

Between a Ball and a Harsh Place: A Study of Black Male Community College Student-Athletes and Academic Progress

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Abstract

Objective: This study examined to what extent differences exist in pre-college characteristics and academic performance between Black male student-athletes and their student-athlete peers.

Method: Data provided by the Florida Department of Education's PK-20 Education Data Warehouse (EDW) were analyzed as a function of group membership (gender and race), using descriptive analysis, cross-tabulations, and a one-way ANOVA. The sample included 513 cases, with White females comprising 36.3% of the sample, White males 24.3%, Black females 15.5%, and Black males 14.3%. Student-athletes' academic performance was operationalized using four continuous variables (grade point average [GPA], course credit hours enrolled, course credit hours earned, and credit hours enrolled/earned ratio) and one dichotomous variable (degree completion).

Results: Findings suggest that Black males earned 72% of the credit hours they attempted, which was less than all other examined groups. Within Black males, differences between socio-economic groups were also found. Individuals identified as high socio-economic status (SES) earned approximately 82% of credit hours enrolled, compared with those identified as low SES, which earned 67% of credit hours attempted. Between-group differences were also found when examining college readiness and percentage of degrees completed.

Contributions: This study contributes to the extant literature on student-athletes at community and 2-year colleges by providing insight into the potential impact

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individual characteristics have on academic performance outcomes for Black male student-athletes. The author also provides thoughtful consideration concerning how institutions and policy changes can positively affect these outcomes.

Keywords

academic performance, race, achievement gap, community college athletics, degree completion, Florida

Community colleges serve as a point of entry (and re-entry) to higher education for more than 12 million credit and non-credit seeking students each year—approximately half of the college-going population (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). Due to their espoused mission to provide all citizens with open access to higher education regardless of academic ability or previous higher education experience, community colleges attract and serve a highly diverse student population. Diversity within this context includes, but is not limited to, age, job experience, academic ability, socio-economic status (SES), and academic ambitions. Students often utilize these institutions to re-tool their skills to re-enter the workforce, participate in activities leading to lifelong learning, and earn credits toward a certificate or degree in their chosen field of study (Bahr, 2013a, 2013b). The literature further suggests that community colleges serve as a path to college athletics for men and women who have a desire to continue their athletic participation after high school (Horton, 2009a; Mendoza, Horton, & Mendez, 2012). Mendoza et al. (2012) suggested that “athletic programs often serve as the primary motivation for many individuals to pursue higher education, especially, perspective [*sic*] students from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds” (p. 202).

In 2012, more than 80,000 community college students participated in varsity athletics across the United States (Hoffman, Sweitzer, & Horton, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This total represents a small percentage of the number of boys and girls who participated in interscholastic athletics during the 2011-2012 school year within the 50 states and the District of Columbia (National Federation of State High School Associations [NFSHA], 2013). According to the NFSHA, more than seven million boys and girls participated in high school athletics that year. Given the small percentage of high school students who make the transition to college athletics, gaining access to higher education by way of athletic participation is a great accomplishment and financial benefit. As Mendoza et al. (2012) indicated, athletics can make the difference between going to a community college and not going to college at all for many prospective students. However, little research has documented or discussed the academic progress of student-athletes at the community college. Since 1980, fewer than 25 peer-reviewed articles have been written on the topic of student-athletes or athletics at 2-year or community colleges. Of these, only two used student-level data to examine students’ academic progress or outcomes (i.e., Knapp & Raney, 1988; Mendoza et al., 2012). Accordingly, much of our understanding of the academic

performance of student-athletes at the collegiate level is provided from data and examples collected from 4-year institutions. The scant empirical research on topics pertaining to community college student-athletes lends itself to further exploration of their individual characteristics and academic behaviors that serve as either positive or negative contributors to student success.

The present study was derived from a larger study that empirically tested the effect of athletic participation and institutional and individual characteristics on the academic performance of student-athletes at community colleges (Horton, 2009b). The previous study found that student-athletes earned more credits hours per semester and had higher grade point averages (GPAs) than non-athlete students. Although student-athletes outperformed their non-athlete peers, student-athletes were found to be less likely to earn a degree from the community college. The intent of this article is to discuss a subset of the larger study, Black males, by way of focusing on differences in individual characteristics and identified academic performance indicators between Black male student-athletes and their student-athlete peers. This goal is accomplished by examining pre-college (i.e., level of college readiness) and academic performance characteristics (i.e., credit hours completed, GPA, and degree completion) for a single cohort (2004-2005) of male and female student-athletes in a single state.

