BARRIERS TO PERSISTENCE AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF NON-COGNITIVE VARIABLES.

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Presents a study on the role non-cognitive variables may play in persistence among African American student athletes. Cognitive variables affecting persistence; Non-cognitive personal and institutional variables which are barriers to persistence in the African American and student athlete populations.

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For many universities which sponsor intercollegiate athletics programs, it is a constant battle to maintain the balance between academic success and competitive success. There is a great deal of criticism and discussion both on and off college campuses regarding the low graduation rates of athletes, particularly African American males competing in the sports of football and basketball. In response, the NCAA implemented legislation that focused on the academic progress of the student athletes. Additionally, individual institutions hasten to implement academic and student service programs aimed at improving the graduation rates of athletes on their campuses. Unfortunately, these programs are often initiated without gaining an understanding of the student population they are designed to serve. Understanding the variables affecting persistence in a particular student population, at a particular institution is the first step in developing retention programs. There are many variables that affect persistence in college students. The variables are typically categorized as either cognitive (intellectual) or non-cognitive (attitudinal or motivational). The purpose of this article is to heighten the reader's awareness about the role non-cognitive variables may play in persistence among African American student athletes.

University administrators and faculty across the country are working to enhance persistence and graduation rates at their respective institutions. Certain subgroups of the student population prove to be more challenging than others; for example; nontraditional older students, students under prepared for higher education, learning disabled, first generation college students, and minority students. The subgroup of intercollegiate athletes and even more specific, African American male athletes may fall into one or more of these categories. The graduation rates for African American men participating in the revenue producing sports of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I football and basketball have historically been low. Although the graduation rates for this group of athletes have improved over the past several years, they are still lower than their white teammates. The NCAA has taken steps aimed at improving educational persistence and graduation rates for athletes in its member institutions. The measures have a limited affect and cannot stand alone to improve persistence of individual athletes at individual institutions. To be effective, programming and intervention strategies must be founded on a basic understanding of the characteristics of the institution as well as the characteristics of the student or subgroups of students.

Many variables affect a student's decision to remain or leave college. Variables that affect persistence are generally categorized as cognitive (intellectual), non-cognitive (motivational) and environmental. Environmental variables are further broken down into internal or institutional and external variables (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1993). The variables act together to influence persistence,
unfortunately, research efforts and programming efforts historically focus on the cognitive aspects. Although the focus of this literature review is the non-cognitive variables associated with persistence, it may benefit the reader to become familiar with some of the mandates imposed on college athletes that focus on cognitive aspects.

**Cognitive Variables Affecting Persistence**

Traditionally, academic success and persistence are measured in terms of cognitive dimensions such as scores on standardized tests, GPA, grades and graduation rates. Institutions routinely assess persistence by evaluating graduation rate. Annually, the NCAA requires all member institutions to report graduation rates of student athletes. Although the data is conservative since it only encapsulates students who enter institutions as freshman and who receive athletic aid, it is useful to demonstrate the significance of the problem in African American student athletes (NCAA 2001, table 1).

In 1990, perceived abuses of athletes and low graduation rates prompted an in-depth study of college athletics by an independent organization called the Knight Commission. Following a critical analysis of college athletics, the commission made several recommendations to the NCAA and to college presidents. The recommendations sought to improve graduation rates and to strongly encourage institutional oversight of student athletes' academic progress. The resulting mandates adopted by the NCAA focus primarily on the cognitive aspects of persistence (Knight, 1993). Familiarity with the mandates for academic standards is useful in understanding the minority student athletes' access to higher education, level of academic integration and degree commitment.

