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## Influence of Student Engagement on the Career Transition of Division I Football Student-Athletes

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Dr. Heather Erwin, Director of Graduate Studies

INFLUENCE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON THE CAREER TRANSITION  
OF DIVISION I FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the  
College of Education  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Ronnie W. Riley

Lexington, Kentucky

Co-Director: Dr. Robert Shapiro, Professor of Biomechanics  
and Dr. Eddie Comeaux, Assistant Professor of Kinesiology and Health Promotion

Lexington, Kentucky

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### INFLUENCE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON THE CAREER TRANSITION OF DIVISION I FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

College's revenue sports, football and men's basketball, fuel the billion dollar intercollegiate athletics industry. Historically, those same two sports have maintained the lowest grade point average among all student-athletes. This inverse relationship begs the question, "what academic sacrifices are being made at the expense of college's revenue sports?"

Student engagement into educationally purposeful activities has been widely acknowledged as having influence on desirable college outcomes. The full extent of student engagement's effect has yet to be determined. The purpose of this study was to conduct exploratory, qualitative research into the role of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities on the career transition of football student-athletes in the Southeastern Conference by answering the following research questions: how do SEC football players perceive their educationally purposeful engagement activities during college? To what extent do their perceptions of purposeful engagement activities influence career transitions?

Results of this qualitative research uncovered the following four major themes: (a) Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities; (b) Desire for Internship Opportunities; (c) Undefined Career Path; and (d) Career Transition Regret. Results showed that former SEC football players in this study did not have enough experience with educationally purposeful engagement activities during college to make a determination. Additionally, student-athlete participants did not have the guidance or time required to participate in the only activity they perceived to be beneficial such as internships. Last, the former SEC football players did not perceive a positive relationship between their purposeful engagement activities and career transition.

Creating a distinct set of student engagement criteria for student-athletes should be considered based on the study's findings. Moreover, all stakeholders in student-athletes should collaborate effectively and share responsibility for their outcome.

KEYWORDS: Student Engagement in Educationally Purposeful  
Activities, Career Transitioning, Student-Athlete,  
Student Achievement, Revenue Sports

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INFLUENCE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT ON THE CAREER TRANSITION  
OF DIVISION I FOOTBALL STUDENT-ATHLETES

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Dedicated to my family

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Former United States Presidents Richard Nixon, John F. Kennedy, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and Dwight Eisenhower all played college football (Boston Channel, 2008). Their experiences are a testament to the fact that the highest levels of achievement can be reached from transitioning as student-athletes to the traditional workforce. Although success is abundantly attainable for those who strive for it, there has been ample documentation that the road traveled by student-athletes has been marred by the demand of athletic pursuits.

According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), college sports exist with the stated purpose of “(Integrating) intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount” (NCAA, 2009). Nevertheless, policies such as performance-based athletic scholarships incentivize student-athletes to prioritize athletics first. In 1973, the NCAA replaced four-year scholarships with grants that had to be renewed on a year-to-year basis. “Because coaches can make athletic performance a condition for financial aid renewal, even academically-oriented athletes had little choice but to make sports their main priority” (Sack, 2001, p. 9). In 2012, the NCAA voted to reform the 39 year ruling on scholarships, which would give individual schools the option to make multiyear awards to student-athletes. However, the four year option is still not mandatory (Press, 2011). “Only six schools in the six major conferences signed 24 multiyear scholarships across all sports over the past year” (Ellis, 2013).

Additionally, the internal conflict between college sports and education has worsened due to the amount of time dedicated to athletics. College sports, specifically

football, have often been criticized for violating the NCAA's restriction on practice time duration (Jacobson, 2009). A student-athlete's participation in athletically related activities shall be limited to a maximum of four hours per day and 20 hours per week, according to the NCAA (2009). Wolverton (2008) reported that Division I football players spend more than 40 hours each week on athletic related activities. With such high demands, there is little wonder why college football graduation rates and grade point averages consistently fall behind other student-athletes (Maloney & McCormick, 1993). During the summer of 2009, University of Michigan head football coach, Richard Rodriguez, came under scrutiny after several former and current players stated that the head coach frequently violated the NCAA's practice time restriction (ESPN, 2009). Operating under the guise of "voluntary workouts," other athletic programs have put similar demands on their student-athletes. "It is well known that the term "voluntary (workout) really means to (practice) if you want to stay at this school" (Jacobson, 2009, p. 1). Time is required inside and out of the classroom to allow for optimal learning experiences by engaging purposefully with non-athlete peers, faculty and student-athletes in other sports (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Student-athlete's time constraints make it difficult for them to engage in educationally meaningful activities, especially during the sport in-season. Commonplace policies such as the NCAA's scholarship renewal option and so-called "voluntary" workouts beg the question whether student-athletes are more "athlete" than "student".

College athletics has become such an economic establishment that its amateur status has frequently been called into question (Duderstadt, 2003). Along with financial prosperity, intercollegiate athletics enjoy a high level of celebrity in American culture

due largely unto the success of football and men's basketball (NCAA, 2008). However, it appears this success has come at a cost. Maloney and McCormick (1993) discovered the following:

In football, the revenue sport with a well-defined season, grades are lower in-season than they are (during the off-season). The same result holds for men's basketball. In fact, [the] overall point estimate is that if these athletes did not participate in sports at all, but still had the advantages afforded them by being athletes, their grades would be higher than the rest of the student body. (p. 570)

Former President of the NCAA, Myles Brand, recognized that football and men's basketball graduation rates have historically lagged behind that of other sports and continue to do so despite a trend of increasing G.P.A.s for overall intercollegiate athletics (Press, 2006).

Table 1.1 depicts the continued tradition of Division I-A football and men's basketball to consistently rank lowest in graduation rates among their student-athlete peers. The table also portrays two different graduation rate measuring tools, the Graduation Success Rates (GSR) and Federal Graduation Rates (FGR). The FGR was the NCAA's legacy solution for calculating student-athletes' graduation rates by simply determining whether the student-athlete would graduate in six years. In 2005, the NCAA announced they had created the GSR primarily to address the leave or transfer of student-athletes to other schools prior to graduation as long as they would have been academically eligible to compete if they remained (NCAA, 2008). Student-athlete transfers counted against universities under the FGR. Despite the reason behind creating the GSR, the fact that there are multiple ways to define graduation rates is evidence that it can be an ambiguous outcome measure (Astin, 1993).

The GSR is markedly higher in the following table versus the FGR (Staff, 2008). Graduation rates have risen in recent years (Sander, 2009), but defining the actual level with which rates have increased became more unclear when the NCAA created the GSR. Although graduation rates help to discern the academic differences among sports, they do not tell the entire story of what impacts student achievement. Instead, the concept of student engagement has proven to be a leading factor in learning, personal development, and ultimately contributing towards desirable education outcomes (Kuh, 2008). Recognizing the impact of student-athlete engagement in educationally purposeful activities is likely to help explain student achievement.

Table 1.1

Graduation Success Rate (GSR) vs. Federal Graduation Rate (FGR)		
Student Engagement Activities	GSR	FGR
Baseball	68%	47%
Basketball	62%	46%
Cross Country/Track	74%	60%
Football	67%	55%
Golf	79%	61%
Gymnastics	86%	70%
Ice Hockey	83%	64%
Lacrosse	88%	74%
Rifle	80%	60%
Skiing	81%	73%
Soccer	79%	58%
Swimming	83%	69%
Tennis	83%	64%
Volleyball	83%	69%

*Notes.* Four year class average, 1998-2001 cohorts.

Student engagement can be seen as both the student's effort and the institutions embrace of educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2008). The impact of college is largely determined by the degree to which students engage in various in-class and out-of-class activities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). George Kuh, professor and founder of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), defines student-engagement (2003) as, "the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in these activities" (p. 25). The intended goal of student engagement

is to increase the likelihood of academic achievement in college. The more involved, willing and accessible any two parties are toward one another, the greater chance the relationship has of being a success (Berscheid, 1994). The principles of student engagement are fundamental and have even been embraced by the NCAA. For example, the NCAA's policy on integrated housing, whereby student-athletes must live among non-athletes, promotes student engagement through equality by integrating student peers (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Kuh (2008) introduced the following criteria as milestones for successful student engagement (see Appendix A):

Students participating in at least two high-impact activities during his or her undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field, would qualify as sufficiently engaged for the highest chance at student achievement. The high-impact activities include first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service/community based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects. Student involvement in high-impact activities has made it possible to evaluate student engagement's contribution to cumulative learning. (p. 19)

### **Problem Statement**

If variables affecting student-athlete academic achievement are equal across all sports, football and men's basketball would occasionally rise to the top of student-athlete graduation rates (Edwards, 2002). The fact that graduation rates are consistently low among the only two revenue-producing sports, football and men's basketball, suggests there are larger structural and political issues which impact student-athlete's academic well-being. Nonetheless, overcoming these barriers is achievable through, among other approaches, education and promotion of student engagement. Exploring the impact of

student engagement is crucial to student-athlete development as it contributes most toward student achievement (Astin, 1993). The final step in the progression of student achievement is translating those skills into a career. Perhaps the most important impact of student engagement is that on career transitioning of college athletes.

Student-athlete career transitioning is the process by which student-athletes are psychologically and vocationally prepared for the conclusion of sport eligibility and the commencement of a traditional workplace position (Levy, 2005). The vocational training that students undertake through academic achievement plays a vital role in how students career transition (Levy, 2005). Although the role of student engagement has been indirectly linked to career transitioning through academic achievement, there has been little extant research that directly investigates the role of student engagement in student-athlete career transitioning. If quality student engagement leads to academic achievement, and academic achievement produces quality career transitions, does student engagement influence the quality career transition of college athletes?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to conduct exploratory, qualitative research into the role of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities on the career transition of football student-athletes in the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Specifically, I explored the extent to which SEC football players perceived their educationally purposeful engagement activities during college. It was pivotal during this investigation to fully characterize student-athlete's career transitioning before, during and after their college football eligibility.

## **Hypothesis**

Accomplishing the goals of this research required testing the hypothesis that these former student-athletes perceived a positive relationship between their engagement in educationally purposeful activities and their career transition.

## **Significance**

This research is noteworthy because of the lifelong contribution toward occupational development that can be determined by understanding the relationship between student engagement and career transitioning. Currently there are no studies that seek to identify the impact of student engagement once student-athletes have departed their undergraduate programs. This research can assist stakeholders in college athletics, such as sport management scholars, college athletic administrators, college career counselors, parents, as well as coaches and student-athletes, by uncovering the mix of factors that contribute to their long term occupational success or failure. The results of this analysis will provide current student-athletes with practical information to better control their own lives.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations.** Three limitations to this study set boundaries on how the findings may be interpreted. Those limitations include sample size, non-random samples, and participant's ability to recall events.

The relatively small sample size used to conduct these qualitative case studies replicates methodology with identical instrumentation, which seeks to fully understand data instead of making generalizations (Waya, Jonesa and Slatara, 2012). When interpreting qualitative findings, it is important to remember the goal is not to generalize

results, but to “link themes explicitly to larger theoretical and practical issues” (Creswell, 2002; TESOL, 2007, p. 3). Despite the criticisms of small sample sizes, including the inability to make generalizations, only limited data is required for it to become part of the analysis framework (Creswell, 2002; Mason, 2010). The case size in qualitative research facilitates the investigator’s close association with participants (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Sandelowski adds,

Adequacy of sample size in qualitative research is relative, a matter of judging a sample neither small nor large per se, but rather too small or too large for the intended purposes of sampling and for the intended qualitative product. (1995, p. 179)

Next, information-oriented, non-random sampling is used to select cases based on the expectation of data provided (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Random sampling is an atypical approach when a small number of cases are selected (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Information-oriented case selection maximizes the utility of information from small samples and single cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Information-oriented sampling does not completely overcome the innate unreliability of generalizing from small samples, nor does it seek to. It does, however, still have valuable influence on the inferential process by facilitating researchers to choose the most suitable cases (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

Finally, the ability of these participants to recollect events leading up to and throughout their career transition was vital to the study. Fortunately it has been determined that memory decay is less of a factor for major life events such as student-athlete career transitioning (Marthinus, 2007). Additionally, asking follow-up questions to verify feedback was helpful in decreasing the effects to this limitation.