Given the intent of this study to explore the academic performance of Black males, cases were organized and analyzed by groups based on race and gender (e.g., Black males, Black females, White males, and White females). Although present within the given data set, male and female athletes from Asian American, Hispanic, and American Indian backgrounds were omitted from the discussion and analysis due to a low representation of student-athletes from these backgrounds (group totals <40). Accordingly, the research question of interest was as follows:

Research Question 1: To what extent do pre-college characteristics and the academic performance of Black male student-athletes differ from their student-athlete peers?

This discussion is a positive step toward closing the gap in the literature on the academic experiences of Black male student-athletes at community colleges. This stream of research has the potential to provide needed evidence to support the strength and role of athletic participation at the community college in opening access to higher education in general, and further the discussion concerning the academic support needs of special populations more specifically. As community colleges receive more national exposure and attention, it has become even more necessary to document students' performance with empirical data.

Contribution and Connection to the Literature

College Access and Academic Performance

Much has been written about the role of community colleges in creating equitable opportunities for individuals to gain access to postsecondary. The product of this

access, however, has not always been equal in terms of performance between groups based on individual characteristics. The unfortunate reality is that many students who begin their academic studies at a community college often leave before completing their intended academic goals (Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008). Within this group of non-completers, students of color are most often overrepresented. Students of color are not only more likely to enter college through the community college, they are more likely than their peers to underperform and leave their institution before meeting their intended goals (Greene et al., 2008; Lee & Ransom, 2011; Wood & Williams, 2013). The growing body of literature suggests that the achievement gap between African American and Hispanic students and their White counterparts continues to widen. In their 2008 study, Greene and colleagues found that despite the time and energy Black students invested in what they termed “educationally effective practices,” they were still found to underperform their White peers.

In spite of the complications associated with capturing academic performance and achievement, and in all the many ways achievement might be defined given the diversity of community college students, these and other findings support the need and importance of continued study of underrepresented populations within higher education. To further illustrate this point, Schuetz (2014) suggested that community college students often consider themselves a success if they are able to

complete a class or two to improve specific skills, or they complete as many classes as are needed to prepare for professional licensure, to move to a better job, or to another college without necessarily earning a certificate or associate’s degree on the way. (p. 613)

Horton (2009a) found that for student-athletes, “success is described as meeting academic requirements necessary to continue athletic participation . . . and being productive enough in the classroom and in their sport to continue in athletics at a four-year institution” (p. 19).

The large spectrum in which academic success and achievement have been measured, and myriad paths to these outcomes, led to a focus for this study on differences between groups based on performance indicators, rather than a focus on specific achievement or success indicator.

Black Male Participation in Higher Education

Given the achievement gap between Black males and their counterparts, this population has received much attention concerning access and academic achievement in higher education in recent years (Harris & Wood, 2013; Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014). Within these discussions, scholars have explored the factors that have proven beneficial to Black male achievement, as well as the challenges that confront them. For example, Bush and Bush (2010) found that contact with faculty members and peers had a positive relationship on achievement measures for Black males, such as GPA, 4-year transfer, and degree/certificate attainment. Using data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, Wood and Palmer (2013) found that students

who participated in extracurricular activities and those who had exposure to diversity self-reported they were very likely to transfer, rather than less likely. The research also highlights the challenges faced by Black males within higher education in general, and community colleges more specifically. Of Black males who do access higher education, most will leave college before reaching their intended goals (Strayhorn & Johnson, 2014; Wood & Williams, 2013), making this group less likely than Black women and individuals from all other racial groups to complete their degree within 6 years (Harper & Harris, 2012; Lee & Ransom, 2011).

Important to this study, Black males are also more inclined than their peers to rely on athletics as an avenue to access higher education and for future earnings (Beamon, 2010; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013; Horton, 2011). As a result of this reliance on athletics, they are expected to balance their academic studies and game and practice schedules (Parsons, 2013), and are often overburdened with high expectations from family for professional sports careers after college (Beamon, 2010). Scholars have further suggested that Black male student-athletes must continually overcome stereotypes concerning their focus on sports over academics and the perceptions of peers and faculty that they are less qualified, less prepared, and less concerned about their academic studies than those in the general student population (Comeaux, 2011; Horton, 2011).

