reading and writing, meaningful interactions with faculty, and collaboration with peers on problem solving task (Kuh, 2001). Chickering and Gamson's (1987) "Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" lends further support to this concept by defining several educationally purposeful activities that influence student personal and academic talent development: student-faculty interaction, task orientation, cooperation among students, opportunities for communication, active learning, respect of diverse talents and ways of learning, and prompt feedback. Likewise, the concept of student engagement parallels a basic tenant of Astin's (1984) student involvement theory which posits that students experience positive gains in learning and personal development by becoming involved on campus.

Although there is extensive research on student engagement related to the general college student population, few studies have specifically examined athletes' engagement in educationally purposeful activities and its influence on a series of desirable outcomes. As such, evidence concerning the positive influence of athlete and faculty contact is

somewhat limited (Comeaux, 2005). While the benefits derived from the relationship between faculty and athletes are to some extent contingent upon the specific nature of contact, Comeaux (2005), using data drawn from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, found that academically-oriented interactions with faculty accounted for modest significance in athlete academic success as compared to informal/social interactions. For example, athletes receipt of assistance from faculty in achieving their professional goals was positively associated with academic performance. Furthermore, Umbach and colleagues (2006), using data from the National Survey on Student Engagement, found in part that athletes did not differ from their non-athlete peers on participation in effective educational practices such as interaction with faculty. More recently, Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) examined factors related to athlete engagement in educationally sound activities. Using a dataset from the Basic Academic Skills Study, Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) revealed the extent to which athletes interacted with faculty did not significantly influence a set of desirable outcomes. However, Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) found on average athletes' interactions with students other than their teammates had positive impacts on personal self-concept and learning and communication skills.

### **College Community Attitudes Toward Athletes**

The findings from several studies examining faculty perceptions of athletes suggest that faculty harbor more prejudicial attitudes toward male athletes than their non-athlete peers (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Comeaux, 2011; Engstrom et al., 1995). In particular, Engstrom and colleagues (1995) employed the Situational Attitude Scale (SAS) to explore faculty attitudes toward Division I athletes at a large public research university. They found that faculty were more negative toward male revenue and nonrevenue<sup>1</sup> athletes than their non-athlete peers, especially regarding academic abilities. For example, faculty participants expressed a degree of surprise and suspicion when a male revenue or

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article, revenue sports include football and men's basketball, and they have "potential" to generate revenue because of their high profile status (see Eitzen, 2009). In contrast, nonrevenue sports are the remaining lower profile sport programs that are not typically viewed as entities with revenue-generating potential.

nonrevenue athlete received an “A” grade in a faculty member’s class. Likewise, Baucom and Lantz (2001) employed the SAS to examine faculty perceptions of athletes at a Division II institution that did not offer athletic scholarships. The researchers found similar negative faculty perceptions toward male revenue and nonrevenue athletes regarding their academic performance.

When accounting for background characteristics, faculty attitudes toward athletes can vary by race and gender (Comeaux, 2010, 2011). Using photo elicitation methodology, Comeaux (2010), for instance, found that faculty held less favorable perceptions of the academic and post-undergraduate accomplishments of Division I Black athletes as compared to their White counterparts. In a study that employed the Situational Attitude Scale, Comeaux (2011) discovered that faculty perceived Division I male athletes more negatively than their female counterparts in areas concerning intellectual abilities, special services such as an expanded tutorial program, and out-of-class achievements. In a related study, Simons and colleagues (2007) surveyed 538 Division I athletes about their perceptions of and treatment by faculty and their non-athlete peers. The authors found a substantial portion of athletes reported they were perceived negatively by professors, teaching assistants, and other students. In addition, Simons and colleagues (2007) discovered that males reported more negative perceptions than females, African American reported more negative views than non-African Americans, and revenue athletes reported more negative perceptions than non-revenue. While the study produced useful findings, it has a significant limitation. These data were obtained from one large, public, highly-selective institution and therefore may not reflect the attitudes held by athletes at schools with different admission standards, different academic expectations, and/or different relationships and engagement with other members of their campus communities. It thus would be instructive for researchers to replicate and extend this study to other campuses to determine if the results are robust.