**Delimitations.** This study is delimited to the career transition and student engagement of former Southeastern Conference football players. The research focused on understanding college outcomes of football student-athletes because of the inverse relationship between their sports prominence and academic achievement. Along with men's basketball, football enjoys a great amount of celebrity in college sports while consistently underperforming academically in comparison (Press, 2006; Ryan, 2010).

This delimitation of college football is conference-specific to the SEC because of its place atop the NCAA football hierarchy as arguably the "country's strongest (football) conference" (Schlabach, 2010). In addition to athletic success, SEC college football boasts financial power as well. Of the NCAA's 12 most valuable teams in terms of "dividend money," 42% belong to the SEC (Ryan, 2010). The next most valuable conference has 25% of the top 12 schools.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

There are currently more than 400,000 student-athletes enrolled in America's universities nationwide who will eventually be faced with challenges associated with student-athlete career transitioning (NCAA, 2010). The ability to overcome those challenges has been indirectly linked to student engagement, but a direct investigation between "student-athlete career transitioning" and "student engagement" has been virtually ignored. Although modern research on student-athlete career transitioning is infrequent, researchers such as Harrison and Lawrence (2004) have studied the variable effects to successful career transitions among college student-athletes. Other scholars such as Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) have studied how educationally purposeful engagement activities influence desirable student outcomes. The next step on the continuum to understand the full effect of student engagement is to contextualize it with student-athlete career transitioning. The following review will be a synthesis of the literature used to support the factors for this much needed research.

### **Student-Athlete Career Transitioning**

Using a mixed-method survey, the Life After Sports Scale (LASS), Harrison and Lawrence (2004) examined Division II student-athletes attitudes about career transitioning. Included in the LASS was a photo elicitation whereby participants responded to a photo and written portrait of a former student-athlete who successfully career transitioned. After analyzing the quantitative and qualitative responses, several themes emerged. Those themes included: *Career Path Well Defined*, *Balancing Academics & Athletics*, and *Positive Role Model*. The theme of *Career Path Well Defined* was comprised of participants' responses that recognized the career advice,

contemplated future careers, or those who had already proclaimed a career choice.

*Balancing Academics & Athletics* is a theme that exhibited “hard work” to be both a ‘student’ and an ‘athlete’. The value of “hard work” was attributed to academics as well as athletics in pursuit of a successful career transition. Last, the *Positive Role Model* theme was derived from participant’s feelings of inspiration. A number of student-athlete responses specifically labeled the former student-athlete’s profile as being “a role model.” The study was important because it increased the knowledge level of valuable, firsthand information concerning student-athlete perspectives on career transitioning. In addition to the three themes, the findings also revealed that student-athletes reflect positively on career transitioning and likewise spend time in preparation for life after sports. That being said, the study was limited by the manner in which the findings were interpreted. With most qualitative case studies, research quality is heavily dependent upon the individual skills of the researcher (Mathie & Camozzi, 2002). Having multiple investigators “coding” high volumes of qualitative materiel can lead to inconsistent categorizations as Harrison and Lawrence (2004) admitted to have occurred. Another limitation of the study as it compares to this proposed research is that the surveyed population were all Division II student-athletes. The current study will focus on Division I student-athletes, specifically college football players. The differences between division level competitiveness could prove to be a bias when making assumptions concerning Harrison and Lawrence’s (2004) study. For instance, the fact that there are only about 50 Division II football alumni out of a total 1,696 NFL players could decrease a Division II student-athlete’s level of expectation to play professionally. Those low expectations held

by Division II players enhance the prospect and viability of transitioning into traditional work roles (Kolenich, 2011).

Methodologically similar to Harrison and Lawrence (2004), Levy (2005) used qualitative case studies to examine influences on the quality of career transitions. The researchers also used the data to discover how transitioning from athletics to traditional career roles can be eased. Levy's study (2005) consisted of interviews with participants such as former Big 10 and Big East conference track and cross country Coach of the Year, Roseanne Wilson, and former Olympic swimmer Casey Barrett.

Levy's (2005) findings revealed that internal and external forces influence athlete ability to confront challenges from career transitioning. The extent to which athletes manage coping with these forces will largely determine the quality of their career transition (Levy, 2005). Internally, Levy (2005) observed that athletes whose self-identity was too attached to their sport participation often resisted efforts to develop identities outside of sports. Externally, Levy (2005) found that professional life skills programs such as NCAA's Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS) program, personal counseling, and career mentoring/networking all assist in the process of career transitioning. Unfortunately, "athletes who possess a low degree of coping ability, combined with deficient social support, are highly unlikely to have the resources necessary to deal with a potentially traumatic life event such as career termination" (Levy, 2005).

Levy's (2005) findings were consistent with that of other studies such as Wylleman (2003), Lavallee (2000), the European Federation of Sports Psychology (FEPSAC) (1997), Gordon (1995), Super (1990) and McPherson (1980), all of which

found that the majority of athletes undergo a similar pattern of phases when transitioning throughout their sport careers. Levy's (2005) research expanded upon FEPSAC's development stages and concluded that the evolution of a sports career is completed once he or she transition out of athletics and into a traditional work role. Levy's (2005) "Lifespan Approach" focuses on career transitioning as a step in the larger sequence of their lives. The process includes: Stage 1: learning and choosing of specific sports; Stage 2: adjustment to intensive training and increased competition; Stage 3: attainment of most proficient status, which may be community team, club, or high school varsity; Stage 4: intercollegiate participation; and Stage 5: Career Transitioning (Levy, 2005).

Levy's study was limited by certain factors. The first issue was the number of case studies performed. Levy stated that he interviewed former coach and student-athlete Roseanne Wilson, former Olympian Casey Barrett, and career transition counselor Lauren Gordon. Although the findings are noteworthy, their generalizability may be somewhat diminished given there were so few case studies with actual student-athletes. The next limitation as it relates to this proposed study was the sample group. Only one participant was a former student-athlete in the United States. Nonetheless, Levy's (2005) research proved to be substantial and had strengths of its own. He conceptualized "successful career transitions" as relative outcomes to each athlete. In Harrison and Lawrence's study (2004), the authors give a written portrait of one former student-athlete's life in order to define what it means to successfully career transition. Instead, Levy prefers to allow student-athletes to construct their own conditions of what is considered a "successful" career transition. He stated that "successful transitions can be described in terms of occupational success and life satisfaction or adjustment or

psychological readiness, but what defines a successful career transition is subjective, based on each athlete's expectations, needs, and values" (Levy, 2005, p. 260). In all, Levy (2005) concluded that if athletes learn and/or possess intrinsic coping capabilities, maintain an effective support system and take proactive retirement steps by considering broader life issues, such as education, relationships, and multicultural variables then they will greatly increase their chances at a quality career transition.

Each of the previous studies not only associated sport career transitioning with the psychological preparedness needed for success, but also the effects of sport career termination. Marthinus (2007) researched those effects by studying the psychological effects of retirement on elite athletes. Using an adapted version of the Cecic-Erpic's (2000) Sports Career Termination Questionnaire II (SCTQ II), Marthinus conducted the first of a two phase methodological process. The SCTQ II is a Likert-type scale survey that amasses quantitative data based on participant feedback. In this case, Marthinus examined the career transition experiences of retired track, field and road running athletes from South Africa (n=104), in which 73% of those surveyed were former student-athletes. In phase two, Marthinus collected and analyzed data from his one-on-one interviews with 23 retired South African "elite" athletes. Marthinus had two reasons for the purpose of his work. First, he wanted to present a quantitative description of sport and non-sport factors within sports career termination. Second, Marthinus investigated how the rate of psychological, psychosocial, and occupational difficulties occurring in life, post-sport career, is a result of sport and non-sport factors (Marthinus, 2007). The results from phase one of Marthinus's (2007) study gauged the influence of athletic factors (voluntariness and gradualness of sport-career termination, subjective view of

athletic achievements, post-sport life planning, and athletic identity) and non-athletic factors (i.e., age, educational status) on different aspects of sport-career difficulties.

There were several relevant findings from the study. First, when questioned about the length of time participants anticipated feeling withdrawal after sports career termination, 57% reported they were sure that their withdrawal from elite sport was permanent, 12% said their feeling was temporary, and 31% reported they were unsure how long the issue would remain unresolved. Second, former athletes who terminated their career involuntarily were reported to have more frequent psychological difficulties, such as feelings of incompetence in activities other than sport, lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, low self-respect, occupational difficulties and difficulties organizing their post-sport life (Marthinus, 2007). Upon career sport termination, athletes expected the greatest social and emotional support from partners (e.g., girlfriend, boyfriend, spouse), parents, and friends. Athletes expected relatively less support in transition from the coaching staff, teammates and sport psychologists. Marthinus (2007) noted that athlete low expectations of coaches and teammates explain why former athletes do not tend to return to their former teams to assist with the sport in general. That being said, athletes actually received slightly more support from teammates and coaches than they expected. Although there was more support provided than expected from coaches, the results were still relatively low. This is an unfortunate fact given that athletes stated they would prefer coaches to support them the most. Next, Marthinus's results showed that the stronger the transitioning athlete's athletic identity, the more self-concept problems, psychosocial difficulties, and occupation-related difficulties he/she are expected to encounter at the termination of his/her sports career. Relatively high psychosocial problems are also

encountered by retiring athletes of a lower academic status. Finally, no significant relationship was found between educational status and occupation-related difficulties after sports career termination. “Educational status” refers to the level of skill or education achieved within a field of study (Babbush-Mosby, 2008). Marthinus (2007) defines “Occupation-related difficulties” as a lack of professional knowledge, financial difficulties, problems with finding a job, and difficulties with adjustment to the requirements of your occupation. The findings on the relationship between educational status and occupation-related difficulties coincide with the findings of Kuh (2008), Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) and Umbach et al. (2006) by showcasing the significance of student-engagement.

In phase two of Marthinus’s research, he discovered the majority of these athletes held fairly positive attitudes about their entire sports career, including the transition to retirement. Participants used a great deal of interview time to positively reflect back on their past career. Interviewees also spent time discussing their coaches, athletic organizations, and their feeling about perceived injustices and missed opportunities. In addition to their past-oriented mindset, participants also harbored feelings of unfinished or unresolved business.

Marthinus’s findings (2007) resulted in at least three identical outcomes to that of Levy (2005). First, he supported the philosophy of a Life-Span Perspective similar to that of Levy’s (2005) Life-Span Approach. The Life-Span Perspective states that athletes navigate different stages throughout their pre- and post-sport careers. The life domains that were identified to span across those careers are Athletic Level, Psychological Level, Psychosocial Level, and Academic Vocational Level (Levy, 2005). Second, both

researchers observed that an athlete's identity level with their sport held consequences for the level of career transitioning difficulty. The greater an athlete's identification with their sport, the more difficult sports career termination and transition has been (Levy, 2005; Marthinus, 2007). Last, Marthinus and Levy both observed that athletes could at least reflect positively about their career transition. Although Levy and Marthinus differed about the level of "trauma" athletes endure through sports career termination, the message was clear that it plays a meaningful role in the lives of athletes long after their sports careers are over (Marthinus, 2007; Levy, 2005).

Questions used in Marthinus's (2007) survey also aligned with characteristics of a conceptual model developed by Comeaux and Harrison (2011), which explains academic success among student-athletes. As shown in Figure 2.1, the model's four characteristics include Precollege, Initial Commitments, Social/Academic System, and Final Commitments. Precollege characteristics, such as family background, educational experiences and preparation, and individual attributes, have an indirect effect on student-athlete academic success, but are the foundation to predicting certain behaviors in college (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Next, the Initial and Final Commitment characteristics identify student-athletes' dedication to social and academic factors, which include goal, sport and institutional commitments. Initial Commitments are processed through the Social/Academic System, which result in the final Commitments that contribute to academic success.