Among the recommendations were increased academic requirements for freshmen eligibility and a requirement of degree progress by continuing student athletes. The NCAA adopted four mandates aimed at improving the academic success of college athletes. The most controversial of the mandates is an amendment to Proposition 48 adopted in 1993. Proposition 48 Initial Eligibility Standard originally adopted in 1983, stipulates that for a freshman student to qualify to be eligible in college he must meet a standard index of combined GPA and SAT scores. Additionally, the student must earn a passing grade in a number of specified core classes in high school. The report recommended increasing the number of core courses and that freshmen and lower division transfer students not meeting the standard must sit out of competition during their first year at the institution (Knight, 1993). Proposition 48 is criticized for being too strict and discriminatory towards minority students who traditionally score poorly on standardized tests and leave high school under prepared for college level work (Brooks & Althouse, 1993; Etzel, Ferrante, & Pinkney, 1996; Sedlacek & Gaston, 1992).

Additional recommendations embrace the overall "No Pass, No Play" philosophy recommended by the Knight Commission.

First, Satisfactory Progress in Degree Requirements stipulates that athletes in Division I sports programs must complete 25%, 50% and 75% of the degree program requirements in their third, fourth and fifth years. Second, Satisfactory Progress in the School Year stipulates that the student must take and pass three quarters of their courses during the regular academic year, not in
summer school. Third, Minimum Grade Point Average Requirement, provides that any student athlete entering his third year of enrollment must maintain a percentage of the minimum GPA required for the institution's degree programs and graduation (Knight, 1993).

In addition to the mandates, the NCAA encourages universities to implement academic advisement programs specifically for student athletes. These programs focus primarily on determining initial eligibility, continuing eligibility (degree progress), planning class schedules and organizing study hall and tutoring programs. Academic advisors for student athletes are often pulled between evaluating the requirements for athletic eligibility and meeting the educational and non-cognitive needs of the student (Roper & McKenzie, 1988). Academic advisors may not have the skills to attend to the student athlete's personal or non-cognitive issues, or the needs of the minority athlete (DeFrancesco, 1996; Scales, 1991). If cognitive variables alone determined persistence of student athletes, the strict eligibility requirements and the "no pass, no play" philosophy of the NCAA, along with academic advisement programs should have more impact on the graduation rates of student athletes.

Non-Cognitive Variables Affecting Persistence

In the years following adoption of the new standards, graduating classes of student athletes show a rate only one to two percent higher than the general student body (NCAA, 2000). Students with low academic ability and high commitment are likely to persist until they become academically ineligible and are forced out of school (Tinto, 1993). Some student athletes fail to meet the academic standards or significant degree progress, their eligibility to compete is withdrawn and they leave the institution. The contradiction is when student athletes demonstrate academic success, makes progress towards a degree, and then leaves school once their eligibility expires. When students have the ability and are in good academic standing and still make the decision to leave college, other variables must be considered (Astin, 1975; Moores, 1989; Tinto, 1993). Measures of cognitive variables such as GPA, correlate with persistence among traditional white college students, but not with persistence among non-traditional, non-white students (Sedlacek & Gaston, 1992).

Many experts in the field of student change and student services believe the student athlete population on a college campus fits the definition of "non-traditional" or "special needs" student groups (Lang, Dunham & Alpert, 1988; Person & LeNoir, 1997; Petrie, 1993; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987; Sedlacek & Gaston, 1992). The experiences of a student athlete on campus are certainly atypical of the traditional college experience. The students lead stressful lives, have unique and time consuming demands placed upon them, and often face stereotyping and discrimination on campus and in the classroom (Sedlacek, 1992).