Research also indicates that members of the campus community (other than faculty) can perceive athletes quite negatively (Sailes, 1993). Sailes (1993), in part, found that Division I White and male college students believed that African American athletes were not academically prepared to attend college, and were not as intelligent and did not receive grades as high as White athletes. Such negative perceptions by students in the

general population appear to be less evident for female athletes. Perhaps, this is because female athletes, on average, exhibit academic performance similar to that of their non-athletic peers, and considerably better than that of their male counterparts (Sellers, Kuperminc, & Damas, 1997; Simons, Van Rheezen, & Covington, 1999). Nonetheless, female athletes face their own challenges: they have been routinely perceived as less feminine than their female non-athlete peers by members of the campus community (Birrell & Cole, 1994; Cohen, 1993). Likewise, Black female athletes have had to contend with such deep-rooted racial stereotypes as hypersexuality and masculinity (Liberti, 1999).

Based on previous research discussed in this article, it is clear that athletes face a unique set of challenges as they navigate their college experience. It is essential that we gain a greater understanding of what they face as they interact with their instructors and peers. More specifically, we must seek answers to the following questions:

1. How do Division I college athletes perceive their engagement with faculty members, teaching assistants, and peers?
2. How do these perceptions vary by race, gender, and type of sport?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The research was conducted at two NCAA Division I public universities in the mid-western United States. The participating universities were of similar size and admission standards. These universities were less selective based on their admissions standards than the previous work performed on a west coast NCAA Division I institution by Simons et al. (2007). This contrast helped to discern whether athletes perceived engagement with members of the campus community vary between these distinctly different institutions. The sample (N=174) included athletes, ranging from first-year students to seniors, and the response rate was 42%. Of the participants, 33% were male and 67% were female; 36% were revenue athletes and 64% were nonrevenue athletes; 73% self-identified as White, 19% as Black, and 8% as Other Ethnicity.

## **Data Collection**

In order to recruit participants, one of the researchers met with key stakeholders in the athletic department at each institution to obtain permission both to survey athletes in the department and to determine which sports might be willing to participate in the study. For the sports that voluntarily agreed to participate in the study, each athlete participant was asked to complete an online questionnaire during scheduled academic team meetings in the spring of the academic year. The questionnaire, on average, required ten to twelve minutes to complete.

A questionnaire developed by Simons and colleagues (2007) was employed to examine how athletes viewed their engagement with faculty, teaching assistants (TA), and other students in classroom settings. The questionnaire contained demographic items, including gender, race/ethnicity, and sport, as well as questions related to the treatment of athletes by members of the campus community. Athlete participants were asked to respond to such questions as how they generally felt their professors, TAs, and non-athlete peers perceived them, whether their grades were positively or negatively influenced by the professor or TAs' knowledge of their athlete identity, and how they felt about asking professors and TAs for accommodations because of an athletic competition. The athletes were also asked to rate the frequency of occurrence of several circumstances on a four point Likert scale ranging from one (always) to four (never). They also answered some questions using a three-point scale (1 = negatively, 2 = neutral (neither positively or negatively), and 3 = positively) or to mark all that apply from a series of possible responses.

## **Data Analysis**

The questionnaire data were tabulated, a series of frequency distributions were calculated, and an independent samples t-test was used to compare and understand (1) male and female athletes; (2) revenue and non-revenue sports; (3) and White and non-White athletes. This technique allowed us to investigate mean differences for these groups. In the analyses, the Levene's test was used to test for equality of variances. The assumption of equal variance was not violated for any of the test results.