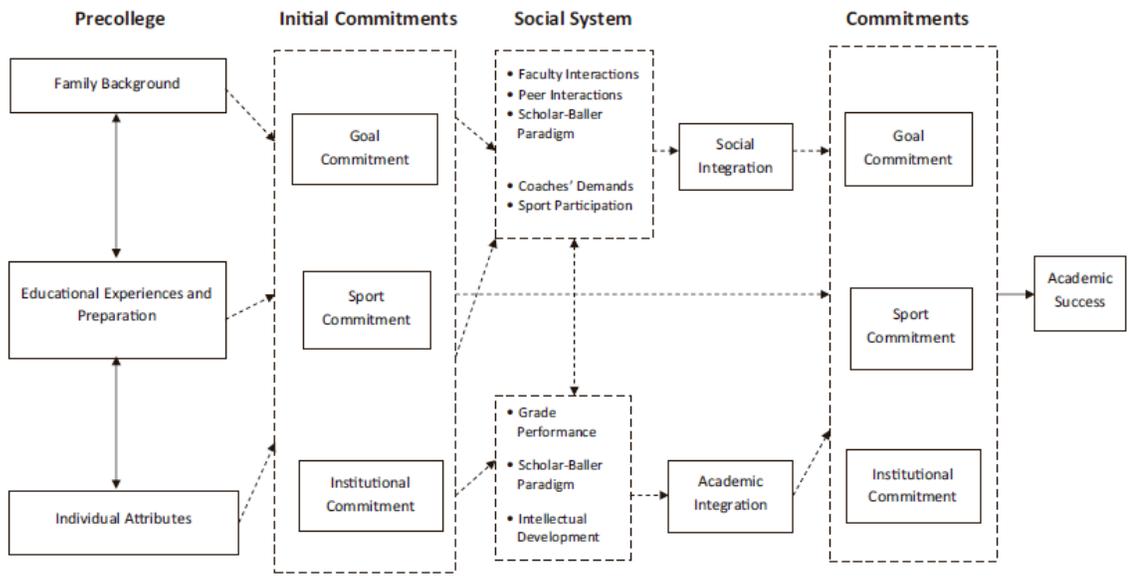


Figure 2.1 Comeaux and Harrison’s (2011) model is a path for college student-athlete academic success.

The most visible limitation to Marthinus’s study in regard to this proposal was the sport and country-specific experiences of track, field and road running athletes in South Africa. Interpreting findings from this investigation could possibly be non-applicable when applying them to other sports contexts. The major significance of this study is that it provides an excellent roadmap for interviewing and gathering qualitative case study data on the experiences of former athletes’ career transitions. This framework will prove especially useful for the context of this study.

Researching student-athlete career transitioning has indelible implications for one of its most pivotal stakeholders, the student-athlete. Harrison and Lawrence (2004), Levy (2005), and Marthinus (2007) largely delivered similar findings by characterizing career transitioning as a systematic, evolving grief process that can be overcome through preparation, knowhow, and the support of professionals, coaches, teammates, friends and

families. Preparation for student-athlete career transitioning may be just as important as the transition itself. The concept of student engagement can perhaps reveal the role of preparedness in the career transition process.

### **Student Engagement**

Although the subject of student achievement has been thoroughly explored, additional research into the subject has evolved perceptions of student achievement. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Institute for effective educational practice at Indiana University is an organization that uses its survey on student engagement to collect and publish the latest research on best practices, while assisting other schools with identifying opportunities and adapting to meet educational needs. Furthermore, researchers such as Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) and Umbach, Palmer, Kuh and Hannah (2006) have applied the concept of student engagement to college athletes. The following review highlights the substance of their research.

George Kuh developed the NSSE and additional instruments on engagement for law students, beginning college students, and faculty. The NSSE is a Likert Scale methodological questionnaire used to reveal behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with producing a successfully equipped and productive student population. The NSSE does not directly evaluate student learning, but its results draw attention to areas where colleges and universities are high-performing as well as those aspects in the undergraduate experience which could be enhanced. To date, 1,452 colleges and universities schools, totaling 2,321,085 students have participated in the survey since the year 2000 (Indiana University Trustees, 2010). Kuh believes student engagement is a composite of two essential elements of the collegiate experience. First, the amounts of

time and effort students invest in studying and in other educationally purposeful activities. Secondly, how colleges and universities deploy resources, organize curriculum, and manage other learning opportunities to motivate students to participate in time-tested, educationally purposeful activities proven to be linked to student learning (Indiana University Trustees, 2010).

Kuh's (2008) study examined ways to help students achieve the forms of learning that would "serve them best, in the economy, in civic society, and in their own personal and family lives" (p. 7). Based on results from the National Survey of Student Engagement, Kuh was determined to answer the single most asked question of him by students, faculty, administrators, and others over the past decade at numerous campuses: "what is the one thing we should do to increase student engagement and success on our campus" (Kuh, 2008, p. 13)?

Kuh (2008) found that some programs and activities seemingly engage participants in ways that increase student performance along the lines of engagement and desired-outcomes. He determined that some educational activities are unusually more effective for a number of reasons. First, certain practices demand considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks, which deepen students' personal investment. Next, the activities almost demand students interact with faculty and peers on meaningful matters. Then, the opportunity for diversity increases through contact with different people. Fourth, interaction facilitates feedback which is essential to personal growth. Finally, these activities give students perspective, on and off campus, which allow more awareness to be considered when forming values and beliefs. Kuh's (2008) research resulted in educationally purposeful activities known as "high-impact" activities. They

include first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, and service and community-based learning. Kuh (2008) concluded that, “(making) it possible for every student to participate in at least two high-impact activities during his or her undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field,” would enhance student engagement and increase student success (Kuh, 2008, p. 19).

Limitations with Kuh’s study stem from decades of research that show the variables to student development are conditional because educational programs affect students differently. Educational practices that are extremely beneficial for one student may have diminishing returns on another. Kuh (2008) does caveat his research on student engagement as not being a “silver bullet” solution (p. 22). The significance of Kuh’s study is rooted in the extensiveness of the NSSE, whereby his results can be trusted to provide a reasonably accurate description of student engagement.

Gaston-Gayles and Hu’s (2009) study on student engagement employed the use of the Basic Academic Skills Survey (BASS) to collect data from 410 Division-I, freshman student-athletes at 21 different universities. The BASS is a survey scale designed and coordinated with the NCAA to measure student-athlete interests, attitudes, and academic skills in several educationally purposeful areas (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2002). Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) used two subscales, the Progress in College (PIC) and Social and Group Experience (SAGE), from the overall BASS scale for their research. Specifically, the PIC measures academic and social successes and failures, personal goals, and general attitudes toward college. The SAGE

subscale evaluates detailed aspects of high school and college experiences (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009).

The purpose of Gaston-Gayles and Hu's study was to examine factors related to student-athletes' engagement in educationally purposeful activities at Division I universities, and their impact on cognitive and affective outcomes (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) used seven variables to define student engagement including interaction with faculty, interaction with students other than teammates, participation in student groups and activities, participation in academic related activities, cultural attitudes and values, personal self-concept, and gains in communication and learning skills. Based on the work of Astin (1999) and Chickering and Gamson (1987), Gaston-Gayles and Hu formulated criteria on student engagement that favored Kuh's (2008) aforementioned principles, such as those gauging participation in various educationally purposeful activities. As a result, the researchers made three overarching findings. First, the profile level of a student-athlete's sport had little impact on student engagements influence of college outcomes. The two exceptions to this finding were the variables "Interacting with Students Other Than Teammates" and "Cultural Attitudes." Student-athletes in high profile sports had lower levels of interaction with students other than teammates, and lower scores on the measure of cultural attitudes and values as compared to low profile sports (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). Additionally, "Participation in Academic Related Activities" affects student-athletes in high profile sports significantly less than those in low profile sports. Secondly, student background characteristics and factors have very little influence on student-athletes' engagement in educationally purposeful activities. Once again, the variable "Interacting with Students

Other Than Teammates” was an exception to the finding. Student-athletes in high profile sports reported interacting less often with students other than teammates compared to low profile athletes. Male athletes had less interaction than females with students other than teammates. Finally, engagement in educationally purposeful activities had a significant influence on cognitive and affective outcomes (i.e., Cultural Attitudes, Personal Self-Concept, and Learning & Communication Skills) for student-athletes when controlling for student background characteristics and factors.

Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) concluded that evidence from their study supported that quality interactions by student-athletes with their non-athlete peers makes a difference in terms of how they view themselves, their cultural attitudes, educational effects and reported gains in learning and communication skills. Additionally, the researchers also deduced that more investigation needs to be done on why *participation in academic related activities* had a comparatively smaller effect on student-athletes in high profile sports as compared to those in low profile sports.

The significance of the study is that it utilizes one of the most extensive datasets available on college athletes regarding their engagement in educationally purposeful activities on college outcomes. However, Gaston-Gayles and Hu mentioned multiple limitations with their study. First, the research is limited by the chosen variables. For instance, it is not possible to compare students across institutions, background characteristics are limited, and the tool does not include pre-college variables. Secondly, since *interacting with students other than teammates* was a significant predictor of college outcomes, the study would greatly benefit if there was more data on student-athlete’s non-athlete peers.

Umbach et al. (2006) performed a study on student engagement using the same methodology as Kuh (2008). Students from 395 four-year colleges and universities were represented, 107 were NCAA Division I, 93 were NCAA Division II, 145 were NCAA Division III, and 50 were NAIA schools (Umbach, 2006). The purpose of the Umbach et al. (2006) study was to compare the engagement results of effective educational practices in student-athletes versus that of their non-athlete peers.

Umbach et al. (2006) measured student engagement using three scales, including level of academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and active and collaborative learning. The findings revealed student-athletes on average were as engaged in most educationally purposeful activities as their non-athlete counterparts. The authors also found that very few differences existed between the engagement of student-athletes and non-athletes on Division I and III campuses, although Division III schools have a slight edge. Despite these small differences, Division I colleges and universities have statistically significant, higher self-reported grades than students at Division III schools. Additionally, men at Division II and NAIA schools report higher grades than men at Division III schools. This finding revealed another reason for showcasing student engagement rather than G.P.A. when determining student achievement.

The significance of Umbach and colleague's (2006) study is that it tells a different story concerning the off-the-field achievements of student-athletes as compared to the portrayal made by popular media. On average, student-athletes that engage in educationally purposeful activities do not differ greatly from their non-athlete peers, but generally favor student-athletes when differences do exist (Umbach, 2006). Having these findings popularized would help reshape perceptions surrounding college athletes, as well

as create higher expectations for the student-athletes themselves. Nevertheless, the study is limited by the manner with which the NSSE identifies student-athletes. Students responded to the question: “Are you a student-athlete on a team sponsored by your institution?”, which leaves it open to falsification. The study is also limited by the inability to identify athletes competing in revenue-producing or nonrevenue-producing sports. This is especially important because of historical data indicating a significant difference in college outcomes between revenue and non revenue-producing sports.

Student engagement has been introduced by several scholars, but can seemingly be summarized by three common themes throughout the research. Those three themes include the “time and energy devoted to educationally purposeful activities (what student-athletes do), using effective educational practices to induce students to do the right things (what institutions do), and educationally effective institutions channeling student energy toward the right activities” (Kinzie, 2009, p. 1). Student engagement is both a function of the individual student effort and institutional practices and policies (Umbach et al., 2006). The manners with which colleges and universities choose to define themselves hold implications for the athletic programs they facilitate. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) findings noted that “because individual effort and involvement are the critical determinants of impact, institutions should focus on the ways they can shape their academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement” (p. 602). If this is true, then “extracurricular” athletic administrators should be participants in shaping the values, vision and mission of collegiate institutions in order to be good stewards of student-athletes’ engagement and occupational preparation.

