TRANSITION EXPERIENES OF ACC STUDENT-ATHLETES

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https://youtu.be/SpXIk62GMN4

Abstract

The NCAA requires exit interviews for all student-athletes as they leave (i.e., transition from) collegiate sport. However, there exists limited empirical evidence to inform the structure and content of these interviews, which restricts their impact on post-career health and well-being. This study adopts a two-phase research strategy to examine ACC student-athlete transition experiences including outcomes of mental, physical, social, and occupational functioning. Aim 1 examined student-athlete transition outcomes via an evidence-based, survey addendum to the standard of care exit interview in a sample of 57 ACC student-athletes. Aim 2 further probed these transition experiences via follow-up in a subsample of students-athletes (n=9). Results highlight the overall adaptive health-related quality of life outcomes of student-athletes sampled while highlighting key barriers and facilitators to the transition experience. Project deliverables include 1) a detailed analysis of ACC student-athlete transition outcomes and 2) evidence-based recommendations for ACC athletics exit survey procedures and transition resources.

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 57 respondents participated in the study, and most respondents were women's sport athletes (Table 1). Nearly half of all respondents reported being currently employed, and 71.4% of those not currently employed reported not seeking employment. Respondents from a wide range of institutions were represented within the sample (Figure 1). Similarly, athletes from a range of sports participated in the study (Figure 2). Nearly half (49.1%) of all respondents reported a lifetime history of musculoskeletal injury. Among those with a self-reported history of musculoskeletal injury (n= 29), respondents reported the knee (n= 16), ankle (n= 10), and shoulder (n= 10) as common sites of injury.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics by transition status group

	Current (n= 44)	Prospective (n= 13)	Total (n= 57)
Gender			
Men's Sports	13 (29.6)	3 (23.1)	16 (28.1)
Women's Sports	31 (70.5)	10 (76.9)	41 (71.4)
Current employment status			
Yes	28 (63.6)	1 (7.7)	29 (50.9)
No	16 (36.4)	12 (92.3)	28 (49.1)
Currently seeking employment			
Yes	4 (25.0)	4 (33.3)	8 (28.6)
No	12 (75.0)	8 (66.7)	20 (71.4)
History of musculoskeletal injury			
Yes	22 (50.0)	7 (53.9)	29 (50.9)
No	22 (50.0)	6 (46.2)	28 (49.1)

*Note: Columns represent counts (and %s) corresponding to student-athletes currently transitioning, prospectively aiming to transition in the coming months, and the pooled sample.
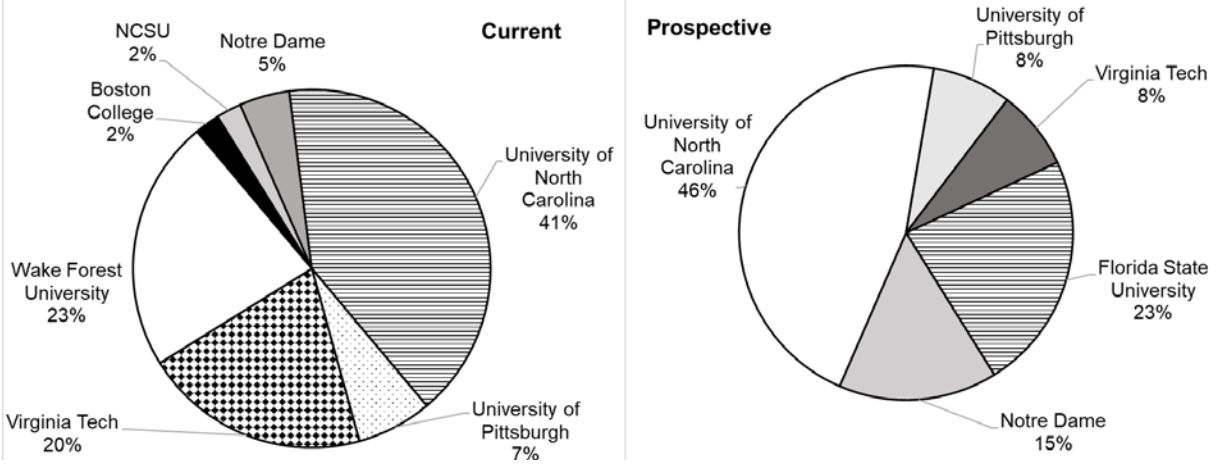
Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by institution, and transition status group.

Health Status and Life Satisfaction

Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS) measures were used to assess current mental health status and physical functioning; more specifically, recent depressive and anxiety-related characteristics, as well as self-reported emotional support were assessed as primary mental health domains of interest. Response scores were transformed during analysis for comparisons with population norms, with a score of 50.0 considered the average for the general United States population.