Non-cognitive variables are personal or social beliefs, motivations and attitudes of the individual student or members of the campus community that affect the student's decision to persist. Several studies by Sedlacek and associates demonstrated the validity of non-cognitive variables in predicting persistence of African American college students and student athletes (Sedlacek & Webster, 1978; Sedlacek, 1987; Sedlacek & Gaston, 1992; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987). They demonstrated, through the use of an instrument called the Noncognitive Questionnaire (NCQ), that non-cognitive variables are stronger indicators of continuing enrollment in African
American students than SAT scores. The NCQ was designed to evaluate seven noncognitive dimensions including self-concept, ability to work towards long-term goals and ability to understand and deal with racism. Although they found persistence in African American students early in their education correlated with pre-college academic success and strong support for long-term goals; they found that later in the student's college career, persistence was correlated with the ability to recognize and manage discrimination and involvement in community service. Young and Sowa (1992) evaluated cognitive and non-cognitive variables as predictors of academic success in a large group of African American student athletes at a large Division I school. Their findings indicate that both non-cognitive variables and cognitive variables should be used to evaluate the academic potential of this group of students. They recommend that following admission, non-cognitive variables be used to assess the needs of African American student athletes, and that the student athletes participate in practical sessions to develop non-cognitive skills such as goal commitment and long term goal setting.

Growing evidence suggests that nonacademic or non-cognitive variables may play a more critical role in persistence of minority students and special needs students such as student athletes. Yet, institutions continue to use primarily cognitive variables to select and admit student athletes, evaluate their eligibility to compete and implement intervention programs.

**Barriers to Persistence**

Several non-cognitive personal and institutional variables have been identified as barriers to persistence in the African American and student athlete populations. The variables to be discussed here are commitment, integration, discrimination and isolation.

**Commitment**

Degree Commitment and Athletic Commitment

In Leaving College, Tinto (1993) describes the primary roadblock to persistence as the absence of commitment. Goal commitment is a strong predictor of persistence (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1993). Goal commitment is the strength of the individual student's goals of attending college and completing a degree. There are three aspects of goal commitment that need to be dissected and evaluated when discussing the student athlete population; degree commitment, athletic commitment and institutional commitment. The goal of attending college and the goal of completing a degree are two separate but related components of goal commitment. Often student athletes are committed to attending college to participate in sports, but are less committed to obtaining a degree (Blann, 1985; Briggs, 1996).

The student's level of goal commitment affects his motivation towards integrating into the academic component of going to college (Astin, 1982). Students with low academic ability and high commitment are likely to persist until they become academically ineligible and are forced out of school (Tinto, 1993). Astin found that African Americans with low degree aspiration and vague goals are more likely to leave school (1975). In the past, student athletes with marginal academic ability and low commitment to degree attainment were kept in school until their eligibility expired and then allowed to drop out (Lang et al, 1988; Person & LeNoir, 1997).
"Majoring in Eligibility", as the practice is called, means taking the basic courses only, avoiding difficult courses, regardless if they count towards a major (Hurley & Cunningham, 1984). Although this practice has been minimized by the NCAA mandate for degree progress, loopholes still exist. For example, at some institutions, a continuing student athlete not making degree progress in one major can switch majors and be in compliance with the mandate for degree progress. An unfortunate side effect of the mandate for degree progress may be that student athletes are advised into majors in which they have little interest, but degree progress is easier to maintain.

The literature pertinent to this discussion falls into the areas of student change, persistence, retention and student services, and involves some commonly used terms. When discussing retention in higher education, students are described as persisters, attainers, or dropouts. Persisters are students who continue college enrollment until they complete their degree requirements. They may be transfers from other schools as long as there has been no interruption in their enrollment. Attainer is a term used to describe a student who leaves college prior to graduation after they have met a personal or professional goal. Students are classified as dropouts if they leave college and never return to resume their education at any time (Lenning, 1980). The term dropout implies negative or bad behavior, and may be incorrectly used when describing student athletes. Many athletes, when entering college, want only to extend their athletic careers, or to attain the status associated with college athletes, not to earn a degree (Lang et al, 1988). If the institution does not change or influence this goal, then the student who leaves before graduation may view himself as an attainer, not a dropout.