## **Summary**

This literature review addressed student-athlete career transitioning and student engagement as pillars in an investigation on the significance of their affiliation. The literature revealed that student-athlete career transitioning is about the quality of psychological and functional preparation required to organize and operate in the traditional workforce (Levy, 2005). Psychological preparation validates the relevance of cultural variables in career transitioning, such as nationality, age, gender, disability, sexual identity, and racial or ethnic identity (Levy, 2005). Unlike student-athlete career transitioning, research on student engagement has shown that cultural variables are not significantly relevant (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). Student engagement is about the relationship quality of student-athletes, faculty, and institution (Umbach et al., 2006). The student-athlete is the common thread which sows the concepts of student-athlete career transitioning and student engagement together. It is the qualitative sum of their experiences that wield the answers to their relationship.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The literature of Harrison and Lawrence (2004), Kuh (2008), Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) and Umbach et al. (2006) was reflected throughout this study while exploring the effects of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities. Similar to Marthinus (2007) and Levy (2005), this study collected qualitative data from interviews with former student-athletes about their career transition. Nonetheless, this research is unique from previous literature by virtue of its context and scope. The context of this study was an investigation into several motivational and environmental factors of college football players from the Southeastern Conference. This study helps to fill an information gap on the impact of student engagement associated with Division I college athletes. None of the previous literature explicitly examines the scope of student engagement in terms of occupational influence after college. Prior studies have only implied a relationship by demonstrating that student engagement increases academic achievement.

This investigation was best served using qualitative research methods because it is most often used to gauge human behavior (Kumar, 2008). Unlike quantitative research, which explains phenomena in terms of magnitude or amount, qualitative data provides insight into the human psyche. Human behavior is explained more thoroughly through qualitative data rather than quantitative (Kumar, 2008). A qualitative case study can be defined as intensive research involving either one to a few cases or several cases in order to explain the behavior of a larger population (Gerring, 2007). There is an inverse relationship between the quality and quantity of qualitative research, which means that as case study numbers increase, the intensity of the research decreases (Gerring, 2007).

## **Research Questions**

Factors affecting the academic achievement of student-athletes are inequitable, particularly among those playing revenue-producing sports (Edwards, 2002). The purpose of this study was to address the problem through exploratory, qualitative research into the role of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities on cases of SEC football student-athlete career transitions. Achieving the purpose of this study helped fill an empirical research gap by testing the hypothesis that cases of former SEC football players perceive a positive relationship between their engagement in educationally purposeful activities and their career transition. The following questions guided this research:

1. How do SEC football players perceive their educationally purposeful engagement activities during college?
2. To what extent do SEC football participants' perceptions of purposeful engagement activities influence their career transitions?

## **Participants**

When small numbers of cases are selected, random sampling is an atypical approach (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). In case study research, random samples emphasizing representativeness will seldom be able to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem; "it is more appropriate to select some few cases chosen for their validity" (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Statistical sampling is traditionally taken at random in order to achieve average representation of an overall population; however, when conducting case studies, findings from a randomly chosen sample may not always be valid depending on the purpose of the study (Annam & Aldrich, 2010). Instead of discovering

representativeness through equal probability and random selection, the most suitable method for this type of study was an information-oriented selection (Creswell, 2002). Information-oriented case selection maximizes the utility of information from small samples and single cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Case studies are chosen based on their background information (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pg 79). There are four types of information-oriented selections, which include Extreme/deviant cases, Maximum variation cases, Critical cases and Paradigmatic cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001). What differentiates Maximum variation cases from other information-oriented sampling selection methods is also what makes it most suitable for this study (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This methodology selects cases with common criteria, but varying outcomes. The purpose of Maximum variation case selection is to get information about the importance of multiple circumstances for case process and results (Flyvbjerg, 2001). As a result of this sampling method, Maximum variation cases are chosen based on their familiarity to the researcher. The study's framework is established by the researcher, therefore he or she knows which cases will facilitate valid results for the studies intended purpose (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The primary researcher's knowledge of the participant's background is also a benefit of information-orientated selections because it provides accessibility to perhaps sensitive information.

In this study, Maximum variation cases represent the four possible college outcomes of Southeastern Conference football players. These college outcomes include: (a) graduating with a college degree and not going to the National Football League (NFL); (b) not graduating with a college degree and not going to the NFL; (c) not graduating and going to the NFL; and (d) graduating and going to the NFL. Even if a player transfers to another school, he would still be subject to the same conclusions. The

graduation rate, or “Graduation,” is one of the most readily available measures of college outcomes, despite student engagement being a strong gauge of student achievement (Nickerson, Diener, & Schwarz, 2010).

Maximum variation cases attain information about the significance of various circumstances from three to four cases which differ on a single dimension (Flyvbjerg, 2001). In this study, that dimension was the student-athlete’s college outcome while career transitioning. In adherence to Maximum variation methodology, one participant was chosen for each of the four possible college outcomes of SEC football players. This sample size accomplishes multiple tasks. First, it maintains protocol for the instrumentation being used in this study, the SCTQ II. This survey has previously been applied across other studies with a similar sample size. Waya, Jonesa and Slatara (2012) used the SCTQ II to interview six, school-aged male athletes with high training attendance to “explore their experiences of strength and conditioning training” (Waya et al., 2012, p. 154). Next, the chosen sample size aligns with previous definitions of case study research, which states that a sample may be comprised of as little as a single unit (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Third, it allows for focused, in-depth discussions and analysis of each participant’s feedback (Gerring, 2007). Lastly, this sample size facilitated results that lead to valid interpretations of this studies intended purpose to test a hypothesis (Creswell, 2002).

The primary researcher was the sole interviewer because of his prior relationship with the participants and pre-established trust as a personal contact with student-athletes at different universities. Participants needed to trust the interviewer in order to gain

access to perhaps very personal and sensitive information (Thomas, Nelson, & Silver, 2005, p. 349).

The use of former student-athletes was particularly useful because they have already processed their own career transition and have established outcomes. Understanding the process that led to each participant's career transition will empower student-athletes to gain control over their own professional futures by utilizing former student-athletes' experiences as a guide.

### **Instrumentation**

To understand the role of student engagement in the career transition of former SEC football players, participants engaged in an adapted version of Marthinus's (2007) semi-structured qualitative interview guide (see Appendix B). The guide was originally developed to focus on the sport career lifecycle of South African runners, from the beginning of their career to the separation process from elite sports. Marthinus' objective was to give former athlete perspective on their career transition (Marthinus, 2007). The interview guide consists of a series of planned questions organized into the following number of interrelated sections (Marthinus, 2007): 1. Beginning the interview, Introductory questions; 2. Initiation (training) stage; 3. Maturity (performance) stage; 4. Anticipation (realization of transition) stage; 5. Interview conclusion; and 6. Evaluation and summary. In the stages of "Maturity" and "Anticipation", questions concerning student engagement in educationally purposeful activities originated from the National Survey of Student Engagement (Trustees of Indiana University, 2005). The questions in Appendix B were customized to focus on former SEC football players, while maintaining the integrity of Marthinus's original interview guide. The adapted interview guide

focuses on former SEC football player early aspirations and athletic identity, evolving athletic and academic goals, level of student engagement and their resulting career transition. The 35 item survey has two measurables. First, it determined whether former SEC football players adequately “engaged” as student-athletes. Second, it measured the participant perceptions on how student engagement affected their career transition. This study also benefited from Marthinus’s interview protocol because it promoted transparency, which increased trust and enabled relevant analysis of participant’s perceptions (Marthinus, 2007).

Section one of the Marthinus (2007) Adapted Interview Guide, Beginning the Interview, served as a methodological and informational function. Methodologically, the line of questioning facilitated rapport, conversation and established a baseline to measure the participant’s consistency later in the interview by recollecting portions of the data. The interview began with questions related to motivations for early athletic participation. According to Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza (1989), this bonding process kept the student engagement/career transition discussion centered on his reasons for participation, which continued into the next section. Section two, Background, is a line of questioning based on the literature of Shaffer (2008), which sought to explain heredity and environment as determinants of human personality. These questions uncovered the influence of participant’s family support system, values and nurturing influences, as well as close friends on their dispositions as career transitioning student-athletes. Information obtained in this section may have been viewed as exceedingly personal; therefore, it was intentionally placed at “Section 2”. The Background section was positioned early enough to follow the chronology of the questionnaire, but late enough to draw the participant in

and leverage the baseline of trust (Miller, 2010). Section three, Initiation Stage, achieved two critical outcomes to the overall success of the interview. First, it continued the process of discovery from the previous section to focus on the participant's commitment to football, academic pursuits, and a traditional working career. Next, it continued building a productive ambience and further developed the participant and interviewer partnership. Section four, Maturity Stage, refers to the participant's actual eligibility as a Southeastern Conference football player. This is the phase when the participant is afforded more autonomy to create his own set of priorities for football, student engagement in educationally purposeful activities and career transitioning. Participants were told that the purpose of this section was to shed light on the athletic/academic mix and what role student engagement played in their career transition. Section five, Anticipation Stage, is the stage immediately preceding actual career transitioning. This is also the period from the end of SEC football eligibility to the expiration of athletic scholarship. Participants were awarded athletic scholarship on an annual, renewable basis (Thomas, 2010). In accordance with the scholarship agreement, players have the spring semester for enrollment because the college football season ends during the fall semester. The purpose of this stage was to explore student-engagement into educationally purposeful activities and how former SEC football players contemplated and prepared for their impending career transition once eligibility had ended. Section six, Actualization Stage, is the period of actual career transitioning. This section investigated life after undergraduate, whether the participant graduated or not. The purpose of these questions was to gain a final measure of participant's perceptions on how "student engagement" affected their career transition. Asking "why" the participant believes his

initial career transition was successful or unsuccessful is important because it establishes the student-athlete's criteria for success. This information may prove useful in the future to create a common standard of successful career transitions.

### **Procedure**

The procedure used for conducting interviews was comparable to that of Marthinus (2007). Information-oriented selections of student-athletes were made of those who fit into each of the four categories, (a) graduating with a college degree and not going to the National Football League (NFL); (b) not graduating with a college degree and not going to the NFL; (c) not graduating and going to the NFL; and (d) graduating and going to the NFL. The researcher called each candidate using phone numbers he had as personal contacts and networking on social media. They were given a brief description of the study, an explanation of the goals and asked if they were interested in participating in the study. Those participating in the study supplied their email address and were sent a cover letter (see Appendix C) and consent form. The cover letter ensured confidentiality, offered a brief description of the research and allowed for the participant to ask any questions to clarify the nature of the study or expectations. The participants were not given inducements for their involvement in the study. They were also told they could withdraw at anytime because their participation was voluntary. Then, a convenient time was scheduled for a 90 – 120 minute interview session via the telephone. Several studies have shown that interview responses and self-disclosure do not vary between telephone and face-to-face interviews (Bermack, 1989). During telephone interviews, the primary researcher was on speakerphone in a private

room while using a tape recorder, and transcribing handwritten field notes. The researcher conducted all interviews firsthand in order to maximize consistency.

Considerable effort to engage the participant's trust before and during the interview was alleviated because of the prior relationship the researcher had with the participants. Decreasing the concerns of participants is vital to the interview process. Complete disclosure at each step of the interview allowed every participant to know exactly what would be performed in advance, thus eliminated any sense of deception. Purposeful steps were taken to obtain the interest and engagement of the former SEC football student-athlete. The bond between participant and interviewer enhanced both the meaningfulness of the experience for the former athlete and the quality of the data for the researcher (Marthinus, 2007). In order to build that bond, participants were fully disclosed on the interviews purpose and procedures. Following the project description, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured format from the interview guide (Appendix B). In an attempt to minimize bias from the questionnaire, each question was asked in a similar voice and manner among all participants, and minimal clarification was given unless requested by the participant. In the event that a question was obviously not applicable to the participant's situation, it was skipped and the next appropriate question was asked. Participants were encouraged to describe situations in considerable detail, and asked follow-up questions to obtain emergent significance. Participants were encouraged to speak freely about their personal experiences before, during, and after their career transition from SEC college football.