## Results

Table 1 presents the degree aspirations of athletes. Self-ratings showed that 36.8% of male athletes reported they intended to obtain master’s degrees, compared to 50.4% of female athletes. Of the revenue athletes, 50% reported that they aspire to earn master’s degrees, compared to 44.7% of non-revenue athletes. Moreover, 46.9% of White athletes reported they intended to obtain master’s degrees, relative to 41.4% of non-White athletes.

Table 1

Self-Reported Degree Aspirations of Athletes (by Gender, Race, and Type of Sport)

	Gender		Race		Type of Sport	
	Male %	Female %	White %	Non-White %	Rev. %	Non-Rev. %
<b>Bachelor’s degree</b>	29.8	35.9	32.4	41.4	28.6	35.6
<b>Master’s degree</b>	36.8	50.4	46.9	41.4	50.0	44.7
<b>Doctorate degree</b>	15.8	8.5	11.7	6.9	7.1	12.1
<b>M.D., D.O., D.D.S., or J.D.</b>	17.6	5.2	9.0	10.3	14.3	7.6

Table 2 displays the academic and athletic identities of athletes. Of the male athletes, 33.3% reported their student and athlete identities as balanced, whereas 40.4% reported a “student first” identity. However, 26.5% of female athletes reported their student and athlete identities as balanced, in contrast to 46.2% who reported a “student first” identity. Of the revenue athletes, 33.3% reported a “student first” identity, compared to 47.7% of non-revenue athletes. Moreover, self-ratings revealed that 29% of White athletes reported their student and athlete identities as balanced, compared to 27.6% of non-White athletes.

Table 2

Athletes' Self-Ratings of Academic and Athletic Identities (by Gender, Race, and Type of Sport)

	Gender		Race		Type of Sport	
	Male %	Female %	White %	Non-White %	Rev. %	Non-Rev. %
<b>Student First</b>	40.4	46.2	44.1	44.8	33.3	47.7
<b>Student Athlete Balance</b>	33.3	26.5	29.0	27.6	40.5	25.0
<b>Athlete First</b>	26.3	27.3	26.9	27.6	26.2	27.3

Table 3 presents the independent-samples t-test results, which compared athletes' general perceptions of how professors, teaching assistants, and their non-athlete peers viewed them. These data were analyzed by gender, sport, and race. In general, athletes tended to believe that professors and TAs viewed them in a neutral way (46.6% and 37.4%, respectively). In contrast, only 28.7% of them felt that other students viewed them this way; athletes more often (44.3%) felt their non-athlete peers viewed them in a positive light.

College athletes' views of how their professors and their peers perceived them were consistent across the key subgroups of race, gender, and type of sport (see Table 3). With respect to teaching assistants, there were no significant differences when comparing revenue and non-revenue sports or White and non-White athletes, but there was a statistically significant difference in the scores for gender. Specifically, male athlete scores ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = .50$ ) were higher than their female counterparts ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = .60$ );  $t(172) = 2.83$ ,  $p = .01$ . The magnitude of the differences in the means was small (eta squared = .044).

Table 4 displays athletes' perceptions of whether or not professors and teaching assistants raised or lowered grades because of the respondents' athlete status. Overall, 83% of athletes reported that their grades were never positively influenced by a professor's knowledge of their athlete

status, and 89% reported they never received lower grades than they deserved as a result of their athlete status. Respondents' participation in revenue versus nonrevenue sports did not affect these findings (see Table 4). There were also no statistically significant differences between White and non-White athletes with respect to positive grade influence by professors. White athlete scores ( $M = 3.82, SD = .50$ ) were, however, higher than their non-White counterparts' scores for negative grade influence. There were also significant differences between male and female athletes' perceptions of positive and negative grade influence by professors because of athlete status. That is, female scores ( $M = 3.74, SD = .57$ ) were higher than male scores for positive grade influence ( $M = 3.58, SD = .86$ );  $t(172) = -1.49, p = .00$ . The magnitude of the differences in the means was small (eta squared = .013). Female scores likewise ( $M = 3.84, SD = .45$ ) were higher than male scores for negative grade influence ( $M = 3.72, SD = .65$ );  $t(172) = -1.40, p = .01$ . The differences in the means also were small (eta squared = .011). ( $M = 3.69, SD = .66$ );  $t(172) = 1.23, p = .03$ . The effect size was small (eta squared = .009).