The notion that all student athletes enter college with the goal of education and attaining a degree is a misconception. The Center for the Study of Athletics, with the support of the American Institutes for Research collected data from student athletes and comparison students at forty-two Division I colleges. The data revealed that education was not African American student athletes' primary reason for attending college. If they had not been recruited for athletics, there was a good chance they would not have attended college with the intention of getting a degree. The data showed that 44% of the African American and 20% of non-African American football players at predominantly white institutions said they almost certainly expected to become professional athletes. Also, the data revealed that 7% of the African American and 3% of the non African American basketball athletes said they expected to become professional athletes (Center, 1989). The actual progression from collegiate sports to professional sports is extremely low. Many young men are left adrift with neither a professional sports contract nor a degree that could secure a career. Less than 2% of NCAA senior football players are drafted by the NFL, and approximately 1.3% of senior basketball players are drafted by the NBA (Probability, 2000).

Long Term Goal Setting and Career Maturity

Research in the student athlete population demonstrates that student athletes, especially African American males, do not develop or make commitments to long-term goals. Using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program from 1986, Briggs found that football and basketball players have significantly lower degree attainment and degree aspirations than their counterparts.
in other sports. Most importantly, Briggs found in her study that the degree aspirations of the football and basketball athletes dropped, while the degree aspirations of athletes in other sports were unchanged (1996). This is likely a result of the students' misconception about the opportunities for advancement into the professional ranks and their total immersion into their roles as an athlete.

The common perception is that student athletes fail to develop and use goal setting principles. To the contrary, the tendency is for competitive athletes to be highly focused on immediate outcome goals and objectives, such as making the team, setting a record, winning a championship and earning a scholarship. It is the absence of long-term realistic goal setting that is of concern. The student athletes may routinely use goal setting in the athletics arena and fail to carry the skills over to other life experiences (Etzel et al, 1996).

Career maturity encompasses the student's ability to formulate career plans, the enhancement of career development tasks or internships and the level of certainty about one's intended career (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Obviously a number of factors besides athletic participation influence the athlete's career aspirations. Factors such as race, socioeconomic background, parent's level of education and jobs all influence how the student considers his future career goals. Many African American students are more likely than their white teammates to be the first member of the family to go to college. A consequence of this is that there is little direction from the family about a college education and how to gain entry into desirable careers and professions, beyond the goal of attainment of a college degree. The parents may not be equipped with enough information to counsel the young men about planning for a high status/high paying jobs or careers (Etzel et al, 1996). Additionally, it is often the students' athletic achievements over their academic achievements that are applauded by family and friends. The focus on athletic ability may distract the young man from looking at other options or aspirations (Scales, 1991).

There is little question that college athletes demonstrate a high level of commitment. Rather the question is the focus and extent of their commitment. The young men who participate in college athletics have already demonstrated discipline and commitment to survive a rigid selection process. Commitment is demonstrated by their willingness to spend hours of mental and physical labor dedicated to the pursuit of a goal. The nuances of goal commitment that need to be clarified in this population are the differences between the goal of attending college and earning a degree, and the relationship between commitment to athletics and commitment to degree attainment.

Institutional Commitment

A separate component of commitment to be considered is institutional commitment. This is the student's desire to attend a particular institution and obtain a degree from a particular institution (Astin, 1982). It is important to recognize that there is a distinction between the athlete's commitment to competition and athletics and to the institution. The student athlete, above all other students, would appear to be very committed to the institution. He invests hours of mental and physical labor to prepare to compete for the intercollegiate team. Wearing the name of the institution on his back, the athlete travels across the state and across the country to compete. Is this truly an indication of institutional commitment, or simply an indication of his commitment
to his goal of extending his athletic career or commitment to the coach, his teammates and possibly the athletic department?