The interviews were concluded with a review of the participant's career transitioning profile. Each subject was provided an opportunity to appraise the entire

interview process. The purpose of the interview appraisal was to give general impressions, discuss the interaction, resolve any problems or abnormalities encountered and reveal any insights gained or uncovered themes. The appraisal was immediately followed by a transcription of the audio recorded interview for further analysis.

In order to increase credibility of the findings, issues concerning validity and reliability were planned prior to performing research (Becker et al., 2005). The strategy to alleviate those concerns in this study was twofold; first, the issues with accurately uncovering personal information was addressed through the use of participants who were personally connected to the researcher at different universities. With personal contacts, participants in the interviews were more likely to talk longer and disclose more precise information, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the findings (Becker, et al., 2005). Next, the primary researcher ensured there was ample time to interview the participant, whether it was an additional hour(s) or a follow-up interview. Having suitable time for participants to provide information maximized the amount of analyzable data needed to confirm the accuracy of responses (Becker, et al., 2005).

### **Data Analysis**

The procedure for analyzing data was a replication of Marthinus's (2007) research protocol, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is an approach to comprehending personally meaningful experiences or phenomena, such as career transitioning. Using non-random, information-oriented sampling, IPA seeks to comprehend participant's attempts to understand their own experiences through qualitative, open-ended questions and dialogue (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Immediately following each participant's interview, the preliminary analysis began by

participant checking. During participant checking, the researcher invited the subject to review his transcript to ensure the researcher's interpretation was as accurate as possible (Marthinus, 2007). Then, the researcher read the final transcript for himself. Working with an independent researcher at American Universities Center for Teaching, Research and Learning (CTRL), the primary researcher began the next phase, called "coding." Coding is the intense annotation of the interview transcript (Patton, 2002). The process of coding can be accomplished using computer programs; however, there is some dispute as to the helpfulness of the software (Ratcliff, 2005; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). In this case, the researchers coded the transcripts by hand. Next, the primary and independent researchers began using the codes to determine themes and patterns throughout the transcripts, beginning with raw data themes. With the assistance of recommendations made by the independent researcher, consensus was achieved on final major themes after analyzing raw data themes. Those patterns and themes lead to meaningful insight of the participant's thought process, which is understood through a growing body of research on student engagement (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Kuh, 2008; Umbach et al., 2006). Although the researcher made pattern comparisons as they emerge across the sample, the emphasis was placed on understanding why individual cases support or undermine the hypothesis. The researcher was able to understand the participant's perceptions and used the findings to test against the hypothesis. Meaningful results were determined as those which did not align with the hypothesis and preexisting body of knowledge on student engagement and career transitioning. Also, the researcher's choice in sampling methodology, Maximum variation, will allow for

exploration into whether college outcomes influence perceptions of the relationship between career transitioning and student engagement.

## Chapter Four: Results

Results of this qualitative research proved beneficial to uncovering the following four major themes: (a) Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities; (b) Desire for Internship Opportunities; (c) Undefined Career Path; and (d) Career Transition Regret. These themes emerged from the participant's background, motivation and lifelong experiences. This section is a detailed account of the participant's influential origins and the qualitative data analysis results from each interview. In an effort to provide anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. This section begins with a background narrative of each participant in the study followed by a presentation of the findings based on the major themes found in the data.

### Participant's Background

**Allen: No NFL, College Graduate.** Allen graduated from college with a double major in business, did not play professional football in the NFL, and is currently a financial manager at a large bank. He appeared to have reflected more than the other participants on his career transition, as evidenced by the ease with which he spoke about specific experiences. As early as he can remember, Allen played football with his brothers and cousins in a field next to his grandmother's house. He started playing organized football at the age of nine for his uncle who coached little league at the nearby recreation center. Football allowed Allen, an ethnic minority like the other participants, to communicate more naturally with other kids by teaching him communication skills and how to work collaboratively. In little league football, he played for the same team and wore the same number as his athletic hero, Atlanta Falcons wide receiver Andre Rison. Allen's eldest brother was also his hero because "he played football, basketball and was

extremely trendy.” Along with his passion for the game, the participant’s high level of family involvement kept him playing football, adding “I never thought about quitting.” Despite feeling unsuccessful during his early stages of football, the participant quickly caught on and worked hard to improve. He chased the euphoria of success and admiration to become a star. What Allen found most enjoyable about football was making an impact on the team. He stated:

Although I was playing tight end, not wide receiver as I desired, the first time I caught a pass and made a first down, I was addicted to the praise and applause. I still remember the name of the play, Fake 32 tight end pop. I thought I was in Cowboy Stadium at the Super Bowl.

Allen grew up in a two parent, devotedly Christian household in South Georgia. His mom and dad were both high school educated, no college and currently work together at a fabric factory. Allen is the third of five boys, who span the spectrum of education and experience. Brother Demetrius has a General Educational Development (GED) diploma, works at Wal-Mart and has had trouble finding gainful employment because of his criminal record. Trinnis has a high school education and works at a pharmaceutical distribution center. Anthony has an undergraduate degree and directs youth services at a residential foster care facility. Jermaine went into the military with a high school diploma, followed by seminary school before becoming a youth pastor.

Allen had close ties with a small group of friends and teammates in high school. Those friends faced a staggering amount of personal and professional setbacks after high school. One high school friend went to jail for selling illegal narcotics. Today he is out of prison and started his own auto accessory business. Another friend had a choice to play Division I football but decided to attend a D-II school so he could remain close to

home. He coached high school football after graduating from college, where he was subsequently arrested for sexual assault on a minor and sentenced to prison. A third friend was academically ineligible to play Division I college football so he attended military preparedness school for one year before going to a Division II school where he excelled athletically. Although he was inducted into his school's hall of fame, he did not make the NFL. He also played arena football for a short time before taking a job in the retail sector. A fourth friend worked in a factory after high school, then enlisted in the military. Allen's final high school friend was also arrested for selling illegal narcotics. When he was released from prison, he moved out of state to start his life over and currently works in the retail sector. Despite having three out of five high school friends serve prison sentences, Allen was more influenced by his father during those years, stating "my dad taught me everything I learned about being a responsible adult and a man. I patterned myself after him." Allen participated in at least two high-impact activities during his undergraduate program, one in Allen's first year, and another in relation to his major field.

**Brandon: No NFL, Did Not Graduate.** Brandon did not graduate from college, nor did he play in the NFL, and currently works as a high school teacher's assistant. The responses he provided during his interview downplayed some of the challenges he faced while career transitioning. A substantial benefit to knowing the participant is that I have firsthand knowledge of information he omitted. Brandon failed to mention that he developed a drug habit after his college football eligibility ended and, for a short time, resorted to asking for handouts from acquaintances in order to supplement his income before moving back home to Tennessee.

Brandon began playing football at the age of 15. He followed his cousin to football practice one day after a game of street basketball and decided to join the team. The participant was indifferent to his level of success at this early stage because he was not completely sold on the sport and ignorant of the fundamentals. Shortly after beginning, he quit playing football for about two weeks, but returned at the insistence of his family. Despite his early lack of ability, Brandon began to excel at football during his junior year in high school. Eventually he earned All-State and All-American honors. By this time, Brandon enjoyed football, especially the exciting atmosphere and cheering of the crowd, more than most things in his life. “(Football) made me feel like I was floating on water.” Dallas Cowboy running back Emmitt Smith became his hero because of Emmitt’s toughness. The participant credits football with keeping him out of trouble, increasing his confidence and self-awareness, driving him to do well academically, and introduced the idea of college. He would become the first person in his family to go college. “I didn’t think a person like me, coming from my neighborhood, could go to college. I used football as motivation to prove to myself and others that I could make it.”

Brandon’s parents were both high school educated. He lived with his unwed mother and father until the age of 10 when they separated. The participant then lived with his father until graduating from high school. Brandon characterized his parent’s professions as “entrepreneurs.” The participant has 12 siblings due unto his father’s “rolling stone lifestyle.” Brandon says his dad was still the most admirable and influential person in his life. “He’s the type of guy that would never walk away knowing his kids want or need something. He’s the best man in the world to me.” Outside of his family, the next biggest influence on Brandon’s life was his only high school friend.

That friend would go on to become an early pick in the first round of the NFL draft. The participant and his friend became estranged for three years after the friend was drafted. Brandon participated in at least two high-impact activities during his undergraduate program, one in Brandon's first year, and another in relation to his major field.

**Chris: NFL, College Graduate.** Chris, a college graduate, played football three years in the NFL, then went to law school and currently is employed as a practicing attorney. He began playing football at age 12 after succumbing to social pressure because of his size. Chris was not successful in his early stages of football. He started playing on the junior varsity team and felt extremely insecure about his physical strength. "Guys would always show off in the weight room, but I shied away because it would have been a catastrophe." Results and success were important to Chris, despite his turbulent start, saying:

I never thought I wanted to be the best person on the team or in the city. I just thought about being the best person on that individual play. It was about dominating during each individual play. I felt like no one should ever get the best of me, although it did happen. Football is a sport where I felt effort could equalize talent.

Football quickly became more interesting to Chris. He began enjoying the physically aggressive nature of the sport. The participant appreciated the one-on-one competition to find out who was the best player, and affectionately called high school practice, "kill my friend day." In addition to Chris's newfound love of the game, camaraderie also kept him playing football. "You can't get (camaraderie like) that anywhere else. That kind of just draws you back (in)." By participating in football during high school, the valuable opportunities he took part in because of sport included playing in professional football stadiums during playoff games and being interviewed on

the news for his entire city to see. Among the participant's athletic heroes, Michael Jordan was the most inspirational because of his ability to excel in clutch situations.

Chris grew up with both his parents in Texas. His family was in church every Sunday where his father preached. The participant's mom and dad both had some college experience but no degree. Professionally, Chris's dad started out in the U.S. military, worked most of his life with the U.S. Postal Service and is currently on disability retirement. The participant's mom was a homemaker until he was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade; then she worked both as a physical and special education assistant at an elementary school. Chris has two brothers and one sister. His first brother, Zach, has a college degree, teaches and coaches high school football. Brother Lenard is in his final semester of college. Sister Ashley is a college graduate, works as a secretary at a law firm and will be attending law school in fall 2013. Chris says he did not really have any close friends during high school because he spent most of his time with family, but had two acquaintances, Nick and Victor. Nick also played Division-I college football, graduated and works in medical device sales. Victor graduated from community college and owns multiple telecommunication retail stores. Out of the entire participant's family and acquaintances, his dad had the biggest influence on him while growing up. "My dad laid the structure, discipline, expectations and foundation." Chris credits his mom for helping him to excel early academically by taking him and his siblings to the library and always stressing the importance of education. Chris participated in at least two high-impact activities during his undergraduate program, one in Chris' first year, and another in relation to his major field.

**Daniel: NFL, Did Not Graduate.** Daniel, a former SEC Player of the Year, did not graduate from college and had a six year career in the NFL. He is currently an author and motivational speaker. The participant grew up in a neighborhood where many of the boys played street football. It was a way of socializing with friends. Daniel wanted to play tennis but stopped once he realized his friends did not want to play. He began playing organized football at age 12 after riding bikes with a group of friends to a field where the youth center started a league. The participant's mom did not want him to play football so his older sister signed the permission form. Daniel was very successful during the initial stages of playing. During his freshman year, he even played at the varsity level. The only sport result the participant cared about was making his mom and grandmother proud, not the expectations of anyone else.