Table 3  
 Athletes' Perceptions of Professor, TA, and Other Student Opinions of Them (by Gender, Race, and Type of Sport)

	Gender			Race			Type of Sport		
	Male	Female	White	Non-White	Rev.	Non-Rev.	Non-Rev.	Non-Rev.	
	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	
<b>Professors</b>	2.35	2.26	2.78	2.34	2.33	2.27	2.27	.63	
	<u>.61</u>	<u>.63</u>	<u>.63</u>	<u>.61</u>	<u>.61</u>	<u>.61</u>	<u>.61</u>	<u>.63</u>	
<b>TAs</b>	* <b>2.44</b>	* <b>2.18</b>	2.25	2.34	2.31	2.25	2.25	.60	
	<u>.50</u>	<u>.60</u>	<u>.58</u>	<u>.55</u>	<u>.52</u>	<u>.52</u>	<u>.52</u>	<u>.60</u>	
<b>Students</b>	2.40	2.39	2.40	2.34	2.38	2.39	2.39	.73	
	<u>.70</u>	<u>.72</u>	<u>.70</u>	<u>.77</u>	<u>.66</u>	<u>.66</u>	<u>.66</u>	<u>.73</u>	

Scale ranges: 1 = negative, 2 = neutral (neither positively or negatively), and 3 = positive

\*Significant at  $p < .05$ .

Table 4  
 Athletes' Perceptions of Positive and Negative Influence of Athlete Status on Grades (by Gender, Race, and Type of Sport)

	Gender				Race				Type of Sport			
	Male		Female		White		Non-White		Revenue		Non-Rev	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
<i>Positive</i>												
<b>Professors</b>	<b>*3.58</b>	.86	<b>*3.74</b>	.63	3.71	.66	3.59	.82	3.62	.76	3.71	.66
<b>TAs</b>	<b>*3.37</b>	.98	<b>*3.64</b>	.75	<b>*3.62</b>	.77	<b>*3.21</b>	1.04	<b>*3.43</b>	.94	<b>*3.59</b>	.80
<i>Negative</i>												
<b>Professors</b>	<b>*3.72</b>	.65	<b>*3.84</b>	.45	<b>*3.82</b>	.50	<b>*3.69</b>	.66	3.74	.59	3.82	.51
<b>TAs</b>	<b>*3.40</b>	.90	<b>*3.61</b>	.79	<b>*3.61</b>	.78	<b>*3.17</b>	.97	3.48	.86	3.56	.82

Scale ranges: 1 (always) to 4 (never)

\*Significant at  $p < .05$ .

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of athletes reported they never received higher grades than they deserved because of their TAs' knowledge of their athlete status. Similarly, 72% of participants reported they never received grades lower than they deserved from their TAs as a result of their athlete status. There were significant differences in both of these findings in terms of gender and race. That is, female scores ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = .75$ ) were higher than male scores for positive grade influence ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = .98$ );  $t(172) = -2.04$ ,  $p = .00$ . The magnitude of the differences in the means was small (eta squared = .024). The scores for female athletes ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .79$ ) were also higher than for their male counterparts for negative grade influence ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = .90$ );  $t(172) = -2.03$ ,  $p = .01$ . The magnitude of the differences in the means was small (eta squared = .024).