Recent anxiety (Avg. T-score= 54.6; SD= 9.2) and depressive (Avg. T-score= 48.9; SD= 8.5) characteristics among respondents were comparable to population expectations. Fifteen respondents had anxiety scores and 8 respondents had depression scores 1 standard deviation worse than population averages (i.e., > 60). Self-reported emotional support in this sample was slightly higher than population expectations (Avg. T-score= 57.7; SD= 6.2), albeit within 1 SD of normative expectations. Self-reported physical functioning was comparable to population expectations (Avg. T-score= 53.5; SD= 7.2).
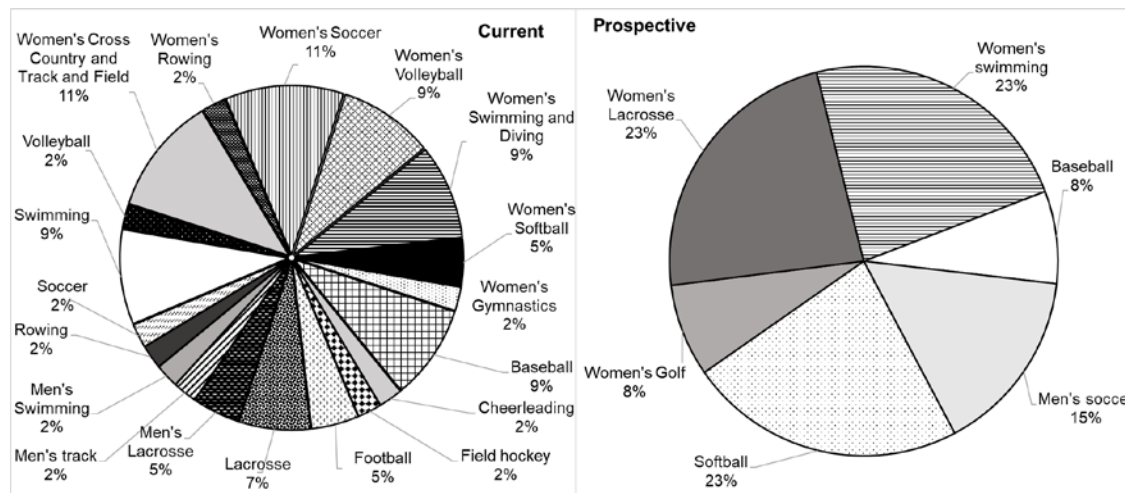

Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by sport, and transition status group.

Student-Athletes Lived Experiences of Transition

Nine individuals provided consent to participate in a follow-up interview designed to get more detail about their transition experiences including perceived barriers, facilitators, and transition planning. A deductive conceptual content analysis was used to analyze the interview responses provided. The majority of study respondents reported a plan to transition to life after collegiate sport whether that be formal (66.7%) or partial/informal (22.2%). All of those with a plan feel/felt like they were/are able to effectively execute it (88.9%). Barriers and facilitators to transition are listed in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. Only factors reported by 2 or more participants are listed.

Table 2
Barriers to Transition from Collegiate Sport (n=9)

	%	n
Physical activity transition	27.80%	5
Identity change	22.20%	4
Lack of teammates/community	16.70%	3
Lack of structure	11.10%	2

Note: % reported represents % of total codes

Table 3
Facilitators of Transition from Collegiate Sport (n=9)

	%	n
Family	16.70%	5
Friends	16.70%	5
Coaches	13.30%	4
Sport psychology services	6.70%	2
Athletic trainers	6.70%	2
Self-motivation	6.70%	2
University academic services	6.70%	2

Note: % reported represents % of total codes

Representative Quotes

Barriers
Identity change - "I identified as an athlete for so long. That's just you know when people would ask what I do I would just say, I swim, I'm a swimmer. So I think finding that identity outside of swimming was difficult for me." - *Participant 55*
Lack of teammates/community – "Just like my friends are my volleyball teammates and a lot of them are either still on the team or gonna go play pro or just like living their lives. And so its weird not being around people all the time." - *Participant 32*

Facilitators
Sport psychology services - "I saw the sports psychologist at [University], so support from her was really big." - *Participant 55*
Athletic trainers - "I think my athletic trainer at [University] was actually huge just because he was the one making sure that like my long-lasting injuries were OK and then he was kind of a resource for me to call too" - *Participant 33*

Conclusions
1. ACC student-athletes reported health status at the level of population norms.
2. In contrast, a meaningful subset of student-athletes reported relatively low levels of mental or social/emotional health.
3. ACC student-athletes largely reported having a transition plan whether derived individually and/or in collaboration with campus/athletics resources provided.
4. Identity, physical activity transition, and lack of teammates/community and structure were noted transition barriers; while support networks, campus/athletics resources, and self-motivation were noted transition facilitators.

Evidence-Based Recommendations
1. Broad assessments of health could be useful for exit survey procedures, but targeted interview questions are needed too – focus on planning, barriers, and facilitators to start.
2. Campus-based resources (e.g., sport psychology, career planning) are useful to those student-athletes that use them but could be more beneficial if used by more and earlier. For that reason, yearly "exit surveys" could be a helpful through-boarding procedure and critical touch-point relative to student-athlete health and functioning.
3. Transition is a critical time point in student-athletes' lives. Further investment into career long transition planning could positively impact ACC student-athlete health, functioning, and future engagement with the universities they attended.

In sum, based on project data, we recommend onboarding, through boarding, and offboarding transition resources/procedures for all ACC member institutions guided by at least one trained staff member (e.g., sport psychologist, social worker, transition counselor).