What Daniel found most enjoyable about football was also what kept him playing for so many years: friendship and camaraderie. In fact, when his friends were not selected to his youth center team, the participant quit the team on multiple occasions. "The youth center used a draft system to decide which players went to each team. I quit the (football) team every year, never playing more than 4 games per season, because none of my friends were on my team." While Daniel was in the youth center league, his uncles played in high school, which began being televised. He began to idolize his uncles after seeing them play football on television. Becoming a local celebrity and traveling for football games presented Daniel with a valuable opportunity to see and imagine a world bigger than the small town from which he came. "I saw that there was much more out there in life."

Daniel grew up with his mother, grandmother and three siblings. His mom and grandmother are both high school educated and work as healthcare assistants. Similarly, both of the participant's sisters are registered nurses. His brother is a factory plant manager. Daniel had two close friends during high school. His first friend started his own consulting company after working in the White House for the 43<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States. The participant's next friend earned a Ph.D. in education. Among all the influences in his life, Daniel's mother was the greatest. "She took care of me during my struggles with respiratory health as a child and overcame her own struggles and adversities." Daniel participated in at least two high-impact activities during his undergraduate program, one in Daniel's first year, and another in relation to his major field.

### **Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities**

Participants conveyed relatively low or limited engagement in educationally purposeful activities as shown in Table 4.1. The table displays each participant's experience with "high-impact," student engagement activities. No participant's engagement in educationally purposeful activities surpassed 30%. Additionally, these participants communicated that they were never encouraged to participate in these activities. Brandon said, "An individual would have to know what (activities to engage), then find a (point-of-contact) and hope they would want to have that conversation with you." Daniel noted, "I don't recall, by firsthand or hearsay, any services being available to discuss activities like student engagement."

Table 4.1

## Student Engagement Activities by Participants

Student Engagement Activities	Allen	Brandon	Chris	Daniel
First Year Seminars and Experiences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Common Intellectual Experiences	No	No	No	No
Learning Communities	No	No	Yes	No
Writing Intensive Courses	No	Yes	No	No
Collaborative Assignments and Projects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Undergraduate Research	Yes	No	No	No
Diversity/Global Learning	No	No	No	No
Service/Community Based Learning	No	No	No	Yes
Internship	No	No	No	No
Capstone Courses and Projects	No	No	No	No

There were only two out of the nine purposeful student engagement activities that all participants shared, which include *First Year Seminars and Experiences* and *Collaborative Assignments and Projects*. No other activity was participated in by more than one student-athlete. The participants noted that *First Year Seminars and Experiences* were courses filled mostly with other student-athletes. Daniel said, “The class had a lot of athletes and talked about stuff like learning strategies.” *Collaborative Assignments and Projects* were said to be commonplace in most classroom environments by these participants. Chris commented that he assumed every student had “group assignments” in most classes.

The activities *Common Intellectual Experiences*, *Diversity/Global Learning*, *Internship* and *Capstone Courses and Projects* were not participated in by *any* of the student-athletes. Although none of these student-athletes took part in an internship, each of the participants expressed desire for internship opportunities.

## **Desire for Internship Opportunities**

Internships provide educational opportunities for individuals who seek to gain practical, occupational experience in a specific career field, sometimes for college credit, during a specified length of time (Loretto, 2014). Participants in this study were asked if they had taken part in any internship during their undergraduate years while NCAA sport eligible. All participants indicated that they had not engaged in an internship. Despite that, each student-athlete also expressed desire to have partaken in an internship. Allen noted:

I should've been doing internships during the summer, which probably would've been unpaid but I was too busy earning money that would last me all year since we weren't allowed to work (as a condition of the terms of the athletic scholarship) during the football season... not that we had the time.

About internships, Brandon stated:

Since I didn't really know exactly what I wanted to do (for a living), doing internships could've been extremely useful to helping me learn about different jobs I could've considered. Unfortunately I didn't really have the time and I also didn't know much about internships. Nobody told me.

The utility of internships as an educational tool was greatly considered by every participant. Chris said "internships could definitely have been a more interesting education that's also more useful in the long run." Daniel disclosed that internships "would've shown how school is applied in the real world." These student-athletes unfulfilled desire for educational support of occupational opportunity through internship is a direct path to the next theme, Undefined Career Path.

## **Undefined Career Path**

All of the participants in this study responded that they lacked specific, traditional career goals. Growing up, the participants never developed specific career ambitions

although academic achievement was highly valued. Every participant's goal was to play in the NFL. Daniel characterized football student-athletes' mindset toward football versus a traditional career saying, "When you're young, you do not doubt that you'll make the NFL. That never-say-never attitude is what makes many athletes great." As a consequence, participants neglected the urgency to create a traditional career identity. Allen stated, "I never had any aspirations for a traditional working career like most people had." Brandon knew he wanted to be rich, but only focused on the NFL to achieve it. "I wanted to live out my dream to play football and be rich," he said. Chris had a nearsighted approach to long term success, saying "Mainly I had academic goals. Plans were to work hard in school and get an scholarship to college. I didn't know what I wanted to do." Daniel's altruism dominated his career outlook. He noted, "I never thought about what occupation I wanted to do. My only thought was that I wanted to be able to help mom financially and have kids of my own one day."

Neither Allen, Brandon, Chris or Daniel identified meaningful support systems or activities, including student engagement, as a likely influence on their transition to a traditional career path. When asked about the role that student engagement played in his career transitioning, Allen stated, "None. They were good experiences and good to do, but I don't think it contributed towards my career transition. I can't make a direct connection right now." Brandon said, "They did not directly play a role, but indirectly they helped me be a leader in college, which could have indirectly helped me in my career transition. Chris stated, "I absolutely do not feel that any of the aforementioned activities prepared me for a career." Daniel said, "Student engagement could probably be useful in someone's career transition, but it did not help me."

In addition to Kuh's (2008) high-impact student engagement activities, participants were asked a series of questions during the course of the study which focused on other factors of engagement. Brandon, who did not graduate or play in the NFL, was the only participant who spoke with a faculty member about career planning. Allen, Chris and Daniel never had conversations with faculty about career planning. Allen laughed while stating:

Any conversation I had about career planning was always self-initiated. The reception or feedback from those conversations was not good at all. I don't think they were engaged or cared as much as I did, and when you're trying to find career or future, you might need a little bit of guidance or someone to bounce ideas off of and that definitely was not the case.

Allen and Chris, both graduates, stated a willingness to plan for career transitioning and spoke about their plans to a career counselor and college dean, respectively. Participants Brandon and Daniel were not unwilling to plan for career transition, but they were both unaware of the need to plan, so they did not take any steps toward doing so. When asked if there were structures in place to help career transition, all participants said that no official or useful system was in place. Brandon stated that his father, mother, pastor and aunts were his career transitioning structure. Allen stated that his university career services were so inept, that it should not count as a career transitioning structure. He commented:

The steps I took to career transition were visiting the university career counselors. It was literally the biggest waste of time. It was the most unproductive meeting I ever had. I got the sense that this person did not even care about their job, let alone me and my future. The university career center was a joke. There was nothing to bridge the gap from where you were as a student to becoming a professional unless you created it. I did not know this when I was a student. I thought there'd be more of a structured plan in place and when I stepped into this arena, I realized that there wasn't anyone to help.

Similarly, Chris stated:

It's amazing how little time was spent talking about career transition anywhere throughout my college career. We talked about football and grades, but there were almost no conversations about a professional career, unless they had to do with athletics, such as coaching. I felt like talking about a non-sport career could not be discussed with anyone in the athletic department. An individual would have to know what he wanted to do professionally, then go find for example the college dean of what you were interested in and hope they would want to have that conversation with you.

Every participant said they had some level of unresolved feelings about their career transition, and each of them coped by talking with former teammates about those emotions. Despite the unresolved feelings, Chris and Daniel stated that their transitions were successful because playing in the NFL afforded them the time, money and connections needed to figure out what they were going to do for a traditional career.

During Chris's transition out of the NFL, he decided to go to law school. He stated:

My friend suggested that I would be a good attorney, and it was the first time I'd ever considered going to law school because I'd never even thought of it previously. When I was released from an NFL team in 2006, I immediately proceeded beginning my journey to law school. The next year I was picked back up by another NFL team. My teammates questioned why I would choose to go to law school. I told them that I had to be ready whenever I was eventually released from an NFL team for the last time. I took the LSAT before the 2009 training camp. When camp was done, I was released from that NFL team. Although I was no longer on an NFL team, I started getting ready for law school and talked to attorneys about how I should prepare. The whole purpose of talking to attorneys was to prepare for employment well in advance, and that's what ended up happening. I had a job waiting for me when I graduated.

Daniel played six years in the NFL and had the least amount of unresolved feelings about his career transition. He then leveraged his career in the NFL transition to a traditional profession. Daniel stated:

When I was finished playing in the NFL, I was contacted by a company through Facebook about an opportunity to do public speaking engagements with grade school kids in (my home state). My career as a motivational public speaker

expanded quickly through word of mouth. During my initial career transition, meeting the right people was the biggest challenge, but I was fortunate to have this opportunity fall in my lap.

Participants Allen and Brandon, who did not play in the NFL, said they had unsuccessful career transitions due to being abandoned by their university and a general lack of career direction, respectively. When trying to transition to a professional career, Allen's goal was to utilize his two degrees by embarking on a career in business. With limited direction, he initially took a blue collar job with an energy company while making career plans. The participant stated:

For whatever reason, beginning a business career in my college town wasn't happening quickly or showing much promise, so I looked elsewhere and ended up moving to Atlanta. I moved away from the place I'd lived for five to six years, started over in a new city and made a new network of people. Banking was also a new industry for me so there was a learning curve, not to mention applying theoretical classroom knowledge into practical workplace skills. Also, I had no professional mentor to help guide me during those formative years as a business professional. Although I reached out to academic counselors from my old university, they could only give me limited advice because my career field wasn't their specialty. The lack of university support was certainly the biggest thing to hurt my transition.

Brandon's career transition met with more challenges than the other participants. His non-sport goal in college was to become a teacher. He has yet to realize that goal, but is still working toward it. He said:

After I left school, I moved back home. I began working in construction, which I've done all my life. I no longer had any goals. I was just trying to make some money. I was procrastinating. It was a challenge to avoid peer pressure from people who wanted me to make the same bad choices they were; their jealousy started pulling me down. The positive influence of my former teammates was ultimately the success that kept me trying to be productive.

Transitioning to a traditional career path is an inevitability. Preparing for that transition should be just as certain, but these student-athletes felt directionless and abandoned while reflecting on the support systems and activities they expected to rely on.

## **Career Transition Regret**

All of the participants realized in hindsight that they should have taken complete responsibility for their career transition because they did not receive support, specifically from the athletic department or coaching staff, they assumed would be there to guide them. Allen said:

In my naive mind, I thought the opportunity to (career transition from) football would be a lot easier. I should've done more because I thought there'd be more people to assist me along the way, and I learned that it didn't work like that. I was under the impression that this university would wrap its arms around its athletes and help us through that transitional process. I just didn't know how to (plan for career transitioning). It's difficult for these kids because the university is holding them responsible for doing something for the university in return for their scholarship, not to mention the time constraints. Some kids don't even know what they want to do when they're that age. You have to fend for yourself.

Brandon added, "You have more responsibility in college because you're a student-athlete. Understand that things won't be given to you just because you play football." Daniel stated, "I feel like anything in my life that has happened has been of my own doing/responsibility. Do everything you can to prepare yourself for life after sports." Chris learned the hard way about fending for his own academic and career transition. He went to college majoring in engineering, but said the athletic administration made him change his major because of scheduling. Despite getting verbal approval from his position coach to show up five minutes late for practice each day because of his class schedule, he was demoted from second to fourth string on the team's roster during the first week of practice. Chris considered that maybe he was athletically incompatible with the team, but suspected his demotion was about his class schedule. His suspicions were validated during a conversation with an academic counselor. Chris said:

One of the academic counselors was at practice and talked to me on the sideline after practice was over. She told me that the coaches wanted me to change my college major. I got the implication that if I wanted to play football, I would do what I was told. After multiple conversations about it, I subsequently changed my major to undecided.