Although much new knowledge has been contributed to our understanding of the experiences of Black males at the community college, our understanding of Black male student-athletes within higher education has been filtered through data and studies primarily focused on Black men at predominantly White and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) -affiliated institutions (Harper, 2009). Despite the overall value of research on Black males provided from the perspective of 4-year institutions, these studies add little new knowledge to better understanding the experiences of Black male student-athletes at the community college. Wood and Williams (2013) suggested that caution should be taken when applying research from Black males at 4-year institutions to those at community colleges, due to significant differences concerning their backgrounds and experiences. Specifically, they suggest that Black males at the community college are more likely to be older, be independent, have dependents, and are less likely to have high degree expectations, which further support the need and significance of this study.

Athletics at the Community

Athletics have been present at community colleges since the early inception of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) in 1939. Approximately 664 institutions or 60% of all public community colleges in the United States sponsor at least one varsity athletic team (Castañeda, Katsinas, & Hardy, 2006; Hoffman et al., 2013). Within the United States, there are three major athletics governing associations for 2-year and community colleges. These athletic governing associations include the California Community College Athletics Association (CCCAA), NJCAA, and Northwest Athletic Association of Community Colleges (NWAACC). The NJCAA is the largest governing agency for athletics at community colleges and 2-year institutions.

As previously discussed, the literature on athletics and student-athletes at the community college is somewhat limited. Mendoza et al. (2012) noted athletics at the community college “provide a parallel extension of the open access mission by providing opportunities for enhancement of individual academic and athletic skills, building social and human capital, and development of personal discipline through both academic study and athletic participation” (p. 204). Evidence provided within the literature further suggests that student-athletes outperform their non-athlete peers in regard to credits hours earned, GPA, and degrees earned (Kanter & Lewis, 1991; Mendoza et al., 2012). Within the context of community colleges, it could be argued that athletic participation increases the likelihood of success for student-athletes, rather than serve as distractor from academic performance, compared with students in the general population. With continued research, answers to these and other questions concerning student-athlete academic performance can be empirically tested.

Study Design and Methods

This study is a secondary data analysis of longitudinal student-level data intended to explore pre-college characteristics, academic performance, and outcomes of Black male student-athletes and their male and female counterparts. The conducted analyses relied on transcript data for student-athletes within the state system for a total of 10 academic terms. Data were provided by the Florida Department of Education’s PK-20 Education Data Warehouse (EDW) and Community College and Technical Center Management Information Systems (CCTCMIS). The sample consisted of student-athletes at 2-year institutions within the Florida community college system that sponsored at least one varsity athletic team during the 2004-2005 academic year. At the time of the original study, Florida’s community college system consisted of 28 institutions. Five institutions within the state did not sponsor at least one varsity athletics team; therefore, these institutions and students attending these institutions were excluded. In addition, three institutions sponsored at least one varsity athletic team, but were excluded due to circumstances outside of the control of the researcher: missing data for student-athletes within the data set provided by the Florida Department of Education.

Description of Data Measures

The student sample was delimited to first-time full-time students within the 2004-2005 cohort ($n = 513$) that began their academic studies at an institution within the system that sponsored at least one varsity athletic team. The award of athletically related financial aid served as the only indicator available within the database to identify student-athletes. Given national athletic governing eligibility requirements, all students within the sample were enrolled full-time at their respective institutions during the fall term of the 2004-2005 academic year.

SES. A proxy variable was created based on the receipt of a Pell Grant, a need-based award given to undergraduate and post-baccalaureate students from low-income

backgrounds attending public and proprietary colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). For classification purposes, Pell Grant recipients were classified as low SES. Thirty-six percent ($n = 185$) of all student-athletes were categorized as low SES. Between groups, 67.9% of Black males were categorized as low income compared with 73.9% of Black females, 22.3% of White females, and 13.8% of White males.