Institutional commitment may come from a number of sources. The student: may have a family member who attended the university and he wants to continue the tradition. The university may have a long history and tradition within the community in which the student lives or in which he grew up. It has been my experience that student athletes identify with a college or university through athletics. Sedlacek has found that identification with the institution correlates highly with retention in African American students (1987). When an athlete is recruited to a college, he is recruited by a coach to be a football player or basketball player, or to be a "Bruin", "Trojan" or "Matador". He is not recruited as a student, as a biology major, or education major. The strength of the image or reputation of the athletic program may transcend athletics to include commitment to the institution (Sedlacek, 1987). In contrast, if the student athlete perceives the institution's image or reputation to be inferior, he may be reluctant to commit. In college athletics this may occur in situations in which the student was not recruited by the school of his ambitions and settled for a school in a lower division or a lesser known reputation. I have often observed that the young men participating in football and basketball are so eager to compete and extend their athletic career; that the record or reputation of the program is inconsequential. Again, this demonstrates that student athletes can be committed to athletics and not to the institution. If a student athlete has no prior history or exposure to an institution, then it would be in the interest of the coach and athletic administrators to actively develop the institutional commitment once the student is on campus. Commuter and community type of colleges with a high percent of non-traditional students may find it even more difficult to foster institutional commitment. A high level of institutional commitment can enhance the student's willingness to get more involved in the social and academic aspects of the campus and visa versa, thereby increasing his commitment to degree attainment. Unfortunately the variables to be discussed subsequently; lack of integration, discrimination and isolation can prohibit the development of institutional commitment as well as social and academic integration in African American student athletes.

Integration

It appears that the presence and strength of goal commitment decreases the probability of dropping out. Goal commitment leads to higher academic development and performance, which results in enhanced academic integration, which in turn increases goal commitment. A high level of institutional commitment increases the likelihood of the student interacting socially with peers, other students, staff and faculty. Increased social integration in turn leads to increased satisfaction with campus experiences and therefore enhances institutional commitment. Unlike the typical student, there are institutional and environmental variables that may work against the student athlete's attempts to integrate into the academic and social communities of the campus.

Tinto (1993) describes the barriers to integration:

The absence of integration appears to arise from two sources referred to here as incongruence and isolation. Incongruence, or what is sometime referred to as lack of institutional fit, refers to that state where the individuals perceive themselves as being substantially at odds with the institution. In this case, the absence of integration results from the person's judgement of the
undesirability of integration. Isolation, however, refers to the absence of sufficient interactions whereby integration may be achieved. It is that condition in which persons find themselves largely isolated from the daily life of the institution (p. 50).

The opportunity that college athletics offers to African American men creates a paradox. Many of these young men would not have the resources to attend college if not for the opportunities that their athletic skills present. The coach, as an emissary of the college, recruits the athlete and convinces him to attend. Yet the student may not be provided the time or resources to navigate the educational arena. Tinto postulates that the student's inability to integrate into the social and academic life of the institution can be a significant factor in his inability to persist (1993). The student athlete's inability to integrate may be, in part, due to his inadequate skills, his unwillingness to participate, or inopportune opportunity to participate in the social and academic communities.

Integration is a two-way street. The institution must provide an environment that is comfortable to the student, and he must be willing to take time to integrate (Roper & McKenzie, 1988). Social integration into the campus communities may include developing close friendships, memberships in clubs and groups, informal relationships with faculty and staff and attendance at social or cultural campus events. Academic integration into the campus community may include academic achievement (GPA, dean's list, etc), frequency of communications with advisors, formal communications with faculty and career counselors, memberships in majors club, and participation in study groups and internships. Person and LeNoir (1997) studied African American male student athletes at eleven different institutions. Their objective was to discover factors that contribute to retention. They found that 70% of the persisters participated in tutoring programs and about half of the students participated in mentor type programs. Additionally, 70% of the students participated in academic advisement and study groups, while 33% participated in research or internship activities.

The challenges the African American student athlete takes on when entering college can be overwhelming. Even if the athlete is academically prepared to meet the challenges of higher education, he is still likely to encounter roadblocks to overcoming incongruencies. At the minimum, persistence in college requires individuals to adjust, both socially and intellectually, to the new and different environment of college (Tinto, 1993). While many visualize the college athlete as the big man on campus, in reality the situation can be quite the opposite. As a high school senior with outstanding athletic abilities or performances, the student is often recognized and given positive feedback by his peers, faculty and the high school community. Once he enters college, the status he once achieved is gone, and he must begin anew both socially and academically. The recruited athlete is made to feel elite and important by the coach. After the student enters the college, the coaches' attention moves to the team, the upcoming season and the next group of recruits. The athlete loses the individual attention and is often left to transition into the new environment with feelings of abandonment and a diminished sense of importance (Person & LeNoir, 1997).