From that moment forward, the participant knew that it was up to him to take personal responsibility for his own academic experience and career transition. He said, “I rededicated myself to holding myself accountable for my responsibilities.”

In addition to realizing an increased level of personal responsibility, the participants learned that professional networking is the best advice for SEC football student-athletes trying to prepare for career transitioning. Chris characterized networking by saying:

As a college athlete, you’re going to meet a lot of people. If you play in the NFL, you’re going to meet a whole lot more. Obviously, everyone is not going to have your best interest at heart, but some of those people do. Those people want to help you and work with you. These are the people you need to keep connections with because that’s the difference between you barely getting by or having the best of many opportunities; even people from high school. In high school, I met an opposing player’s dad who actually went to law school at my alma mater. Imagine if I had stayed in contact like he wanted me to. Imagine the opportunities I could’ve had. Maintaining networks with positive people is something I wish I’d realized earlier.

Daniel stated about professional networking:

Now that I’m finished playing in the NFL, the biggest challenge to starting a traditional career was establishing the right contacts to be successful. My career transition successes have been the opportunities I’ve had through the contacts I actually did make by playing in the NFL.

Allen’s advice on networking was to:

Start early and make connections with people. Reach out to alumni associations around the country. I had no idea they existed until after I moved and reached out. Those connections need to be made years in advance and the athletic/university should help inform and bridge the gap.

## **Summary**

In addition to the detailed account of the participant's influential origins, four major themes were uncovered as a result of this qualitative research, including Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities, Desire for Internship Opportunities, Undefined Career Path, and Career Transition Regret. These themes emerged from the participant's background, motivation and lifelong experiences.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct exploratory, qualitative research into the role of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities on the career transition of football student-athletes in the SEC by exploring the extent to which SEC football players perceived their educationally purposeful engagement activities during college. An analysis of the participant's feedback uncovered four major themes in the Results chapter, including Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities, Desire for Internship Opportunities, Undefined Career Path and Career Transition Regret. During the following discussion, the findings of this study will be summarized and interpreted, the importance of the findings will be conferred, and comparisons will be drawn between the results of this study and current literature on student engagement and career transitioning.

The theme, *Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities*, emerged from participant's responses of having few experiences with "high-impact" activities. These student-athletes, who expressed Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities, stated there was virtually no college curriculum which actively engaged them in the majority of these activities. This finding is consistent with Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009), which found that college football student-athletes have relatively low levels of student engagement, including interaction with students other than teammates, fewer cultural attitudes and values, and decreased impact of academic related activities on learning and communication skills. The importance of this finding is that it demonstrates failure on the part of their universities to engage these student-athletes in purposeful engagement activities. The finding is also notable because it reveals these participants were unaware of the educationally purposeful activities to seek out. This lack of institutional

responsibility and accountability for the well-being of these student-athletes is concerning because it is a missed opportunity to increase their general academic self-concept and improve personal and learning development (Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, & Harrison, 2011). Universities assume a great deal of responsibility for student-athletes' academic well-being for at least two reasons, the income that revenue-producing sports generate and the legal responsibility to act in the best interest of the student, otherwise known as *in loco parentis* (Lake, 2000). It is the responsibility of the university to ensure that athletes are exposed to purposeful engagement activities that improve the quality of their experiences and ultimately perhaps their career transition (Kuh, 2008).

Another plausible explanation for the emergence of the theme, Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities, is at times due to “hostile campus racial climates and reinforcement of low academic expectations” of ethnic minorities, which all of the participants in this study happened to be (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011, p. 241). Racial hostility, or projected stereotypes, towards Black athletes attending predominately White institutions reduces their engagement in educationally purposeful activities or the broader academic community (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). When university academic support centers find ways to increase the purposeful engagement of all their student-athletes, research has shown it will likely lead to desired educational outcomes (Comeaux, 2010).

When these student-athletes are inadequately prepared and supported by their colleges or universities, it is reasonable to expect limited purposeful engagement activities. Despite the fact that athletes in the study had limited engagement activities, participants qualified as adequately engaged in purposeful engagement activities according to Kuh (2008) by participating in at least two high-impact activities during the

undergraduate program, one in the first year and one taken later in relation to the major field. This definition of student engagement, which qualifies a student as adequately engaged, is inconsistent with the findings of this study. Despite every participant's adequate level of engagement, Brandon and Daniel did not graduate from college. Participant's graduation rate was independent of their student engagement, that is to say that these student-athletes' level of engagement into educationally purposeful activities did not affect the rate by which they graduated. I do not disagree with researchers, such as Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) or Umbach, Palmer, Kuh and Hannah (2006), who find that student engagement can increase academic achievement, cognitive, and affective outcomes. The findings for the present study instead suggest that the definition for sufficient engagement as defined by Kuh (2008) may just be insufficient for this population of students.

Furthermore, participants in this study identified *Internships* as a highly desired opportunity despite never taking part themselves. This finding is valuable because student-athlete's ability to identify internships as a useful educational tool perhaps demonstrates their desire to participate in activities that can enhance the quality of their school-to-career transitions. This result, to some degree, is consistent with the Harrison and Lawrence (2004) study, which found that student-athlete's perceptions about being a true "student-athlete," is achieved when academics is balanced with an individual's athletic responsibilities. Participant Daniel disclosed that internships "would've shown how school is applied in the real world." Daniel's words are consistent with Kuh's (2008) goals of achieving liberal education by "connecting essential learning outcomes with high-impact practices." Moreover, participant's responses are consistent with Kuh's

(2008) objectives for internships, which are *Practicing Integrative and Applied Learning* and *Strengthening Intellectual and Practical Skills*.

The question that remains is, “why didn’t these student-athletes take part in internships if they were willing?” The answer is twofold, guidance and time. While the participants indicated they desired internship opportunities, they also noted that they were never given the chance or direction to seek out such activities. Even if the opportunity were available, the student-athletes would not have had the time to participate because of their commitment to being a fulltime student-athlete. Allen said he should have been doing summer internships but he was unaware and preoccupied with working to cover additional expenses throughout the year. Allen also spoke about the limited time his summer football schedule allowed him to hold a steady internship position. This finding is consistent with literature by Jacobson (2009), Wolverton (2008), and Maloney and McCormick (1993), which noted that many student-athletes, especially those in revenue sports, have great difficulties balancing academic endeavors because of the time commitment to athletics.

The major theme, *Undefined Career Path*, was born out of an absence of specific, traditional career goals, combined with little or no assistance from their universities. All of the participants in this study responded that they never developed specific career ambitions although academic achievement was highly valued. Every participant’s goal was to play in the NFL. Harrison and Lawrence (2004) found the opposite to be true during their study, as “Career Path Well Defined” was a major theme in their work. Harrison and Lawrence (2004) found that participants contemplated their future careers and recognized the significance of planning their career choice. The diverging

conclusions between the two studies may be due to the participants in each study. Harrison and Lawrence (2004) interviewed Division II student-athletes from various sports, as opposed to the premier conference in the highest level of revenue sport competition. The expectation about playing professional sports was likely to be very different, causing for dissimilar levels of preparation into a traditional career (Kolenich, 2011). The high level of association of sport and identity the participants in this study exhibited, which caused their undefined career path is consistent with the works of both Marthinus (2007) and Levy (2005). The aforementioned studies observed that athletes whose self-identity was too attached to their sport participation often resisted efforts to develop identities outside of sports. This leads to problems with self-concept, psychosocial difficulties, and occupation-related difficulties at the termination of a sports career.

Last, student-athletes in this study demonstrated remorse for not taking complete responsibility for their career transitioning process, resulting in the theme *Career Transition Regret*. The origin of their regret was due to the assumption concerning the support they would receive from their school, athletic department and/or coaching staff. This finding is important because it suggests a potential milestone in the lifecycle of student-athlete career transitioning where these participants' career preparation began to go astray. Allen said:

There was not an unwillingness to plan for a (career) transition; I just didn't know how to do it. I should've done more (to plan for a career transition) because I thought there'd be more people to assist me along the way, and I learned that it didn't work like that.

Career transition success for those participants who did not play in the NFL was defined differently than those who played professionally. The NFL provided structure and the ability to earn a relatively high salary immediately after college. The participants who played football professionally considered their career transition successful, while those who did not play in the NFL stated that their transition was unsuccessful. This is consistent with Levy (2005), which stated that so-called “successful career transitions” are relative outcomes to each athlete. Additionally, these findings are supported by Marthinus’ (2007) work, which provides an explanation on why the non-NFL participants labeled their career transition as unsuccessful. Marthinus (2007) found that athletes who involuntarily completed their sports career showed occupational difficulties and complications with establishing their post-sport life.

### **Summary**

During this discussion, the major themes were summarized and interpreted, the importance of the findings were conferred, and comparisons were be drawn between the results of this study and current literature on student engagement and career transitioning. The theme *Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities* emerged from participant’s responses of having few experiences with “high-impact” activities. Next, participants in this study identified *Internships* as a highly desired opportunity despite never taking part themselves. *Undefined Career Path* is the major theme that materialized from an absence of specific, traditional career goals, combined with little or no assistance from their universities. Finally, participants demonstrated remorse for not taking complete responsibility for their career transitioning process, resulting in the theme *Career Transition Regret*.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusions, Implications and Future Direction**

Student engagement into educationally purposeful activities has been widely acknowledged as having influence on desirable college outcomes. The full extent of student engagement's effect has yet to be determined. The purpose of this study was to conduct exploratory, qualitative research into the role of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities on the career transition of football student-athletes in the Southeastern Conference by answering the following research questions: how do SEC football players perceive their educationally purposeful engagement activities during college? To what extent do their perceptions of purposeful engagement activities influence career transitions? Accomplishing the goals of this research required testing the hypothesis that these former student-athletes perceived a positive relationship between their engagement in educationally purposeful activities and their career transition.

### **Conclusions**

The influence of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities on desired college outcomes is well-documented; however, the actual contribution of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities, as defined by Kuh (2008), was marginal in this study. By participating in at least two high-impact activities during their undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one in relation to their major field, every student-athlete in this study adequately engaged. Despite being sufficiently engaged, half of the participants did not graduate. The participant's graduation rate was independent of their student engagement.

Furthermore, the findings of this study aligned with the objectives set forth. Results of this qualitative research uncovered the following four major themes: (a) Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities; (b) Desire for Internship Opportunities; (c) Undefined Career Path; and (d) Career Transition Regret. The themes *Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities* and *Desire for Internship Opportunities* addressed the first research question, “How do SEC football players perceive their educationally purposeful engagement activities during college?” The former football players in this study did not have enough experience to make a determination about their educationally purposeful engagement activities during college. Additionally, the student-athletes did not have the guidance or time required to participate in the only activity they perceived to be beneficial, internships. The themes *Undefined Career Path* and *Career Transition Regret* addressed the second research question, “To what extent do their perceptions of purposeful engagement activities influence career transitions?” The former SEC football players did not perceive a positive relationship between their purposeful engagement activities and career transition. The hypothesis of this study was disproven. These findings help define the boundaries of student engagement, as defined by Kuh (2008). Furthermore, the results of this study will become data in the analytical framework on student engagement, and not as generalizations of all student-athletes.

### **Implications**

There are currently few distinctive criteria for student engagement associated with revenue sport student-athletes, or any athlete for that matter, but participant responses suggest there should be more types of beneficial engagement activities for college athletes. Based on the study findings, athletic stakeholders can benefit from a distinct set

of student engagement criteria for revenue sport student-athletes, which include a range of purposeful activities related to academic and career transition support. Exploring relevant activities such as these will aid in research on student engagement of revenue sport student-athletes to create an accurate depiction of their college experiences.