College readiness. Another important aspect to consider when discussing college success is students' level of college readiness. Research over the past decade has found that college readiness greatly affects the cost of students' education and their ability to complete a degree or transfer in a timely manner (American College Test [ACT], 2013). Accordingly, a variable was constructed to identify students' level of college readiness using a multiple step process. First, student scores for the ACT were converted to Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores using the "ACT/SAT Conversion Table" provided by ACT (2008). Next, student scores from the College Placement Test (CPT) were converted to SAT scores using remedial cut score placement criteria from the state of Florida (Miami Dade College, n.d.)." The table was used to determine students' academic readiness for college-level math, reading, and writing, where 0 = college ready and 1 = not college ready. A categorical variable was then created based on the number of content areas remediation was needed. This variable was coded as 0 = if no remediation was needed, 1 = remediation in one content area was necessary, 2 = remediation in two content areas was required, and 3 = remediation was necessary in reading, writing, and math. Thirty-nine percent of student-athletes were identified as being college ready. This means that approximately 61% of all students within the sample entered college not ready for college-level work. Seventeen percent required remediation in at least one content area, 18.8% in two content areas, and 24.8% in all three content areas. Between groups, 45.7% of Black males required remediation in all three content areas, compared with 44.3% of Black females, 17.4% of White males, and 13.1% of White females. Figure 1 provides an illustration of students' academic performance (cumulative GPA) by groups and level of college readiness.

Continuous variables. Students' academic performance was operationalized using four continuous variables (cumulative GPA, course credit hours enrolled, course credit hours earned, and credit hours enrolled/earned ratio) and one dichotomous variable—degree completion. When examining GPA, White females had the highest mean GPA among their peers ($\mu = 2.73$) and Black males the lowest ($\mu = 2.27$; see Table 1). The median total semesters enrolled for the given sample was four semesters. In addition, of interest to this study was an examination of course credit hours enrolled and credit hours earned. All groups had similar numbers when examining mean credit hours enrolled each semester (group $\mu = 12.67$) likely contributed to NJCAA requirements for students to be enrolled full-time to be eligible to participate in their given sport. The variable "credit hours enrolled/earned ratio" was also computed. A ratio of 1.00 indicates that a student earned all credits hours he or she enrolled. Within the sample, White females (0.8057) and Black females (0.8051) had the highest credit hours

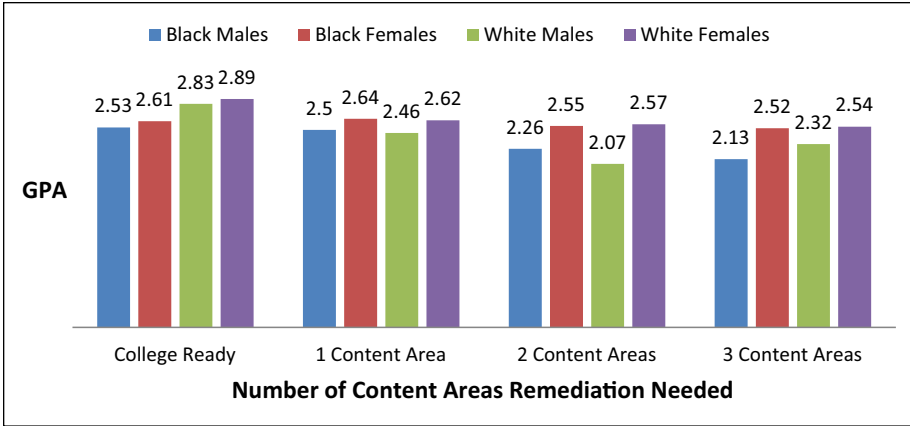


Figure I. GPA by group membership and level of college readiness.
 Note. GPA = cumulative grade point average.

Table I. Means and Standard Deviations for Continuous Variables by Groups.

Groups (n)	Credit hours enrolled (SD)	Credit hours earned (SD)	Credit Earned Ratio (SD)	Grade point average (SD)
Black males (81)	12.65 (3.19)	9.19 (4.38)	0.7220 (0.307)	2.30 (0.904)
High SES (26)	11.61 (3.69)	9.28 (3.54)	0.8195 (0.229)	2.45 (0.752)
Low SES (55)	13.13 (2.84)	9.02 (4.76)	0.6759 (3.29)	2.19 (0.963)
Black females (88)	12.28 (2.95)	9.97 (3.59)	0.8051 (0.209)	2.56 (0.643)
High SES (23)	12.78 (2.87)	10.41 (4.08)	0.8207 (0.266)	2.55 (0.816)
Low SES (65)	12.11 (2.98)	9.81 (3.43)	0.7996 (0.187)	2.57 (0.576)
White males (138)	12.95 (2.85)	10.39 (4.28)	0.7638 (0.291)	2.66 (0.922)
High SES (119)	12.91 (2.93)	0.761 (0.297)	0.7610 (0.297)	2.57 (0.893)
Low SES (19)	13.21 (2.33)	10.41 (4.08)	0.7815 (0.262)	2.57 (1.11)
White females (206)	12.67 (2.85)	10.54 (3.91)	0.8057 (0.238)	2.73 (0.823)
High SES (160)	12.81 (2.79)	10.75 (3.81)	0.8161 (0.228)	2.78 (0.822)
Low SES (46)	12.17 (2.79)	9.84 (4.22)	0.7697 (.270)	2.55 (0.810)
All student-athletes (513)	12.67 (2.93)	10.14 (4.06)	0.7811 (0.262)	2.59 (0.849)

Note. SES = socio-economic status.

enrolled/earned ratio. Black males had a mean course credit hours enrolled/earned ratio of 0.7220, which means, as a group, Black males earned approximately 72% of all credit hours attempted.