Affiliations with others in the campus community enable the student to gain the skills to adapt to a variety of roadblocks that may hinder commitment. The student's ability to adjust may be shaped by the initial interactions and experiences he has on campus. As is often the case, the
student athletes' orientation to the campus, especially in football, is through athletic activities not academic ones. In Division I and II athletic programs, the athletes are completely immersed in three weeks of pre-season camp and may begin the competitive season before school even starts. The athlete immediately becomes involved in the athletic environment and is distracted from initiating relationships with other communities on campus. Institutions have recognized the need to orient students to the campus environment to develop a sense of familiarity and comfort. Freshman student athletes are routinely exposed to institutional and athletic department orientation programs. Transfer students are inconsistently exposed to the campus environment and are often excluded from in orientation programs. Ideally, orientation programs need to extend to the transfer student population. It would not be unusual for a transfer student's first day on campus to be the first day of classes or an athletic practice.

Boone interviewed former athletes at Memphis State who did not graduate. The athletes felt they were not integrated into the life of the campus. They did not identify with any aspects of the campus except athletics. They related very few contacts on campus with students and faculty (1987). In the AIR report on the experiences of African American student athletes, basketball and football players at predominantly white institutions reported greater difficulty in getting to know other students and being liked by other students for just being themselves (Center, 1989).

Involvement in Campus Communities

Integrating and adjusting to the social environment not only requires time and interest from the student but the availability of opportunities on campus. There are commuter and community campuses with strong athletics programs that struggle to provide a traditional undergraduate social environment. Because the institution fails to provide or offer opportunities for social integration, does not necessarily mean that the student will fail to successfully integrate. The student athlete may find adequate sense of belonging, support and friendship within the subculture, in this case the athletic team (Tinto, 1993).

The subculture of the team may provide adequate social gratification but the lack of involvement in the academic process reduces the likelihood of persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini demonstrated through their research that the depth and frequency of interactions the student has with other members of the campus community, the more likely he is to persist. The researchers found this variable to be the single most important variable associated with the student's decision to leave college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Astin describes the importance of academic integration in his Theory of Student Involvement. Student involvement is the “amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experiences, how devoted or committed the student is towards academics” (1984). He proposes that the more the student is involved, the more likely he is to persist. The student athlete, because of his demanding schedule, is physically alienated from the academic world. The African American male athlete, because of inadequate academic preparation or discrimination, may be further alienated from the academic world.

Discrimination
African American student athletes are subjected to discrimination because of their race, status as an athlete and academic ability. Sedlacek has conducted a great deal of research on African American college students including student athletes. He has repeatedly evaluated the non-cognitive variables that predict persistence in these minority groups. One factor that consistently predicts persistence in the African American student athlete is his ability to recognize and deal with racism (1987; 1992). Student athletes are treated with prejudice and discrimination by association as minorities and non-traditional students. Person and LeNoir describe this challenge of being a minority as "negotiating the dualism", the dualism of being an African American student and being a student athlete (1997). Both roles are a minority on the typical college campus, and both roles are subject to prejudices and discrimination (Leach & Conners, 1984; Olsen, 1996). The typical African American college student is confronted with challenges such as racism and academic discrimination. The challenges become even greater with the added burden of the time demands and the physical and psychological stress placed on athletes (Roper & McKenzie, 1988).