In addition to contributing to the body of knowledge on student engagement, career transitioning, and student-athlete achievement, this study holds implications for student affairs professionals of student-athletes. For these professionals, the implication of this study is one of shared responsibility and collaboration. The outcomes of this study were linked, in large part, to a lack of collaboration and shared responsibility of student-athlete stakeholders. The theme, Limited Purposeful Engagement Activities, demonstrated failure on the part of their universities to engage these student-athletes in purposeful engagement activities. The same institutional neglect can be said for the emergence of the other themes, Desire for Internship Opportunities, Undefined Career Path and Career Transition Regret. The challenge of engaging a relatively high number of student-athletes to be successful academically, while preparing for career transition, is no longer the sole responsibility of student affairs professionals. Every stakeholder involved in the lives of student-athletes has the shared responsibility to function as a support network that enables overall student-athlete success. For example, I propose the Student-Athlete Well-Being Framework (SAWF).

The SAWF utilizes economic incentives to ensure three desired outcomes, including academic achievement, occupational preparation, and the physical well-being of student-athletes. This system will not only support student-athletes throughout the

lifecycle of their eligible tenure, but also prepares them for the next stage in their lives, transitioning to the traditional workforce.

In the SAWF, the university administration supports the athletic administration and holds them accountable for the three SAWF goals through the use of employee pay incentives when student-athletes meet specified objectives. In turn, the athletic administration holds accountable the coaching staff, academic support services, career services and athletic trainers/medical staff for the related responsibilities for which they are being held. One of the most effective ways of accountability in the workplace is by tying pay to performance of organizational objectives (Chingos, 2002). In this case, automatic pay incentives/disincentives will be in place to control the athletic department's compliance with achieving the three SAWF goals. Coaching staffs act as enforcers, holding student-athletes accountable for following the guidance of the support services (academic support, career services and athletic trainers/medical staff) through the use of additional physical conditioning or restricting practice/playing time. Academic support services are responsible for helping to identify college majors and provide tutorial/advisory services for coursework. Additionally, academic support services will be measured by the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate (APR), a team-based metric that accounts for the eligibility and retention of each student-athlete, each term (NCAA, 2015). Next, career services assists to provide practical job training and internships so student-athletes can either choose a career path or gain more experience in a chosen path. Furthermore, career services will be assessed by Comeaux's (2013) Career Transition Scorecard (CTS). The CTS seeks to "enhance the quality of student-athletes' career transition" by measuring the following general areas: access, retention, institutional

receptivity, and excellence/high achievement (Comeaux, 2013). Then, athletic training/medical support staff will conduct pre- and post-season physicals, including CT scans for contact sports. At the end of the student-athlete’s sport eligibility, the athletic trainers and medical staff would perform two things; first, a counseling evaluation to ensure a healthy detachment of self-identify from sport, which is a familiar career transitioning challenge (Levy, 2005). Second, an “exit physical” would be performed to identify the short and long-term physical damage that the rigor of college sports sometimes inflicts. Moreover, athletic training/medical support staff will be measured on whether or not they completed the aforementioned tasks. These stakeholders will simultaneously provide effective support to assist student-athletes in achieving their desired college outcomes without increasing the already heavy demands on the athletes.

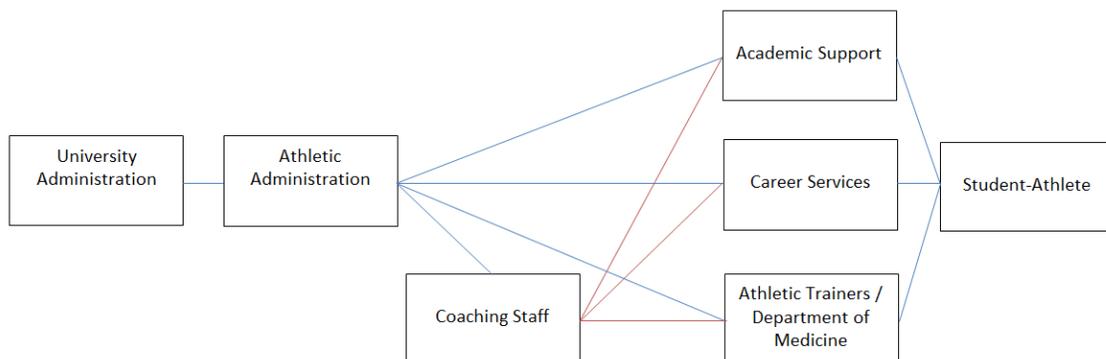


Figure 6.1 SAWF Organization Chart

Student-athlete rights, particularly those from revenue sports, headline the national news. In fact, the National Labor Relations Board decided in March 2014 to allow the Northwestern football team to vote on unionization (Heitner, 2014; Ohr, 2014).

If revenue sport student-athletes are not being compensated with the resources needed to succeed academically or career transition properly, the conditions will continue adding fodder to those who question the motives of intercollegiate athletics.

## APPENDIX A

### High Impact, Student Engagement Activities

#### Excerpt from:

Kuh, George D. (2008). "High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter." AAC&U, Washington, D.C. 34 pp.

The following are descriptions of high-impact activities:

#### First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research.

#### Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (see below). These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.

#### Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning (see below).

#### Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are

encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice "across the curriculum" has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

#### Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

#### Undergraduate Research

Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students' early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

#### Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

#### Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course.

The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

#### Internships

Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for "course credit," students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member. Capstone Courses and Projects Whether they're called "senior capstones" or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.

## APPENDIX B

### Marthinus (2007) Adapted Interview Guide

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You are being invited to take part in a research study about how college football student-athletes in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) perceive the relationship between their engagement into educationally purposeful activities and their career transition. You are invited to take part in this research study because you were formerly an SEC football student-athlete. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about four people to do so. Are you willing to participate?

##### Section 1: Beginning the interview

1. How old were you when you began your athletic career?
2. What got you into football to begin with?
3. Did you have an athletic hero? Who was he/she and what made him/her a hero to you?
4. What was the most important thing that has kept you playing football for so many years?
5. What did you find most enjoyable about football?
6. As far back as you can remember, what were your life goals athletically, academically and/or career-wise?

##### Section 2: Background

1. Growing up, who were your primary caretakers? What is their education level and profession?
2. How many siblings do you have? What is their education level and profession?
3. Did anyone else live with you while growing up?
4. What are your closest friends from high school doing professionally today?
5. Was your family particularly religious? If so, what religion?
6. What or who do you feel was the biggest influence on you growing up? Why?

### Section 3: Initiation stage

1. It's clear that you made a long-term commitment to football and achieved a high level. By commitment to sport we mean "Your desire and determination to keep doing what you do best, and that is playing at the highest levels of competition." How successful were you in the initial stages?
2. What was your main goal, short and long term, when you began participating in sport?
3. Were results important to you in the beginning stages and why?
4. Considering everything, both on and off the field, how much did you enjoy playing football? (1-7 Likert scale; 1 means you enjoyed most).
5. What valuable opportunities did you have by taking part in sport?

### Section 4: Maturity stage

1. When you first began college, what were your sport and non-sport goals?
2. Were you prepared to deal with the additional demands of being an SEC football college student-athlete? How did you deal with these demands? What did you find most effective?
3. How many hours per week did you spend preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, and other activities related to your academic program)? Did you ever surprise yourself with how hard you worked at times to meet an instructor's standards? Did your campus environment emphasize spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work?
4. Did you ever discuss grades or assignments with an instructor? Did you ever discuss ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class? Did you receive prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral)? Did you talk about career plans with a faculty member or advisor?
5. Did you ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions? Did you ever work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments? Did you ever tutor or teach other students (paid or voluntary)? Did you discuss ideas from your

readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)?

6. During your last year of athletic eligibility, what were your sport and/or non-sport goals? What was your college major(s) at this time?

#### Section 5: Anticipation stage

1. Would you say there was an unwillingness or unawareness on your part to plan for transitioning into a traditional career field? What steps did you take?
2. Was there a structure in place to help you with your career transition (courses, programs, professors, teammates, other friends, family, coaches or administrators)? Describe.
3. Did you have any unresolved feelings/emotions about the end of your eligibility as a player? If so, who did you have to confide in?
4. Following your final college game, what were your sport and non-sport goals?
5. (Show the participant a list of high-impact activities) Did you participate in at least two high-impact activities during your undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one in relation to your major field?

#### Section 6: Actualization stage

1. After you left undergraduate school, whether you graduated or not, how were you earning a living and/or developing your career? What were your goals?
2. Explain some of the challenges and successes you had while starting your career.
3. What role, if any, do you feel “student engagement” played in your career transition?
4. What do you feel helped/hurt your career transition?
5. Do you currently have any unresolved feelings/emotions about your career transition from being a student-athlete? If so, how do you cope?
6. What suggestions would you give current and future SEC football players to help them better deal with the end of their sports eligibility and prepare for career transitioning?
7. Do you feel your overall career transition from being an SEC college football player to the traditional workforce? Why?

8. What is your current profession?

## APPENDIX C

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

#### **The Influence of Participation in Educationally Purposeful Activities on the Career Transitioning of Division I Football Players**

##### **WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about how college football student-athletes in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) perceive the relationship between their engagement into educationally purposeful activities and their career transition. You are invited to take part in this research study because you were formerly an SEC football student-athlete. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about four people to do so.

##### **WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?**

The person in charge of this study is Ronnie Riley of University of Kentucky Department of Kinesiology and Health Promotion. He is being guided in this research by Eddie Comeaux, Ph.D. and Robert Shapiro, Ph.D. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

##### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, determine how SEC football players perceive their educationally purposeful engagement activities during college? Next, uncover to what extent do their perceptions of purposeful engagement activities influence career transitions? By doing this study, we hope to learn how to improve the quality of purposeful engagement activities and the career transition of college football student-athletes in the SEC.

##### **WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

The interview will be conducted in-home or over the telephone. The time length of the interview is one session for 90-120 minutes.

##### **WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

You will be asked to answer questions from the Interview Guide. Section one of the Interview Guide, Beginning the Interview, serves a procedural and informational function. The line of questioning will begin our conversation, establish trust, and create a standard to measure the consistency of your answers later in the interview by recollecting portions of your statements. The interview will begin with questions related to your motivations for early athletic participation. Section two, Background, seeks to explain heredity and environment as determining factors of human personality. These questions uncover the influence of your values, family support system, close friends, and nurturing influences on your character as a student-athlete. Section three, Initiation Stage, will achieve two outcomes. First, it will continue to uncover your motivations and priorities set on football, academics, and preparation for a traditional work career. Second, it helps

us to continue building trust and further develops our interviewing relationship. Section four, Maturity Stage, refers to your actual eligibility as a Southeastern Conference football player. This is the phase during the interview when you are given more independence to communicate your priorities in regards to football, academics, and preparation for a traditional work career. The purpose of this section is to shed light on how you balanced athletic and academic priorities, and what role certain educational practices played in your preparation for a traditional work career. Section five, Anticipation Stage, is the period from the end of SEC football eligibility to the expiration of your athletic scholarship. The purpose of this stage is to explore certain educational practices, and how you contemplated and prepared for your impending career transition into the traditional workforce after your football eligibility had ended. Section six, Actualization Stage, is the period of actual career transitioning. We will discuss your life after undergraduate school, despite your graduation status. The purpose of these questions is to gain a final measure of your perception on the level of success that certain educational practices had on your career transitioning into the traditional workforce. Uncovering those perceptions is impactful because they will reveal your personal measures of success.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

**WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

**IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?**

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

**WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?**

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

**WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?**

We will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. The Primary Researcher will keep the research results in a password protected computer and/or a locked file cabinet in Kentucky and only he will have access to the records while working on this project. The Primary Researcher will finish analyzing the data by December 2012, but will retain the data for six years after the study has been completed. The Primary Researcher will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. If tape recordings are made, only the Primary Researcher will have access to them. The tapes will not be presented to anyone else and will be erased or destroyed immediately after they have been transcribed.

We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky's Office of Research Integrity.

#### **CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?**

If you decide to take part in the study, you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons

#### **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the researcher, Ronnie Riley at 859-492-8044. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this

research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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