When looking at racial differences in positive grade influence by TAs, scores for White athletes ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) were higher than non-Whites ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ );  $t(172) = 2.47$ ,  $p = .00$ . The effect size was small (eta squared = .034). The scores for White athletes ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .79$ ) were also higher than for non-Whites for negative grade influence ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = .97$ );  $t(172) = 2.66$ ,  $p = .00$ . The magnitude of the differences in the means was small (eta squared = .039). Finally, there was no statistically significant difference between students involved in revenue versus nonrevenue sports when it came to negative grade influence by TAs; however, there was a significant difference in positive grade influence. Specifically, the scores of non-revenue athletes ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) were higher than those of revenue athletes ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .94$ );  $t(172) = -1.10$ ,  $p = .04$ . The mean differences were small (eta squared = .007).

Table 5 describes athletes' levels of comfort with and treatment by professors and teaching assistants when requesting accommodations because their athletic competitions conflicted with class meetings. In general, 53% of athletes reported they sometimes felt uncomfortable asking a professor or TA to make accommodations for them when they had athletic competitions. When comparing these findings by subgroups, there were no statistically significant gender, race, or sport differences (see Table 5). Similarly, 70% of athletes felt professors and TAs never refused to make accommodations for them because they had athletic commitments, and there were no significant differences by gender, race, or sport.

Table 5  
 Athletes' Perceptions of Treatment by Professors & TAs (by Gender, Race, and Type of Sport)

	Gender				Race				Type of Sport			
	Male		Female		White		Non-White		Revenue		Non-Rev	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Student feels comfortable asking for accommodations	3.01	.79	2.97	.84	2.92	.85	3.28	.59	3.14	.68	2.93	.86
Professor/TA refuses to make accommodations	3.25	.74	2.92	.71	2.95	.73	3.41	.63	3.29	.71	2.95	.72

Scale ranges: 1 (always) to 4 (never)  
 \*Significant at  $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how athletes viewed their engagement with members of the campus community in classroom settings. Of particular interest was the extent to which athletes' views differed by their gender, race, and type of sport. The descriptive statistics revealed that female athletes not only had higher degree aspirations than their male counterparts, but they were also more likely to report "student first" identities than were the male athletes. These findings are not surprising considering that female athletes have been shown to have higher levels of academic success in the classroom and are better able to balance their academic and athletic roles compared to their male counterparts (Sellers et al., 1997; Simons et al., 1999). Also consistent with previous research (Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, & Harrison, 2011), athletes in non-revenue sports reported a higher "student first" identity than those in the revenue sports of football and men's basketball.

With respect to general perceptions of members of the campus community, a significant proportion of athletes in this study reported that their professors and teaching assistants held neutral views of them, and that their non-athlete peers held positive views. This finding seems to suggest that athletes in this study are in a climate conducive for engagement in purposeful activities (Comeaux, 2005; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). Unlike in previous work where athletes reported negative treatment by professors and other students in classroom settings, a relatively small proportion of athletes believed they were perceived negatively by professors, TAs, and non-athlete peers. This finding is noteworthy considering existing evidence that faculty and students harbor negative attitudes toward athletes (Comeaux, 2011; Engstrom et al., 1995) and that athletes feel stigmatized in the academic community (Simons et al., 2007). Also noteworthy is the fact that male athletes were slightly more likely than their female counterparts to believe their TAs viewed them positively. This contrasts with previous evidence that suggests that male athletes experience some of the most detrimental stereotypes and negative labels from other members of the campus community (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Comeaux, 2011; Engstrom et al., 1995).

The fact that the majority of athletes reported that they never received lower or higher grades than they deserved from professors or TAs is

encouraging. Anecdotal evidence and extant research have suggested that some coaches who view students as athletes first also feel enormous pressure to win; as such they may devalue the academic role, counseling students to take courses with selected faculty who are “athlete friendly” or are willing to give them “special” considerations in the classroom (Adler & Adler, 1985; Eitzen, 2009).