Pre-college characteristics. To gain a better understanding of the sample, it is important to discuss additional descriptive statistics for identified pre-college characteristics to

Table 2. Number and Percentage of Degrees and Certificates Earned by Groups.

Groups	Degree or certificate earned		Total
	No degree/certificate	Degree/certificate	
Black males	69 (85.2%)	12 (14.8%)	81
Black females	62 (70.5%)	26 (29.5%)	88
White males	94 (68.1%)	44 (31.9%)	138
White females	127 (61.7%)	79 (38.3%)	206
Total	52 (68.6%)	161 (31.4%)	513

provide further context. For example, students within the sample represented 29 different states, with the majority (72.3%) being from Florida. More than 90% of all students entered college within 1 year of completing high school. Forty-three percent ($n = 223$) of student-athletes participated in the team sports golf, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, and volleyball; 31% basketball; and 25.5% baseball. Black males were most represented in the sport basketball (90.1%). Less than 3% ($n = 11$) of the sample had a documented learning, mental or psychological or physical disability. A total of 81 students received Bright Futures Scholarships, with White females ($n = 44$) and White males ($n = 33$) being most represented within the group of aid recipients. Bright Futures is a state merit aid program in Florida that is intended to retain high-achieving high school students within the state by providing students up to 100% of tuition fees and college-related expenses to attend institutions within the state (Zhang, Hu, & Sensenig, 2013).

Dichotomous variables. A liberal interpretation of degree completion was purposely used to provide the broadest possible picture of the academic performance for student-athletes. Specifically, this study did not incorporate enrollment in a degree program as a requisite for degree completion. Given that student-athletes are allotted a maximum of 2 years of athletic eligibility per sport and are required to be enrolled full-time each semester (not a typical enrollment pattern of student population at community colleges), examining degree completion within the given timeline was deemed appropriate. Only 31.4% ($n = 161$) of student-athletes completed a degree or certificate within 10 academic terms. When considering degree completion by group membership, Black males earned 7.5% of all degrees and certificates, Black females 16.1%, White males 27.3%, and White females 49.1%. Forty percent of students who were deemed college ready earned a degree or certificate, compared with approximately 19% of those who were not college ready in any of the three areas (see Tables 2 and 3).

Data Analysis

Data analysis included descriptive analysis, cross-tabulations, and a single one-way ANOVA. The data were analyzed as a function of group membership, that is, gender

Table 3. Number and Percentage of Degrees and Certificates Earned by Level of College Readiness.

Level of college readiness	Degree or certificate earned		Total
	No degree/certificate earned	Degree/certificate earned	
College ready	129 (59.4%)	88 (40.6%)	217
1 content area required	63 (66.3%)	32 (33.7%)	95
2 content areas required	81 (75.0%)	27 (25.0%)	108
3 content areas required	120 (81.1%)	28 (18.9%)	148
Total	393 (69.2%)	175 (30.8%)	568

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA—GPA.

	Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	<i>M</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
GPA					
Between groups	12.155	3	4.052	5.776	.001
Within groups	357.069	509	0.702		
Total	369.224	512			

Note. GPA = grade point average.

and race (Black males and females, and White males and females), SES, and college readiness. Including all student-athletes, the sample included 513 cases. White females comprised 36.3% ($n = 206$) of the sample, White males 24.3% ($n = 138$), Black females 15.5% ($n = 88$), and Black males 14.3% ($n = 81$). Student-athletes' academic performance was operationalized using four continuous variables (cumulative GPA, course credit hours enrolled, course credit hours earned, and credit hours enrolled/earned ratio) and one dichotomous variable (degree completion). An ANOVA procedure revealed a significant difference in GPA between groups, $F(3, 509) = 5.77, p = .001$. Tukey's post hoc multiple comparison indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean GPA for Black males ($\mu = 2.30$) and White females ($\mu = 2.73$) and White males ($\mu = 2.66$; Table 2). No significant differences in GPA were found between Black males and Black females (see Tables 4 and 5).