The student athletes' perceived elite status adds to the inequity and discrimination. "There is a thin line between admiration and resentment by the university community" (Leach & Conners, 1984, p. 36). Faculty and students for the most part are unfamiliar with the specifics of operating an athletics program. Their perception is that the athletes are taking more than a fair share of the institution's resources and that the athletes and athletic department are being extended unusual privileges. This perception exists, whether it is true or not, and further increases the incongruence of student athletes. Often because of the special services or accommodations provided to the student athlete population, i.e. academic advisement, study hall, early enrollment, they are perceived by faculty and peers as spoiled and pampered. Sedlacek coined this prejudice against student athletes as "athletism" and recommends that orientation programs should help student athletes understand this "ism" along with racism (1992).

Athletes, especially African American males, are stereotyped by faculty and their classmates as low academic performers (DeFrancesco, 1996; Scales, 1984; Sedlacek & Gaston, 1992). A case study by De Francesco at an urban comprehensive university looked at the perceived differences between the needs expressed by student athletes and the perceptions of the faculty. When compared to other undergraduate students, 52% of African American student athletes felt it was harder for them to be regarded as serious students. Additionally, 53% of the faculty felt that compared to other students, it was harder for African American student athletes to be taken seriously as students (1996).

There is an assumption by many in the campus community that African American student athletes, especially in the high profile sports of football and basketball, are admitted under special circumstances. Not only do faculty and other campus community members marginalize student athletes' academic abilities, but the athletes often marginalize their own academic abilities. The athlete, after years of academic mediocrity and a focus on athletics over academics, may develop a low academic self-concept. Academic self-concept is how the student views his own abilities and interests in academics. The result of a low academic self-concept is a perpetuation of a low level of academic motivation, which inhibits academic integration (Leach & Conners, 1984). If the student is under-prepared or perceived to be under-prepared by the
faculty, the student will take a passive role in the learning process and his academic development will suffer (Astin, 1984).

The African American student athletes' perception of racial and athlete discrimination can affect their comfort level within the campus community which will result in further isolation and a decreased willingness to become involved with the campus community. Satisfaction with experiences and relationships on campus is directly tied to institutional commitment (Bean, 1981).

Isolation

Isolation can have detrimental effects on the student's ability to integrate into both the social and academic environments of campus. Excessive demands on the athlete's time and the natural clique that is formed by an athletic team, results in isolation. In Division I college athletic programs there is no such concept as the "off season". The athletes train, condition, practice, scrimmage, and watch film throughout the academic year. Although the NCAA regulates the number of hours per week and the number of weeks per academic year the coach can hold official practices, nothing prevents a highly dedicated athlete from self-imposing many more hours. The athlete with a break between classes is more likely to be found watching film of next week's opponent instead of in the library studying. A typical football or basketball scholarship athlete will start his day at 6 or 7 a.m., maybe in the weight room, and finish practice at 6 or 7 p.m. without any time set aside to socialize or study.

To compound matters, the nature of intercollegiate competition requires students to be absent from class a significant amount time during their season of competition. A typical basketball or football travel schedule will cause athletes to miss fifteen to twenty percent of their classes during a semester. Absenteeism for basketball athletes is a greater issue because the season overlaps both the Fall and Spring semesters. The student is likely to fall behind, miss important lectures, information and materials, all of which will make him feel less prepared and less orientated to the course. Even the student athlete with the best intentions at the start of the season can find himself behind academically.

The demands on the student athlete's schedule do not leave him time to socialize with classmates, integrate into the culture of the campus or develop relationships with other students and faculty. The athlete becomes intensely committed to athletic endeavors, he suffers from mental and physical fatigue, all of which result in low motivation to study or engage in academic projects. Role engulfment is a term that is used to describe the student's all encompassing involvement and focus on athletics, which leads to narrowing of educational aspiration and goal commitment (Briggs, 1996). The athlete is focused on the immediate goals of meeting the demands of his coaches and competitive schedule and extending his athletic career. The student is motivated by success on the field or on the court, not in the classroom.