There were some interesting subgroup differences in athletes’ perceptions of whether their grades had been positively or negatively influenced by their athlete status. For example, female athletes were more likely than males to believe that class grades (from professors or TAs) had never been positively or negatively influenced. Likewise, White athletes in this study were more likely than non-Whites to report that their professors had never given a lower grade than was deserved, and that their TAs had never given lower or higher grades than deserved, because of their athlete status. And finally, non-revenue athletes were more likely than those in revenue sports to report that their class grades had never been positively influenced by their TAs’ knowledge of their athlete status.

While these findings are interesting and, in many ways encouraging, more work—both quantitative and qualitative—is needed in order to better understand the underlying reasons for these findings. The differences revealed in this study are relatively small differences and the extent to which relationships between athletes and their instructors affect their learning and personal development is an important topic of inquiry. For instance, because male athletes generally tend to perform less well academically (Simons et al., 1999) and participate in more high profile sports than their female counterparts, are they more likely to receive grades that are lower or higher than they deserve, simply because of their athlete status? Factors that account for these gender differences should be further explored in future studies.

This study also uncovered an important finding related to athletes’ treatment by professors and teaching assistants as they requested accommodations for athletic competition. In contrast to previous research that revealed that faculty were more negative toward athletes than toward non-athletes in situations concerning special services (e.g., Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Comeaux 2011; Engstrom et al., 1995), the majority of athletes in this study reported that professors and TAs never

refused to make special accommodations for them because of conflicts between their academic and athletic schedules. While this finding is very promising, it would be instructive to explore university class attendance policies and how mid-week scheduling of athletic contests impacts faculty perceptions and related attitudes toward the athletic subculture. The types of pressures on faculty to accommodate athletes with sporadic class attendance records remain unknown.

## Conclusion

The results from this study point to several conclusions. First, given the evidence that members of the campus community may hold more negative stereotypical attitudes toward athletes than their non-athlete peers (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Comeaux, 2011; Engstrom et al., 1995; Sailes, 1993), one would anticipate that athletes would believe that the perceptions of professors, teaching assistants, and other students are quite unfavorable. Interestingly, these athletes, regardless of gender, race, or type of sport, believed their professors and teaching assistants had neutral views (i.e., neither positive or negative) of them, and that their non-athlete peers viewed them somewhat positively. Second, athletes' perceptions of the treatment they have received from professors and teaching assistants was promising. The instructors of the participants in this study, at least, were sympathetic to the needs of athletes and seemed to understand the enterprise of intercollegiate athletics. Third, it does not appear that athletes believed that other members of the campus community were treating them any differently because of their athlete status. Finally, the findings revealed that there were minimal gender, sport, and race differences related to athletes' views of and treatment by professors, teaching assistants, and their non-athlete peers in classroom settings. To further explore these differences, analyses are recommended using a national dataset or surveys from multi-institutional studies.

Overall, this study contributes to a developing area of literature regarding the relationships between athletes and other members of the college community. It extends the extant literature on athletes' perceptions of professors, teaching assistants, and other students in classroom settings. Although athletes in the present study reported their non-athlete peers viewed them somewhat positively, more detailed analyses might reveal more about their relationship. Further, while this study showed some evidence of gender, sport, and race differences concerning athletes'

views of and treatment by members of the campus community, the extent of these differences was not precisely clear. Future research is necessary to better understand these differences on a broad range of outcomes. It would also be instructive to conduct studies that involve observation of the actual classroom dynamics in order to triangulate these students' self-reports about how they are perceived and treated in light of their athlete status.

While the present study produced useful findings, it also had shortcomings. Despite the data being obtained from two large public institutions, the sample was not necessarily representative of all sectors of American higher education. Thus, generalizations from this study should be made with caution and consideration of this limitation. Second, athletes' self-reported data were used in this study, and while self-reports have been shown to be valid, all respondents may not use the same standards to respond to survey questions (Pascarella, 2001). Nonetheless, in spite of these caveats, the present study provides a useful foundation on which to build, and points to important new directions for future work on the relationship between athletes and other members of the campus community.

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