Limitations

Each study presents the researcher with challenges and limitations that prevent him or her from fully exploring the population, issues, or problems of interest. This study is no different. One limiting (and somewhat unique) aspect of this study is that it explores the pre-college characteristics and the academic performance of student-athletes from a single state using student-level longitudinal data. Accordingly, some caution must be taken when making generalizations of findings to student-athletes outside of the

Table 5. GPA Post Hoc Comparison (Tukey).

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	MD (I - J)	SE	p	95% CI	
					LB	UB
Black males	Black females	-.28718	.12897	.117	-.6196	.0452
	White males	-.29757*	.11723	.055	-.5997	.0046
	White females	-.45457*	.10985	.000	-.7377	-.1714
Black females	Black males	.28718	.12897	.117	-.0452	.6196
	White males	-.01039	.11426	1.000	-.3049	.2841
	White females	-.16739	.10666	.397	-.4423	.1075
White males	Black males	.29757*	.11723	.055	-.0046	.5997
	Black females	.01039	.11426	1.000	-.2841	.3049
	White females	-.15700	.09213	.323	-.3945	.0805
White females	Black males	.45457*	.10985	.000	.1714	.7377
	Black females	.16739	.10666	.397	-.1075	.4423
	White males	.15700	.09213	.323	-.0805	.3945

Note. GPA = grade point average; MD = mean differences; CI = confidence interval; LB = lower bound; UB = upper bound.

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

examined state. Institutions across the nation are likely to attract students with different pre-college and background characteristics than those represented within the present sample. Any possible differences in characteristics of the population across the country are likely a product of factors including, but not limited to, an institution’s geographic locale, level of athletic participation (i.e., Divisions I, II, and III), and the number and type of sponsored sport teams. For instance, states that sponsor football will likely have higher institutional participation numbers than those states, such as Florida, that do not sponsor football.

Furthermore, the used analyses did not include advanced statistical methods to ascertain which individual or institutional factors are likely to contribute to differences between or within groups, or to predict specific outcomes. This study was intended to present data based on groups to provide a descriptive picture of this population, based on the selected sample. Last, this study relied solely on data collected by institutions and reported to the state of Florida. Thus, errors in data collection and extraction by EDW are very likely. These errors, if any, may have resulted in erroneous results and findings.

Despite these limitations, providing a state-level view of the academic performance of Black male student-athletes affords researchers and practitioners an opportunity to become more knowledgeable about a group that is not often discussed within the literature. The author uses these data to provide thoughtful insight concerning how institutions and policies have the potential to create environments of support to increase progress toward degree and other academic performance indicators of interest concerning Black male student-athletes.

Results

Findings from the present study mirror what previous research has suggested when examining differences between Black males and their peers, specifically concerning ratio of credit hours enrolled/earned; Black males earned 72% of the credit hours they attempted, which was less than all other examined groups. Within Black males, differences between socio-economic groups were also found. Individuals identified as high SES earned approximately 82% of credit hours enrolled, compared with those identified as low SES, which earned 67% of credit hours attempted. Black males who were identified as low SES had a lower mean GPA ($m = 2.19$) than those identified as low SES in all other groups. Black males were also found to enter college less prepared and were outperformed by their peers in terms of the percentage of degrees earned. Approximately 14% of all Black males earned a certificate or degree, whereas the percentage of degrees earned for all Black females was twice as high (29.5%).

For the overall sample, findings further suggest differences in degree completion based on level of college readiness. Forty percent of students identified as college ready completed a degree or certificate, compared with 33%, 25%, and 19%, respectively for those needing one content area, two content areas, and all three content areas. As could be expected, GPAs for those who were college ready were visibly higher than those who required remediation in all three content areas. Although means illustrate differences, further analysis is necessary to confidently ascertain whether or not significant differences in GPA between and within groups based on college readiness exist. These and other areas for future research are later discussed.