The high profile of most college athletics programs attracts criticism in good times and in bad. The natural reaction of coaches and administrators is to circle the wagons, and protect the athletes from the problems of the outside world. Athletes are encouraged to spend their free time with their teammates, socializing, hanging out; they have study hall with teammates and even
live with teammates. While this philosophy may assist the coach to develop a tight knit team environment, the philosophy is a disadvantage to the athletes. The result is isolation from the rest of the campus environment and minimizes the student's opportunities to integrate into the campus community (Scales, 1991). They are involved in their own encapsulated world and are often encouraged by coaches and administrators to remain isolated. Student athletes are frequently discouraged from networking by the attitudes of students and faculty on campus who perpetuate negative stereotypes of student athletes. Conversely, isolation of the athletes from the campus community also makes it difficult for members of the community to become familiar with the needs and issues of student athlete population (Parham, 1993). The student's inability to recognize and deal with discrimination, a poor academic self-concept, and role engulfment are variables that may perpetuate the student's isolation from the academic community.

**Summary of Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature review was to give the practioneer an introduction to the concept of non-cognitive variables as an important component of persistence among African American male intercollegiate athletes. Many variables, cognitive variables, as well as non-cognitive interact to affect the students' decision to leave or remain in college (Astin, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Research has demonstrated that traditional measures of cognitive variables correlate with persistence in the traditional white college student population, but not in the non-traditional, non-white student population. Non-cognitive variables may play a more important role in the persistence of non-traditional minority college students, such as African American male intercollegiate athletes. The non-cognitive variables discussed were commitment, integration, discrimination and isolation. The level of integration and the presence of discrimination and isolation will ultimately affect the student's level of commitment.

Three components of commitment were described; goal commitment, athletic commitment and institutional commitment. Although student athletes may appear to be highly committed to pursuing athletic endeavors, they may be less committed to earning a college degree. Student athletes with low commitment to attaining a degree and low commitment to the institution will have less interest in integrating into the campus environment. If student athletes have difficulty adjusting to the institutional environment and are subjected to discrimination, they will be less willing to integrate into the social and academic communities of the campus (Astin, 1975; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). Additionally, the athletes' intense involvement in practice and competition, effectively isolates them from the campus community which may limit their ability to integrate.

The presence and degree of impact the variables have on students is different at every institution. There is not a common college experience. Individual students and subgroups of students, such as student athletes or African Americans, interact or react differently to the campus environment. Persistence is determined in part by how the individual student's motivation and attitude toward attaining a degree fit with his experiences on campus. The student's willingness and ability to integrate into the social and academic communities of the campus is indicative of the student's level of commitment to attaining a degree.
In his book Leaving College, Tinto (1993) repeatedly makes the point: "The key to successful student retention lies with the institution, in its faculty and staff, not one formula or recipe" (p. 4). Although institutions may learn from the outcomes of experiences or research at other institutions, it is important for each institution to investigate the profile of persistence on its campus (Tinto, 1993).

It is likely in the near future that the NCAA, under constant pressure to improve graduation rates of student athletes, will implement even more rigid academic eligibility requirements. Stricter requirements will result in the elimination of opportunities for young men to participate in college athletics and still will not solve the problem of persistence of the student athletes who are granted admission into the world of higher education. Recognizing that non-cognitive variables play a role in persistence and identification of the noncognitive variables that predict the persistence in a particular subgroup such as student athletes will be an important part of the solution. This information will be useful in planning intervention strategies, mentoring and tutoring programs, career development programs, counseling and advisement programs as well as campus orientation programs for student athletes. As important, is imparting the importance of non-cognitive variables in retention of African American athletes to faculty, advisement staff, coaches and administrators.

Table 1 Graduation Rates - NCAA Division I National Statistics

Legend for Chart:

A - Student Characteristics
B - 1990
C - 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Student Athletes</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All African American Males</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Male Athletes</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All White Males</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Male Athletes</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Males - Football</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Males - Football</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Males - Basketball</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Males - Basketball</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


By Rhonda Hyatt, ED.D