Discussion

In 2012, 2-year institutions allocated more than 100 million dollars annually for athletically related financial aid (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These monies represent a substantial financial investment in a relatively small number of individuals within the general student population: student-athletes. In times when limited resources are allocated for higher education, and greater institutional accountability has been requested, increased focus has been placed on access and student performance when determining continued and future funding (Bahr, 2013b). Performance-based funding—a practice of connecting funding to inputs (e.g., access, affordability, enrollment, and financial aid), outputs (e.g., retention, degree completion, remedial student success), and outcomes (e.g., transfer, job placement, student learning)—is viewed as a way to influence institutional behavior toward increased student success (Bahr, 2013b; D'Amico, Friedel, Katsinas, & Thornton, 2014). Given the intent and limitations of this study, ascertaining institution's financial return on their investment, or in what ways, if any, participation in athletics individually impacted each student was not an intended goal.

The provided data and study design, did, however, allow the researcher to answer the research question of interest: To what extent do pre-college characteristics and academic experiences and behaviors of Black male student-athletes differ from their

student-athlete peers? With more states moving to funding models that include performance indicators, exploring answers to this question sheds light on populations that could benefit from concerted efforts geared toward meeting higher student outcomes. In this particular case, the focus was situated on Black male student-athletes. In reflecting on the findings from this study, the author discusses these findings within the context of the available literature.

Although athletics is seen as an avenue to access higher education for Black males, within this secondary data analysis, Black males were not overly represented within the sample of student-athletes as one might expect. The majority of Black males in the sample of 20 institutions were clustered within the sports basketball and baseball, whereas their White counterparts were represented across all eight sports, leading to higher overall participation rates for White student-athletes.

Community college presidents have long considered athletics as a mechanism for increasing gender and ethnic diversity within their student populations (Lawrence, Mullin, & Horton, 2009; Williams & Pennington, 2006). However, attracting new and diverse populations using athletics has its limits, such as team roster and international student recruiting restrictions (see Article V, Section 12 of NJCAA Bylaws, 2014). Unless an institution's budget and state regulations allow for sponsorship of team sports with large rosters, such as football, or that attract a greater number of Black, Hispanic/Latino, and international students, any increase in gender and ethnic and racial diversity is likely to be minimal.

Individual characteristics of particular interest to this study were group membership, SES, and college readiness. Scholars have suggested that individual student characteristics such as these have a strong relationship to student persistence, degree attainment, and 4-year transfer (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Laanan, 2003). Dougherty and Kienzl (2006) and Laanan (2003) found SES to be a significant factor in predicting degree aspirations and 4-year transfer for community college students. Dougherty and Kienzl, using a social and academic integration model (Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1993), and Laanan, a status attainment (Blau & Duncan, 1967) and undergraduate socialization (Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970; Sewell & Hauser, 1972) theoretical framework, each concluded that students from lower SES backgrounds were less likely to complete a degree compared with students from higher income families. In examining group membership, SES and college readiness within this study, performance differences were found between and within groups. Despite existing differences, findings suggest that student-athletes, regardless of their level of college readiness, are finding ways to complete a degree or certificate. Future examination of factors leading to degree completion for academically underprepared student-athletes is strongly encouraged.

Implications and Recommendations

Although rarely discussed within the literature, the focus of student-athlete success and degree attainment at the community college is not a new concept or idea. In 1990, Champion wrote, "now, academic progress leading to successful attainment of

the associate degree has become a most important measurement of the institution's athletic program" (p. 50). As Campion wrote those words, athletic governing associations for 2-year and community colleges have put forth policies to encourage both students and institutions to take a more focused approach to increase degree completion for student-athletes. Despite many successes and advances, as indicated within this study, institutions still have work to do to get more Black male student-athletes across the proverbial finish line. Continued research on the performance of student-athletes will provide institutions with further guidance to enhance the performance and achievement of their student-athletes. Specifically, research provides greater insight into the effectiveness of policies, programs, and services and enhances our understanding of populations and groups that continue to underperform.

The provided recommendations and implications that follow focus on the issue of Black male student-athlete achievement from the perspective of what institutions can do to enhance the experiences and outcomes for this group. In addition, recommendations for future research will be provided to assist graduate students, practitioners, and scholars through the development of future research studies to not only shed light on the issues concerning Black males but also develop strategies for improving the performance and available supports for student-athletes in general. In this era of increased focus on institutional accountability and student outcomes, further research will enable institutions to illustrate through data what impact investment of resources in activities, such as athletics, has on student outcomes and performance.

Institutional Culture Focused on Degree Completion

Goals for increased Black male participation in higher education by way of community colleges and athletics must be accompanied by intentional attempts to support these students academically once they enroll. Institutional cultures must encourage student-athletes to enroll in college level, core courses leading to a degree or certificate, rather than "filler" courses used to ensure students maintain their athletic eligibility. The development of such a culture must begin with administrators and include the support and endorsement of coaches, athletic support staff members, and faculty. The importance of a culture focused on student achievement has become even more important for students who desire to transfer and compete in athletics at a 4-year institution. Beginning in 2009, to transfer and be eligible to practice, compete, and receive financial aid at a NCAA Division I program, student-athletes must complete a set number of transferable English and math credit hours with a GPA of 2.5 or higher at the community college (Sander, 2011). Completing an associate's degree prior to leaving the institution would ensure that student-athletes have met minimum transfer requirements and are eligible to participate in athletics at the next level.

Advising Services

Institutions must find efficient ways to quickly move student-athletes through their intended programs of study, including any required developmental coursework.

Maneuvering through developmental course requirements can be challenging for students to complete and delay their time to degree completion (Hodara & Jagers, 2014). To complete degree requirements, students must successfully complete the required core courses, avoid taking non-transferable credit hours that will not count toward transfer, and be quickly brought up to college-level readiness, if they enter college not ready for college-level work. Institutions have the ability to assist students to complete courses with acceptable grades. For example, this can be accomplished by providing students with advising services and monitoring the number and types of courses students enroll in. Furthermore, making available academic support services such as tutoring and mentoring often enhances the performance of students, especially Black male student-athletes (Carr, Kangas, & Anderson, 1992).

The last issue is somewhat more complicated. Given the open access mission of community colleges, institutions do not turn away students because they are not college ready. One recommendation for institutions to consider is to encourage coaches to recruit prospective student-athletes who show evidence that they are able to handle the academic and athletic responsibilities associated with being a college athlete. This includes, but is not limited to, considering prospective students' level of college readiness in math, reading, and writing prior to making an offer to compete athletically or awarding athletically related financial aid. However, such practices contradict the mission of open access institutions. As a result, institutions must assume the responsibility of making sure students leave their institutions with a degree and/or the necessary prerequisites to enter a 4-year institution, regardless of their abilities at the time of matriculation. A more likely solution is for institutions to provide opportunities for students to enroll in accelerated developmental courses to complete developmental course requirements in less time (Hodara & Jagers, 2014), or to encourage and provide resources for students to complete developmental coursework during the summer terms.

Increasing Presence of Support Services

Institutions must ensure focus and care are given to provide the necessary support and attention student-athletes from low SES backgrounds need to be successful. The opportunity to participate in college athletics and the award of athletically related financial aid are both enticing for students from low SES backgrounds to access higher education. However, students from these low SES backgrounds are more likely to struggle academically and leave an institution prior to completing a degree (Laanan, 2003). The additional personal responsibilities associated with athletic participation have the propensity to severely hinder the probability students from low SES will be successful at the community college. Accordingly, it is important for institutions to put in place ongoing, intentional efforts to support students beyond providing financial incentives for attending the community college and participating in intercollegiate athletics. Examples of such practices include professional and career development workshops, assistance with financial management, and encouragement to explore internship opportunities to gain work experience.

Future Research

The present research is intended to inspire and encourage future empirical research on the academic plight and achievement of student-athletes at the community college, nationally, as there are endless possibilities for future inquiry on this topic. In closing, provided below are areas where future research would be helpful in expanding the current literature on the impact of athletics and athletic participation at the community college and the academic performance and outcomes of student-athletes.

To begin, empirically exploring the impact of college readiness on student-athletes' ability to complete their academic studies during their years of athletic competition, and specific practices and policies institutions have instituted to assist underprepared students complete their intended academic goals within 2 to 3 years, would substantially add to the current literature. Next, researchers are encouraged to focus on the impact of individual characteristics, such as learning disabilities, degree completion, and 4-year transfer. Many athletic programs at 4-year institutions have programs designed to test students for learning disabilities and to support student-athletes who are found to have such disabilities. Continued research on the extent to which learning disabilities create barriers for students is essential to developing a holistic approach to supporting student-athletes at the community college. In addition, assessment of the effectiveness of programs and services focused on international and student-athletes of color is needed. Specifically, what programs and services are in place to help support and integrate student-athletes from minority groups into the larger college community? Lastly, the role of faculty in the governing and oversight of athletics at the institutional, regional and national level should be explored. For example, how involved are faculty in the recruiting, mentoring, and advising of student-athletes? Empirical evidence concerning the impact and various roles faculty play within athletics would be a great addition to the present body of literature.

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